Chronology of
The Parliamentary Debates

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803). 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D’Ewes’ Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland’s Debates, 22 vols.; Grey’s Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett’s Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES commenced with the year 1803, and the contents are set forth in the following Chronological Table:—

| HISTORY | CONQUEST TO 34 GEO. II.—1066 to 1760 |
| Vol. 1 to 15. | 1 Will. I to 34 Geo. II |
| 1066-1760 |
| REIGN OF GEO. III.—1760 to 1820 |
| Vol. 15 to 35. | Geo. III to 40 Geo. III. |
| 1760—1800 |
| PARLIAMS OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND (First Parliament) |
| Vol. 35—41 Geo. III. | 1801 |
| — 36—42 | 1802 |
| (Second Parliament) |
| Vol. 36—42 Geo. III. | 1802-3 |
| DEBATES |
| First Series (Second Parliament—cont.) |
| Vol. 1 & 2 | 44 Geo. III. | 1803-4 |
| — 3 to 5 | 45 | 1805 |
| — 6 & 7 | 46 | 1806 |
| (Third Parliament) |
| Vol. 8 & 9 | 47 Geo. III. | 1806-7 |
| (Fourth Parliament) |
| Vol. 9 to 11 | 48 Geo. III. | 1807-8 |
| — 12—14 | 49 | 1809 |
| — 15—17 | 50 | 1810 |
| — 18—20 | 51 | 1810-11 |
| — 21—23 | 52 | 1812 |
| (Fifth Parliament) |
| Vol. 24 to 26 | 53 Geo. III. | 1812-13 |
| — 27 & 28 | 54 | 1813-14 |
| — 29—31 | 55 | 1814-15 |
| — 32—34 | 56 | 1816 |
| — 35 & 36 | 58 | 1817 |
| — 37—38 | 58 | 1818 |
| (Sixth Parliament) |
| Vol. 39 & 40 | 59 Geo. III. | 1819 |
| — 41—60 | 1819-20 |

Second Series (Seventh Parliament) |
| Vol. 1 to 3 | 1 Geo. IV. | 1820 |
| — 4 & 5 | 2 | 1821 |
| — 6—7 | 3 | 1822 |
| — 8—9 | 4 | 1823 |
| — 10—11 | 5 | 1824 |
| — 12—13 | 6 | 1825-6 |
| — 14—15 | 7 | 1826 |

(Eighth Parliament) |
| Vol. 16 | 7 Geo. IV. | 1826 |
| — 17 | 8 | 1827 |
| — 18 & 19 | 9 | 1828 |
| — 20—21 | 10 | 1829 |
| — 22 to 25 | 11 | 1830 |

Third Series (Ninth Parliament) |
| Vol. 1 to 3 | 1 Will. IV. | 1830-1 |
| (Tenth Parliament) |
| Vol. 4 to 8 | 2 Will. IV. | 1831 |
| — 9—14 | 3 | 1832 |
| (Eleventh Parliament) |
| Vol. 15 to 20 | 4 Will. IV. | 1833 |
| — 21 to 25 | 5 | 1834 |

(Twelfth Parliament) |
| Vol. 26 to 30 | 6 Will. IV. | 1835 |
| — 31—35 | 7 | 1836 |
| — 36—38 | 8 | 1837 |

(REIGN OF WILLIAM IV.—1830 to 1837) (Thirteenth Parliament) |
| Vol. 39 to 44 | 1 Victoria | 1838 |
| — 45—50 | 2 | 1839 |
| — 51—55 | 3 | 1840 |
| — 56—58 | 4 | 1841 |
| (Fourteenth Parliament) |
| Vol. 59 | 4 Victoria | (b)1841 |
| — 60 to 65 | 5 | 1842 |
| — 66—71 | 6 | 1843 |
| — 72—76 | 7 | 1844 |
| — 77—82 | 8 | 1845 |
| — 83—88 | 9 | 1846 |
| — 89—94 | 10 | (a)1847 |

(Fifteenth Parliament) |
| Vol. 95 | 10 Victoria | (b)1847 |
| — 96—101 | 11 | 1848 |
| — 102—107 | 12 | 1849 |
| — 108—113 | 13 | 1850 |
| — 114—118 | 14 | 1851 |
| — 119—122 | 15 | (a)1852 |
| (Sixteenth Parliament) |
| Vol. 123 | 15 Victoria | (b)1852 |
| — 124 to 129 | 16 | 1853 |
| — 130—135 | 17 | 1854 |
| — 136—139 | 18 | 1855 |
| — 140—143 | 19 | 1856 |
| — 144—147 | 20 | (a)1857 |

(REIGN OF VICTORIA.—1837 to 1901)
### CHRONOLOGY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES—cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EIGHTEENTH PARLIAMENT</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 145 to 147</td>
<td>148—153</td>
<td>(b)1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 154 &amp; 155</td>
<td>154—156</td>
<td>(a)1859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 157 to 180</td>
<td>157—180</td>
<td>(a)1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NINETEENTH PARLIAMENT</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 181 to 184</td>
<td>185—190</td>
<td>(b)1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 194 to 198</td>
<td>194—203</td>
<td>(b)1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 218 to 221</td>
<td>218—221</td>
<td>(b)1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 252 to 256</td>
<td>252—256</td>
<td>(b)1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWENTIETH PARLIAMENT</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 302 to 307</td>
<td>302—307</td>
<td>(b)1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWENTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 308 &amp; 309</td>
<td>308 &amp; 309</td>
<td>(b)1886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fourth Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EIGHTEENTH PARLIAMENT—cont.</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 1 to 6</td>
<td>1—6</td>
<td>(b)1890-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWENTIETH PARLIAMENT—cont.</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(b)1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWENTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT—cont.</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(b)1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWENTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT—cont.</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(b)1899</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fifth Series—Official Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lords Debates</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 1 to 4</td>
<td>1—4</td>
<td>1900-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commons Debates</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 1 to 33</td>
<td>1—33</td>
<td>1900-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### REIGN OF GEORGE V.—1910 to 1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lords Debates</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 7 to 10</td>
<td>7—10</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1912-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1913-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1914-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1915-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1916-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1917-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1918-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commons Debates</strong></td>
<td>Vol. 21 to 33</td>
<td>21—33</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1912-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1913-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1914-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1915-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1916-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1917-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vol. 103</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1918-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### THIRTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33 to 38...9 &amp; 10 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39—43</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44—47</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 (2nd Session)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49—51</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52 (2nd Session)</td>
<td>13 Geo. V.</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53—55</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56 to 59...14 &amp; 15 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 to 62...15 &amp; 16 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1924-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63—65</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66—69</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 &amp; 71</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72 to 74...19—29</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1928-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75 to 78...20 &amp; 21 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1929-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79—82</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1930-31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83 to 85...22 &amp; 23 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86—89</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90—94</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95—98</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99 to 102...26 Geo. V.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REIGN OF EDWARD VIII.—1936

#### Lords Debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99 to 102...Edward VIII</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Commons Debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>308 to 316...Edward VIII</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>317</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REIGN OF GEORGE VI.—1936 to 1952

#### Lords Debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>104 to 106...1 Geo. VI.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107—110...1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111—114...2—3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115—117...3—4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118—120...4—5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121—124...5—6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125—129...6—7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130—133...7—8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134—136...8—9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Commons Debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>318 to 327...1 Geo. VI.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328—340...1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>341—354...2—3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>355—366...3—4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>367—375...4—5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>376—384...5—6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385—394...6—7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>395—405...7—8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>406—412...8—9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>137 to 143...9 &amp; 10 Geo. VI.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144—151...10—11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152—158...11—12</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1947-48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159—165...12—14</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1948-49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### THIRTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>166 to 168...14 Geo. VI.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169—173...14 &amp; 15</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FORTIETH PARLIAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Range</th>
<th>Session(s)</th>
<th>Volume(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>174...15 &amp; 16 Geo. VI. and 1 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1951-52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175—176...15 &amp; 16 Geo. VI. and 1 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1951-52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### REIGN OF ELIZABETH II.—1952 to

#### Lords Debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>174 to 178</th>
<th>1952</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>179—183</td>
<td>1952—53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>184—189</td>
<td>1953—54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>190—192</td>
<td>1954—55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fortieth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>193 to 199</th>
<th>1955—56</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200—205</td>
<td>1956—57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>206—211</td>
<td>1957—58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>212—218</td>
<td>1958—59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Second Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>219 to 225</th>
<th>1959—60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>226—234</td>
<td>1960—61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>235—243</td>
<td>1961—62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>244—252</td>
<td>1962—63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>253—260</td>
<td>1963—64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Third Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>261 to 269</th>
<th>1964—65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>270—273</td>
<td>1965—66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Fourth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>274 to 285</th>
<th>1966—67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>286—296</td>
<td>1967—68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>297—304</td>
<td>1968—69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>305—310</td>
<td>1969—70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Fifth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>311 to 324</th>
<th>1970—71</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>325—335</td>
<td>1971—72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>336—345</td>
<td>1972—73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>346—349</td>
<td>1973—74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Sixth Parliament)

| Vol. | 350 to 353                        | 1974         |

(Forty-Seventh Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>354 to 365</th>
<th>1974—75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>366—377</td>
<td>1975—76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>378—386</td>
<td>1976—77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>387—395</td>
<td>1977—78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>396—399</td>
<td>1978—79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Eighth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>400 to 414</th>
<th>1979—80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>415—424</td>
<td>1980—81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>425—435</td>
<td>1981—82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>436—442</td>
<td>1982—83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Ninth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>443 to 456</th>
<th>1983—84</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>457—467</td>
<td>1984—85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>468—481</td>
<td>1985—86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>482—487</td>
<td>1986—87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fiftieth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>488 to 501</th>
<th>1987—88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>502—512</td>
<td>1988—89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>513—522</td>
<td>1989—90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>523—531</td>
<td>1990—91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>532—536</td>
<td>1991—92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fifty-First Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>537 to 549</th>
<th>1992—93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>550—558</td>
<td>1993—94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>559—566</td>
<td>1994—95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>567—574</td>
<td>1995—96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>575—579</td>
<td>1996—97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Chamber Debates—cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>495 to 506</th>
<th>1952</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>507—519</td>
<td>1952—53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>520—534</td>
<td>1953—54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>535—541</td>
<td>1954—55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-First Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>542 to 559</th>
<th>1955—56</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>560—576</td>
<td>1956—57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>577—593</td>
<td>1957—58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>594—611</td>
<td>1958—59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Second Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>612 to 628</th>
<th>1959—60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>629—647</td>
<td>1960—61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>648—665</td>
<td>1961—62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>666—683</td>
<td>1962—63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>684—700</td>
<td>1963—64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Third Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>701 to 719</th>
<th>1964—65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>720—726</td>
<td>1965—66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Fourth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>727 to 752</th>
<th>1966—67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>753—771</td>
<td>1967—68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>772—789</td>
<td>1968—69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>790—802</td>
<td>1969—70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Fifth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>803 to 824</th>
<th>1970—71</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>825—844</td>
<td>1971—72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>845—862</td>
<td>1972—73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>863—869</td>
<td>1973—74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Sixth Parliament)

| Vol. | 870 to 879                        | 1974         |

(Forty-Seventh Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>880 to 900</th>
<th>1974—75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>901—920</td>
<td>1975—76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>921—937</td>
<td>1976—77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>938—956</td>
<td>1977—78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>957—966</td>
<td>1978—79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Forty-Eighth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>967 to 993</th>
<th>1979—80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>994—1000</td>
<td>1980—81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixth Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>1 to 12</th>
<th>1980—81</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13—30</td>
<td>1981—82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31—43</td>
<td>1982—83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Nineteenth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>44 to 66</th>
<th>1983—84</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67—85</td>
<td>1984—85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86—104</td>
<td>1985—86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105—117</td>
<td>1986—87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fiftieth Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>118 to 141</th>
<th>1987—88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142—161</td>
<td>1988—89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>162—179</td>
<td>1989—90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>180—197</td>
<td>1990—91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>198—206</td>
<td>1991—92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fifty-First Parliament)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>207 to 232</th>
<th>1992—93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>233—249</td>
<td>1993—94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>250—266</td>
<td>1994—95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>267—283</td>
<td>1995—96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>284—293</td>
<td>1996—97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**REIGN OF ELIZABETH II.—1952 to**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol.</th>
<th>(FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)</th>
<th>Commons Debates</th>
<th>(FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>580 to 594</td>
<td>46—47 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>294 to 320</td>
<td>46—47 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>595 to 606</td>
<td>47—48 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>321 to 338</td>
<td>47—48 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>607 to 619</td>
<td>48—49 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>339 to 358</td>
<td>48—49 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>620 to 625</td>
<td>49—50 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>359 to 369</td>
<td>49—50 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol.</td>
<td>(FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)</td>
<td>Commons Debates</td>
<td>(FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>626 to 640</td>
<td>50—51 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>370 to 393</td>
<td>50—51 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>641 to 654</td>
<td>51—52 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>394 to 414</td>
<td>51—52 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>655 to 666</td>
<td>52—53 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>415 to 427</td>
<td>52—53 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>667 to 671</td>
<td>53—54 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>428 to 433</td>
<td>53—54 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol.</td>
<td>(FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
<td>Commons Debates</td>
<td>(FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>672 to 686</td>
<td>54—55 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>434 to 452</td>
<td>54—55 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>687 to 695</td>
<td>55—56 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>453 to 466</td>
<td>55—56 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>696 to 705</td>
<td>56—57 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>467 to 484</td>
<td>56—57 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>706 to 714</td>
<td>57—58 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>485 to 500</td>
<td>57—58 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>715 to 718</td>
<td>58—59 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>501 to 509</td>
<td>58—59 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol.</td>
<td>(FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
<td>Commons Debates</td>
<td>(FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>719 to 736</td>
<td>59—61 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>510 to 544</td>
<td>59—61 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>737 to 744</td>
<td>61—62 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>545 to 562</td>
<td>61—62 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>745 to 753</td>
<td>62—63 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>563 to 581</td>
<td>62—63 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>754 to 761</td>
<td>63—64 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>582 to 595</td>
<td>63—64 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol.</td>
<td>(FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
<td>Commons Debates</td>
<td>(FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>762 to 772</td>
<td>64—65 Eliz. II.</td>
<td>596 to 610</td>
<td>64—65 Eliz. II.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**V**

**Chronology of the Parliamentary Debates—cont.**
# House of Commons

## Alphabetical List of Members

[Returned at the General Election, 7 May 2015]

### A

- Abbott, Diane (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)
- Abrahams, Deborah Angela Elspeth Marie (Oldham East and Saddleworth)
- Adams, Nigel (Selby and Ainsty)
- Afriyie, Adam (Windsor)
- Ahmed-Sheikh, Tasmina (Ochil and South Perthshire)
- Aldous, Peter James Guy (Waveney)
- Alexander, Heidi (Lewisham East)
- Ali, Rushanara (Bethnal Green and Bow)
- Allan, Lucy (Eastbourne)
- Aldous, Peter James Guy (Waveney)
- Alexander, Heidi (Lewisham East)
- Ali, Rushanara (Bethnal Green and Bow)
- Allan, Lucy (Eastbourne)
- Aldous, Peter James Guy (Waveney)
- Alexander, Heidi (Lewisham East)
- Ali, Rushanara (Bethnal Green and Bow)
- Allison, John (Walsall)
- Allan, Lucy (Eastbourne)
- Aldous, Peter James Guy (Waveney)
- Alexander, Heidi (Lewisham East)
- Ali, Rushanara (Bethnal Green and Bow)

### B

- Bacon, Richard Michael (South Norfolk)
- Bailey, Adrian Edward (West Bromwich West)
- Baker, Steven John (Wycombe)
- Baldwin, Harriett Mary Morison (West Worcestershire)
- Barclay, Stephen Paul (North East Cambridgeshire)
- Bardell, Hannah Mary (Livingston)
- Baron, John Charles (Basildon and Billericay)
- Barron, Rt Hon. Kevin John (Rother Valley)
- Barwell, Gavin Laurence (Croydon Central)
- Bebb, Guto ap Owain (Aberconwy)
- Beckett, Rt Hon. Margaret Mary (Derby South)
- Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North West Norfolk)
- Benn, Rt Hon. Hilary James (Leeds Central)
- Benyon, Richard Henry Ronald (Newbury)
- Bercow, Rt Hon. John Simon (Buckingham)
- Beresford, Alexander Paul (Mole Valley)
- Berger, Luciana Clare (Liverpool, Wavertree)
- Berry, James Jacob Gilchrist (Rossendale and Darwen)
- Berry, Michael James Ellwood (Kingston and Surbiton)
- Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield South East)
- Bingham, Andrew Russell (High Peak)
- Black, Mhairi (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)
- Blackford, Ian (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
- Blackman, Robert John (Harrow East)
- Blackman, Kirsty (Aberdeen North)
- Blackman-Woods, Roberta Carol (City of Durham)
- Blackwood, Nicola Claire (Oxford West and Abingdon)
- Blenkinsop, Thomas Francis (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland)
- Blomfield, Paul Christopher (Sheffield Central)
- Blunt, Crispin Jeremy Rupert (Reigate)
- Boleys, Nicholas Edward Coleridge (Grantham and Stamford)
- Bone, Peter William (Wellingborough)

### C

- Cadbury, Ruth (Brentford and Isleworth)
- Cairns, Alan Hugh (Vale of Glamorgan)
- Cameron, Rt Hon. David William Donald ( Witney)
- Cameron, Lisa (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow)
- Campbell, Rt Hon. Alan (Tynemouth)
- Campbell, Gregory Lloyd (East Londonderry)
- Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
- Carmichael, Rt Hon. Alexander Morrison (Orkney and Shetland)
- Carmichael, Neil (Stroud)
- Carswell, John Douglas Wilson (Clacton)
- Cartlidge, James Roger (South Suffolk)
- Cash, William (Stone)
- Caulfield, Maria Colette (Lewes)
- Chalk, Alex (Cheltenham)
- Champion, Sarah Deborah (Rotherham)
- Chapman, Douglas (Dunfermline and West Fife)
- Chapman, Jennifer (Darlington)
- Cherry, Joanna Catherine (Edinburgh South West)
- Chishti, Atta-Ur-Rehman (Gillingham and Rainham)
- Chope, Christopher Robert (Christchurch)
- Churchill, Johanna Peta (Bury St Edmunds)
- Clark, Rt Hon. Greg (Tunbridge Wells)
- Clarke, Rt Hon. Kenneth Harry (Rushcliffe)
Clegg, Rt Hon. Nicholas William Peter (Sheffield, Hallam)
Cleverly, James Spencer (Braintree)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Robert (The Cotswolds)
Clwyd, Rt Hon. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Coaker, Vernon Rodney (Gedling)
Coffey, Margaret Ann Wishart (Stockport)
Coffey, Thérèse Anne (Suffolk Coastal)
Collins, Damian Noel Thomas (Folkestone and Hythe)
Colvile, Oliver Newton (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport)
Cooper, Julie Elizabeth (Burnley)
Cooper, Rosemary Elizabeth (West Lancashire)
Cooper, Rt Hon. Yvette (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington North)
Costa, Alberto Castrenze (South Eichstead)
Cowan, Ronnie (Inverclyde)
Cox, Charles Geoffrey (Torridge and West Devon)
Cox, Helen Joanne (Batley and Spen)
Crawley, Angela (Lanark and Hamilton East)
Creagh, Mary Helen (Wakefield)
Creasy, Stella Judith (Walthamstow)
Crouch, Tracey Elizabeth Anne (Chatham and Aylesford)
Crudumas, Jonathan (Dagenham and Rainham)
Cryer, John Robert (Leyton and Wanstead)
Cummins, Judith Mary (Bradford South)
Cunningham, Alexander (Stockton North)
Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry South)
Dakin, Nicholas (Scunthorpe)
Danczuk, Simon Christopher (Rochdale)
David, Wayne (Caerphilly)
Davies, Henry Byron (Gower)
Davies, Christopher Paul (Brecon and Radnorshire)
Davies, David Thomas Charles (Monmouth)
Davies, Geraint Richard (Swansea West)
Davies, Edward Glyn (Montgomeryshire)
Davies, James Michael ( Vale of Clwyd)
Davies, Miriam Jane Alice (Eastleigh)
Davies, Philip Andrew (Shipley)
Davis, Rt Hon. David Michael (Haltemprice and Howden)
Day, Martyn (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)
De Piers, Gloria (Ashfield)
Debbonaire, Thangam (Bristol West)
Dinenage, Caroline Julia (Gosport)
Djanogly, Jonathan Simon (Huntingdon)
Docherty, Martin John (West Dunbartonshire)
Dodds, Rt Hon. Nigel Alexander (Belfast North)
Doherty, Patrick (West Tyrone)
Donaldson, Jeffrey Mark (Lagan Valley)
Donaldson, Stuart Blair (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
Donelan, Michelle Emma May Elizabeth (Chippenham)
Dorries, Nadine Vanessa (Mid Bedfordshire)
Double, Stephen Daniel (St Austell and Newquay)
Doughty, Stephen John (Cardiff South and Penarth)
Dowd, James Patrick (Lewisham West and Penge)
Dowd, Peter (Bootle)
Dowden, Oliver James (Hertsmere)
Doyle-Price, Jacqueline (Thurrock)
Dromey, Jack Eugene Joseph (Birmingham, Erdington)
Drummond, Felicia Jane Beatrix (Portsmouth South)
Dudriddle, James Philip (Rochford and Southend East)
Dugher, Michael Vincent (Barnsley East)
Duncan, Rt Hon. Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon. George Iain (Chingford and Woodford Green)
Dunne, Philip Martin (Ludlow)
Durkan, John Mark (Foyle)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
Eagle, Maria (Garston and Halewood)
Edwards, David Jonathan (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr)
Efford, Clive Stanley (Eltham)
Elliott, Julie (Sunderland Central)
Elliott, Thomas Beasly (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Ellis, Michael Tyron (Northampton North)
Ellison, Jane Elizabeth (Battersea)
Ellman, Louise Joyce (Liverpool, Riverside)
Ellwood, Tobias Martin (Bournemouth East)
Elmore, Chris (Ogmore) [By-election, May 2016]
Elphicke, Charles Brett Anthony (Dover)
Engel, Natasha (North East Derbyshire)
Esterson, William Roffen (Selton Central)
Eustice, Charles George (Camborne and Redruth)
Evans, Christopher (Islwyn)
Evans, Graham (Weaver Vale)
Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
Evennett, Rt Hon. David Anthony (Bexleyheath and Crayford)

F

Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Lichfield)
Fallon, Rt Hon. Michael (Sevenoaks)
Farrelly, Paul (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Farron, Timothy James (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Fellows, Marion (Motherwell and Wishaw)
Fernandes, Sue-Ellen Cassiana (Fareham)
Ferrier, Margaret (Rutherglen and Hamilton West)
Field, Rt Hon. Frank (Birkenhead)
Field, Rt Hon. Mark Christopher (Cities of London and Westminster)
Fitzpatrick, James (Poplar and Limehouse)
Fello, Robert Charles Douglas (Stoke-on-Trent South)
Fletcher, Colleen Margaret (Coventry North East)
Flint, Rt Hon. Caroline Louise (Don Valley)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport West)
Foster, Kevin John (Torbay)
Fovargue, Yvonne Helen (Makerfield)
Fox, Rt Hon. Liam (North Somerset)
Foxcroft, Victoria Jane (Lewisham, Deptford)
Francois, Rt Hon. Mark Gino (Rayleigh and Wickford)
Frazer, Lucy (South East Cambridgeshire)
Fream, George William (Mid Norfolk)
Freer, Mike (Finchley and Golders Green)
Fuller, Richard Quentin (Bedford)
Furniss, Gill (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) [By-election, May 2016]
Fys, Marcus John Hudson (Yeovil)

G

Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford South)
Gardiner, Barry Strachan (Brent North)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alphabetical List of Members</th>
<th>18 MAY 2016</th>
<th>Alphabetical List of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garnier, Rt Hon. Edward Henry (Harborough)</td>
<td>Hendrick, Mark Phillip (Preston)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garnier, Mark Robert Timothy (Wyre Forest)</td>
<td>Hendry, Andrew Egan Henderson (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauke, David Michael (South West Hertfordshire)</td>
<td>Hepburn, Stephen (Jarrow)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gethins, Stephen Patrick (North East Fife)</td>
<td>Herbert, Rt Hon. Nick (Arundel and South Downs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghani, Nusrat Munir (Walden)</td>
<td>Hermon, Sylvia Eileen (North Down)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibb, Nicolas John (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton)</td>
<td>Hillier, Meg (Hackney South and Shoreditch)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, Patricia (North Ayshire and Arran)</td>
<td>Hinds, Damian Patrick George (East Hampshire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillan, Rt Hon. Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)</td>
<td>Hoare, Simon James (North Dorset)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass, Patricia Mary (North West Durham)</td>
<td>Hodge, Rt Hon. Margaret Eve (Barking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen, John Philip (Salisbury)</td>
<td>Hodgson, Sharon (Washington and Sunderland West)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glindon, Mary Theresa (North Tyneside)</td>
<td>Hoey, Kate (Vauxhall)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goddard, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Hall Green)</td>
<td>Hollern, Catherine Malloy (Blackburn)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmith, Frank Zacharias Robin (Richmond Park)</td>
<td>Hollingbery, George Michael Edward (Meon Valley)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodman, Helen Catherine (Bishop Auckland)</td>
<td>Hollinrake, Kevin Paul (Thirsk and Malton)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill, Robert (Scarborough and Whitby)</td>
<td>Hollobone, Philip Thomas (Kettering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gove, Rt Hon. Michael Andrew (Surrey Heath)</td>
<td>Holloway, Adam James Harold (Gravesham)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grady, Patrick John (Glasgow North)</td>
<td>Hopkins, Kelvin Peter (Luton North)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham, Richard (Gloucester)</td>
<td>Hopkins, Kristan Frederick (Keighley)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant, Helen (Maidstone and The Weald)</td>
<td>Hosie, Stewart (Dundee East)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant, Peter (Glenrothes)</td>
<td>Howarth, Rt Hon. George Edward (Knowsley)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, James Whiteside (North Wilts)</td>
<td>Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Aldershot)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Neil Charles (Airdrie and Shotts)</td>
<td>Howell, John Michael (Henley)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grayling, Rt Hon. Christopher Stephen (Epsom and Ewell)</td>
<td>Howlett, Benjamin John (Bath)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Chris (Bolton West)</td>
<td>Hoyle, Rt Hon. Lindsay Harvey (Chorley)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Rt Hon. Damian Howard (Ashford)</td>
<td>Huddleston, Nigel Paul (Mid Worcestershire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Katherine Anne (Stretford and Urmston)</td>
<td>Hunt, Rt Hon. Jeremy Richard Streynsham (South West Surrey)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greening, Rt Hon. Justine (Putney)</td>
<td>Hunt, Tristram Julian William (Stoke-on-Trent Central)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwood, Lilian Rachel (Nottingham South)</td>
<td>Huq, Rupa Asha (Ealing Central and Acton)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwood, Margaret (Wirral West)</td>
<td>Hurd, Nicholas Richard (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greve, Rt Hon Dominic Charles Roberts (Beaconsfield)</td>
<td>Hussain, Imran (Bradford East)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith, Nia Rhianon (Llanelli)</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffiths, Andrew James (Burton)</td>
<td>Irranca-Davies, Ifor Huw (Gogmore)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gummer, Benedict Michael (Ipswich)</td>
<td>[Resigned, March 2016]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyimah, Samuel Phillip (East Surrey)</td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haigh, Louise Margaret (Sheffield, Heeley)</td>
<td>Jackson, Stewart James (Peterborough)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfon, Rt Hon. Robert Henry (Harlow)</td>
<td>James, Margot Cathleen (Stourbridge)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Luke Anthony (Thornbury and Yate)</td>
<td>Jarvis, Dan (Barnsley Central)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton, Fabian (Leeds North East)</td>
<td>Javid, Rt Hon. Sajid (Bromsgrove)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond, Rt Hon. Philip (Rumneyde and Weybridge)</td>
<td>Jayawardena, Ranil Malcolm (North East Hampshire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond, Stephen William (Wimbledon)</td>
<td>Jenkyns, Andrea Marie (Morley and Outwood)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock, Rt Hon. Matthew John David (West Suffolk)</td>
<td>Jenrick, Robert Edward (Newark)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands, Rt Hon. Gregory William (Chelsea and Fulham)</td>
<td>Johnson, Rt Hon. Alan Arthur (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanson, Rt Hon. David George (Delyn)</td>
<td>Johnson, Boris de Pfeffel (Uxbridge and South Ruislip)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harman, Rt Hon. Harriet (Camberwell and Peckham)</td>
<td>Johnson, Diana Ruth (Kingston upon Hull North)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper, Rt Hon. Mark James (Forest of Dean)</td>
<td>Johnson, Gareth Alan (Dartford)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harpham, Robert Harry (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough)</td>
<td>Johnson, Joseph Edmund (Orpington)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Died, February 2016]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrington, Richard Irwin (Watford)</td>
<td>Jones, Andrew Hanson (Harrogate and Knaresborough)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, Carolyn (Swansea East)</td>
<td>Jones, Rt Hon. David Ian (Clwyd West)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, Elizabeth Rebecca Scott (Castle Point)</td>
<td>Jones, Gerald (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart, Simon (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire)</td>
<td>Jones, Graham Peter (Hyndburn)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haselhurst, Rt Hon. Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)</td>
<td>Jones, Helen Mary (Warrington North)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Helen Elizabeth (Dulwich and West Norwood)</td>
<td>Jones, Kevan David (North Durham)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Rt Hon. John Henry (South Holland and the Deepings)</td>
<td>Jones, Marcus Charles (Nuneaton)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayman, Susan Mary (Workington)</td>
<td>Jones, Susan Elan (Clwyd South)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heald, Oliver (North East Hertfordshire)</td>
<td>Kane, Michael Joseph Patrick (Wythenshawe and Sale East)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healey, Rt Hon. John ( Wentworth and Dearne)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kaufman, Rt Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Kawczynski, Daniel Robert (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Keeley, Barbara Mary (Worsley and Eccles South)
Kendall, Elizabeth Louise (Leicester West)
Kennedy, Seema Louise Ghissi (South Ribble)
Kerevan, George (East Lothian)
Kerr, Calum Robert (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk)
Khan, Rt Hon. Sadiq Aman (Tooting) [Resigned]
Kimahan, Daniel De Burgh (South Antrim)
Kinnock, Stephen Nathan (Aberavon)
Kirby, Simon Gerard (Brighton, Kemptown)
Knight, Rt Hon. Sir Gregory (East Yorkshire)
Knight, Julian (Solihull)
Kwarteng, Kwasi Alfred Addo (Spelthorne)
Kyle, Peter John (Hove)

L
Laing, Eleanor Fulton (Epping Forest)
Lamb, Rt Hon. Norman Peter (North Norfolk)
Lammy, Rt Hon. David Lindon (Tottenham)
Lancaster, John Mark (Milton Keynes North)
Latham, Pauline Elizabeth (Mid Derbyshire)
Lavery, Ian (Wansbeck)
Law, Christopher Murray Alexander (Dundee West)
Leadsom, Andrea (South Northamptonshire)
Lee, Phillip James (Bracknell)
Lefroy, Jeremy John Elton (Stafford)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough)
Leslie, Christopher Michael (Nottingham East)
Letwin, Rt Hon. Oliver (West Dorset)
Lewell-Buck, Emma Louise (South Shields)
Lewis, Brandon Kenneth (Tees Valley) [By-election, December 2015]
Lewis, Clive Anthony (Norwich South)
Lewis, Ivan (Bury South)
Lewis, Rt Hon. Julian Murray (New Forest East) [Died, October 2015]
Liddell-Grainger, Ian Richard Peregrine (Bridgwater and West Somerset)
Liddington, Rt Hon. David Roy (Aylesbury)
Lilley, Rt Hon. Peter Bruce (Hitchin and Harpenden)
Long-Bailey, Rebecca (Salford and Eccles)
Lopresti, Giacomo (Filton and Bradley Stoke)
Lord, Jonathan George Caladine (Woking)
Loughton, Timothy Paul (East Worthing and Shoreham)
Lucas, Caroline Patricia (Brighton, Pavilion) [Resigned]
Lucas, Ian Colin (Wrexham)
Lumley, Karen Elizabeth (Redditch)

M
McCabe, Stephen James (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
McCaff, Callum (Aberdare South)
McCarthy, Gerry Gillian (Bristol East)
McCartney, Jason Alexander (Colne Valley)
McCartney, Karl Ian (Lincoln)
McDonagh, Siobhain Ann (Mitcham and Morden)
McDonald, Andrew Joseph (Middlesbrough)
McDonald, Stewart (Glasgow South)
McDonald, Stuart Campbell (Cumbernauld, Kirkintilloch East)
McDonnell, Alasdair (Belfast South)
McDonnell, John Martin (Hayes and Harlington)
McFadden, Rt Hon. Patrick Bosco (Wolverhampton South East)
McGarry, Natalie (Glasgow East)
McGinn, Conor Patrick (St Helens North)
McGovern, Alison (Wirral South)
McInnes, Elizabeth Anne (Heywood and Middleton)
Mackinlay, Craig (South Thanet)
McKinnell, Catherine (Newcastle upon Tyne North)
Mackintosh, David James (Northampton South)
McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow North East)
McLoughlin, Rt Hon. Patrick Allen (Derbyshire Dales)
McMahon, Jim (Oldham West and Royton)

[By-election, December 2015]
Mc Nally, John (Falkirk)
MacNeil, Angus Brendan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar)
McPartland, Stephen Anthony (Stevenage)
Mactaggart, Rt Hon. Fiona Margaret (Slough)
Madders, Justin (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
Mahmood, Khalid (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Mahmood, Shabana (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Main, Anne Margaret (St Albans)
Mak, Alan (Havant)
Malhotra, Seema (Felltham and Heston)
Malthouse, Christopher Laurie (North West Hampshire)
Mann, John (Bassetlaw)
Mann, Scott Leslie (North Cornwall)
Marris, Rob (Wolverhampton South West)
Marsden, Gordon (Blackpool South)
Maskell, Rachael Helen (York Central)
Maskey, Paul John (Belfast West)
Matheson, Chris (City of Chester)
Mathias, Tania Wyn (Twickenham)
May, Rt Hon. Theresa Mary ( Maidenhead)
Maynard, Paul Christopher (Blackpool North and Cleveleys)
Meacher, Rt Hon. Michael (Oldham West and Royton)
[By-election, December 2015]
Mealey, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mears, James Ian (Gateshead)
Menzies, Mark Andrew (Fylde)
Merrill, John Luther (Plymouth, Moor View)
Merriman, Huw William (Bexhill and Battle)
Metcalfe, Stephen James (South Basildon and East Thurrock)
Miliband, Rt Hon. Edward (Doncaster North)
Miller, Rt Hon. Maria Frances Lewis (Basingstoke)
Milling, Amanda Anne (Cannock Chase)
Mills, Nigel John (Amber Valley)
Milton, Rt Hon. Anne Frances (Guildford)
Mitchell, Rt Hon. Andrew John Bower (Sutton Coldfield)
Molloy, Francis Joseph (Mid Ulster)
Monaghan, Carol (Glasgow North West)
Monaghan, Paul William (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
Moon, Madeleine (Bridgend)
Mordaunt, Penny Mary (Portsmouth North)
Morden, Jessica Elizabeth (Newport East)
Morgan, Rt Hon. Nicola Ann (Loughborough)
Morris, Anne Marie (Newton Abbot)
Morris, David Thomas (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Morris, Grahame Mark. (Eastleigh)
Morris, James George (Halesowen and Rowley Regis)
Morton, Wendy (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Mowat, David John (Warrington South)
Mulholland, Greg (Leeds North West)
Mullin, William Arthur Roger (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath)
Mundell, Rt Hon. David Gordon (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale)
Murray, Ian (Edinburgh South)
Murray, Sheryll (South East Cornwall)
Murrison, Andrew William (South West Wiltshire)
Nandy, Lisa Eva (Wigan)
Neill, Robert James MacGillivray (Bromley and Chislehurst)
Newlands, Gavin Andrew Stuart (Paisley and Renfrewshire North)
Newton, Sarah Louise (Truro and Falmouth)
Nicolson, John MacKenzie (East Dunbartonshire)
Nokes, Caroline Fiona Ellen (Romsey and Southampton North)
Norman, Alexander Jesse (Hereford and South Herefordshire)
Nuttall, David John (Bury North)

O

O'Hara, Brendan (Argyll and Bute)
Offord, Matthew James (Hendon)
Onn, Melanie (Great Grimsby)
Onwurah, Chi (Newcastle upon Tyne Central)
Opperman, Guy (Hexham)
Osamor, Kate Ofunne (Edmonton)
Osborne, Rt Hon. George Gideon Oliver (Tatton)
Oswald, Kirsten Frances (East Renfrewshire)
Owen, Albert (Ynys Môn)

P

Paisley, Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parish, Neil Quentin Gordon (Tiverton and Honiton)
Patel, Rt Hon. Priti Sushil (Witham)
Paterson, Rt Hon. Owen William (North Shropshire)
Paterson, Steven Alexander (Stirling)
Pawsey, Mark Julian Francis (Rugby)
Pearce, Teresa (Eith and Thamesmead)
Penning, Rt Hon. Michael Alan (Hemel Hempstead)
Pennycook, Matthew Thomas (Greenwich and Woolwich)
Penrose, John David (Weston-super-Mare)
Percy, Andrew Theakstone (Brigg and Goole)
Perkins, Matthew Toby (Chesterfield)
Perry, Claire Louise (Devizes)
Phillips, Jessica Rose (Birmingham, Yardley)
Phillips, Stephen James (Slough and North Hykeham)
Phillipson, Bridget Maeve (Houghton and Sunderland South)
Philp, Chris Ian Brian Mynott (Croydon South)
Pickles, Rt Hon. Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
Pincher, Christopher John (Tamworth)
Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax, Richard Grosvenor (South Dorset)
Poulter, Daniel Leonard James (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)
Pound, Stephen Pelham (Ealing North)
Pow, Rebecca Faye Clark (Taunton Deane)
Powell, Lucy Maria (Manchester Central)
Prentis, Victoria Mary Boswell (Banbury)
Prisk, Michael Mark (Hertford and Stortford)
Pritchard, Mark Andrew (The Wrekin)
Pugh, John David (Southport)
Pursglove, Thomas Christopher John (Corby)
Quin, Jeremy Mark (Horsham)
Quince, William James (Colchester)
Qureshi, Yasmin (Bolton South East)

R

Raab, Dominic Rennie (Esher and Walton)
Rayner, Angela (Ashton-under-Lyne)
Redwood, Rt Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
Reed, Jameson Ronald (Copeland)
Reed, Stephen Mark Ward (Croydon North)
Rees, Christina Elizabeth (Neath)
Rees-Mogg, Jacob William (North East Somerset)
Reeves, Rachel Jane (Leeds West)
Reynolds, Emma Elizabeth (Wolverhampton North East)
Reynolds, Jonathan Neil (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Rimmer, Marie Elizabeth (St Helens South and Whiston)
Ritchie, Margaret (South Down)
Robertson, Angus Struan Carolus (Moray)
Robertson, Laurence Anthony (Tewkesbury)
Robinson, Gay (Belfast East)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry North West)
Robinson, Mary Josephine (Cheadle)
Rosindell, Andrew Richard (Romford)
Rotheram, Steven Philip (Liverpool, Walton)
Rudd, Rt Hon. Amber (Hastings and Rye)
Rutley, David Henry (Macclesfield)
Ryan, Rt Hon. Joan Marie (Enfield North)

S

Salmond, Rt Hon. Alex (Gordon)
Sandbach, Antoinette (Eddisbury)
Saville Roberts, Liz (Dwyfor Meirionnydd)
Scully, Paul Stuart (Sutton and Cheam)
Selous, Andrew Edmund Armstrong (South West Bedfordshire)
Shah, Naseem Akhter (Bradford West)
Shannon, Richard James (Strangford)
Shapps, Rt Hon. Grant (Welwyn Hatfield)
Sharma, Alok Kumar (Reading West)
Sharma, Virendra Kumar (Ealing, Southall)
Sherriff, Paula Michelle (Dewsbury)
Shuker, Gavin (Luton South)
Siddiq, Tulip (Hampstead and Kilburn)
Simpson, Thomas David (Upper Bann)
Simpson, Rt Hon. Keith Robert (Broadland)
Skidmore, Christopher James (Kingswood)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolesover)
Slaughter, Andrew Francis (Hammersmith)
Smeth, Ruth Lauren (Stoke-on-Trent North)
Smith, Rt Hon. Andrew David (Oxford East)
Smith, Angela Christine (Penistone and Stocksbridge)
Smith, Catherine Jane (Lancaster and Fleetwood)
Smith, Chloe Rebecca (Norwich North)
Smith, Henry Edward Millar (Crawley)
Smith, Jeffrey (Manchester, Withington)
Smith, Julian Richard (Skipton and Ripon)
Smith, Nicholas Desmond John (Blaenau Gwent)
Smith, Owen (Pontypridd)
Smith, Royston Matthew (Southampton, Itchen)
Smyth, Karin (Bristol South)
Soames, Rt Hon. Nicholas (Mid Sussex)
Solloway, Amanda Jane (Derby North)
Soubry, Rt Hon. Anna Mary (Broxtowe)
Spellar, Rt Hon. John Francis (Warley)
Spelman, Rt Hon. Caroline (Meriden)
Spencer, Mark Steven (Sherwood)
Starmer, Keir (Holborn and St Pancras)
Stephens, Christopher (Glasgow South West)
Stephenson, Andrew George (Pendle)
Stevens, Joanna Meriel (Cardiff Central)
Stevenson, Andrew John (Carlisle)
Stewart, Robert Alexander (Beckenham)
Stewart, Iain Aitken (Milton Keynes South)
Stewart, Roderick James Nugent (Penrith and The Border)
Streeter, Gary Nicholas (South Devon West)
Streeting, Wesley Paul William (Ilford North)
Stringer, Graham Eric (Blackley and Broughton)
Stuart, Gisela Gschaider (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Stuart, Graham (Beverley and Holderness)
Sturdy, Julian Charles (York Outer)
Sunak, Rishi (Richmond (Yorkshire))
Swan, Rt Hon. Desmond Angus (New Forest West)
Swire, Rt Hon. Hugo George William (East Devon)
Syms, Robert Andrew Raymond (Poole)

T
Tami, Mark Richard (Alyn and Deeside)
Thewliss, Alison Emily (Glasgow Central)
Thomas, Derek Gordon (St Ives)
Thomas, Gareth (Harrow West)
Thomas-Symonds, Nicklaus (Torfaen)
Thompson, Owen George (Midlothian)
Thomson, Michelle Rhonda (Edinburgh West)
Thorner, Emily (Islington South and Finsbury)
Throup, Margaret Ann (Erewash)
Timms, Rt Hon. Stephen Creswell (East Ham)
Timpson, Anthony Edward (Crewe and Nantwich)
Tolhurst, Kelly Jane (Rochester and Strood)
Tomlinson, Justin Paul (North Swindon)
Tomlinson-Mynors, Michael James (Mid Dorset and North Poole)
Tracey, Craig Paul (North Warwickshire)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie Belinda (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Trickett, Jon Hedley (Hemsworth)
Truss, Rt Hon. Elizabeth Mary (South West Norfolk)
Tugendhat, Thomas Georg John (Tonbridge and Malling)
Turley, Anna Catherine (Redcar)
Turner, Andrew John (Isle of Wight)
Turner, Karl (Kingston upon Hull East)
Twigg, Derek (Halton)
Twigg, Stephen (Liverpool, West Derby)
Tyrie, Rt Hon. Andrew Guy (Chichester)

U
Umunna, Chuka Harrison (Stratford-on-Avon)
Z
Zahawi, Nadhim (Stratford-on-Avon)
Zeichner, Daniel Stephen (Cambridge)
HER MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE Rt HON. DAVID CAMERON, MP, MAY 2015)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt Hon. David Cameron, MP

First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt Hon. George Osborne, MP

Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP

Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt Hon. Michael Fallon, MP

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade—The Rt Hon Sajid Javid, MP

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions—The Rt Hon. Stephen Crabb, MP

Secretary of State for Health—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP

Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities—The Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan, MP

Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP

Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP

Secretary of State for Transport—The Rt Hon. Patrick McLoughlin, MP

Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers, MP

Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt Hon. John Whittingdale, MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt Hon. Oliver Letwin, MP

Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal—The Rt. Hon. Baroness Stowell of Beeston, MBE

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Innovation and Skills—

Secretary of State and President of the Board of Trade—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

Ministers of State—

The Rt Hon. Anna Soubry, MP (Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise)

Joseph Johnson, MP (Minister for Universities and Science)

Edward Vaizey (Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy) §

Lord Price (Minister for Trade and Investment) §

Nick Boles, MP (Minister for Skills) §

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—

George Freeman §

Baroness Neville-Rolfe, DBE, CMG §

Cabinet Office—

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt Hon. Oliver Letwin, MP

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General—The Rt Hon. Matthew Hancock, MP

Lord President of the Council—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP

Parliamentary Secretaries—

Rob Wilson, MP (Minister for Civil Society)

John Penrose, MP §

Lord Bridges of Headley

Minister without Portfolio—

The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon, MP

Communities and Local Government—

Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP

Ministers of State—

The Rt Hon. Mark Francois, MP (Minister for Communities and Resilience)

Brandon Lewis, MP (Minister for Housing and Planning)

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—

Marcus Jones, MP

James Wharton, MP

Richard Harrington (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees) §

Baroness Williams of Trafford
Culture, Media and Sport—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. John Whittingdale, MP
*Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy*—Edward Vaizey, MP
*Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State*—
  Tracey Crouch, MP
  The Rt Hon. David Evennett, MP
  Baroness Neville-Rolfe, DBE, CMG
  Baroness Shields (Minister for Internet Safety and Security)

Defence—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Michael Fallon, MP
*Ministers of State*—
  Penny Mordaunt, MP (Minister for the Armed Forces)
  Philip Dunne, MP (Minister for Defence Procurement)
  The Rt Hon. Earl Howe
*Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State*—
  Mark Lancaster, MP
  Julian Brazier, MP

Education—
*Secretary of State and Minister for Women and Equalities*—The Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan, MP
*Ministers of State*—
  Nick Boles, MP (Minister for Skills)
  Nick Gibb, MP (Minister for Schools)
  Edward Timpson, MP (Minister for Children and Families)
*Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State*—
  Sam Gyimah, MP
  Lord Nash
*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice*—Caroline Dinenage, MP

Energy and Climate Change—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP
*Minister of State*—Andrea Leadsom, MP
*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*—Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP
*Minister of State*—George Eustice, MP
*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*—Rory Stewart, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Office—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP
*Ministers of State*—
  The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP (Minister for Europe)
  The Rt Hon. Hugo Swire, MP
  Lord Price (Minister for Trade and Investment)
  The Rt Hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns, DBE
*Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State*—
  James Duddridge, MP
  Tobias Ellwood, MP

Health—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP
*Minister for Community and Social Care*—The Rt Hon. Alistair Burt, MP
*Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State*—
  Ben Gummer, MP
  Jane Ellison, MP
  George Freeman, MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences)
  Lord Prior of Brampton

Home Office—
*Secretary of State*—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP
*Ministers of State*—
  The Rt Hon. Mike Penning, MP (Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice)
  The Rt Hon. John Hayes, MP—(Minister for Security)
  The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP (Minister for Immigration)
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Karen Bradley, MP
Richard Harrington (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees) §
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon §

International Development—
Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP
Ministers of State—
The Rt. Hon. Desmond Swayne, MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Richard Harrington, MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees) §
Nick Hurd, MP
Baroness Verma

Justice—
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP
Ministers of State—
The Rt Hon. Mike Penning, MP (Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice) §
Lord Faulks, QC (Minister for Civil Justice)

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Caroline Dinenage, MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice) §
Dominic Raab, MP
Shaiilesh Vara, MP §
Andrew Selous, MP §

Law Officers—
Attorney General—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Wright, QC, MP
Solicitor General—Robert Buckland, QC, MP

Leader of the House of Commons—
Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP
Deputy Leader of the House of Commons—Thérèse Coffey, MP

Northern Ireland—
Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—Ben Wallace, MP

Scotland Office—
Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—Lord Dunlop

Transport—
Secretary of State—The Rt Hon. Patrick McLoughlin, MP
Minister of State—Robert Goodwill
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Claire Perry, MP
Andrew Jones, MP
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon §

Treasury—
Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt Hon. David Cameron, MP
First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt Hon. George Osborne, MP
Chief Secretary—The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP
Financial Secretary—David Gauke, MP
Exchequer Secretary—Damian Hinds, MP
Economic Secretary—Harriett Baldwin, MP
Commercial Secretary—Lord O’Neill of Gatley
Parliamentary Secretary—The Rt Hon. Mark Harper, MP

Lords Commissioners—
The Rt. Hon. David Evennett, MP
John Penrose, MP §
Charlie Elphicke, MP
Mel Stride, MP
George Hollingbery, MP
Guto Bebb, MP §
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Andrew Selous, MP §
Guy Opperman, MP
Julian Smith, MP
Margot James, MP
Sarah Newton, MP
Stephen Barclay, MP
Simon Kirby, MP
Jackie Doyle-Price, MP

Wales Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-Secretaries of State—
Guto Bebb, MP §
Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Work and Pensions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Stephen Crabb, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP (Minister for Employment)
The Rt Hon. Lord Freud (Minister for Welfare Reform)
Baroness Altmann (Minister for Pensions)
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-Secretaries of State—
Justin Tomlinson, MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People)
Shailesh Vara, MP §

Office of the Leader of the House of Lords—
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt. Hon. Baroness Stowell of Beeston, MBE
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe

Her Majesty's Household—
LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Earl Peel, GCVO, DL
LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie
MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord Vestey, KCVO
Treasurer—The Rt Hon. Anne Milton, MP
COMPTROLLER—Gavin Barwell, MP
VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Kris Hopkins, MP
CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—Lord Taylor of Holbeach, CBE
CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN’S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Lord Gardiner of Kimble
BARONESS IN WAITING—Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
LORDS IN WAITING—Lord Ashton of Hyde, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §, Viscount Younger of Leckie, The Earl of Courtown

§ Members of the Government listed under more than one Department

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt. Hon. Caroline Spelman, MP
HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP
CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle, MP
FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs Eleanor Laing, MP
SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Natascha Engel, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS
Sir David Amess, MP, Mr Adrian Bailey, MP, Mr Clive Betts, MP, Mr Peter Bone, MP, Mr Graham Brady, MP, Ms Karen Buck, MP, Mr Christopher Chope, MP, Mr David Crausby, MP, Geraint Davies, MP, Philip Davies, MP, Nadine Dorries, MP, Mr Nigel Evans, MP, Sir Roger Gale, MP, Mike Gapes, MP, The Rt Hon. Cheryl Gillan, MP, James Gray, MP, The Rt Hon. David Hanson, MP, Mr Philip Hollobone, MP, The Rt Hon. George Howarth, MP, Sir Edward Leigh, MP, Mrs Anne Main, MP, Steve McCabe, MP, Sir Alan Meale, MP, Mrs Madeleine Moon, MP, Mr David Nuttall, MP, Albert Owen, MP, Andrew Percy, MP, Mark Pritchard, MP, Andrew Rosindell, MP, The Rt Hon. Joan Ryan, MP, Mr Gary Streeter, MP, Graham Stringer, MP, Mr Andrew Turner, MP, Valerie Vaz, MP, Mr Charles Walker, MP, Phil Wilson, MP

SECRETARY—Matthew Hamlyn

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION
The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP, Chris Bryant, MP, The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP (Leader of the House), Stewart Hosie, MP, David Natzler (Clerk of the House), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (External Member), Jane McCall (External Member)

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—Tom Goldsmith
ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Helen Wood

ADMINISTRATION ESTIMATE AUDIT COMMITTEE
Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (Chair), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP, Stephen Brooker, Jane McCall

SECRETARY OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE—Lloyd Owen

liaison committee

CLERK—Tom Healey

The Board
Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director), John Benger (Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees), John Borley, CB (Managing Director, Facilities), Lee Bridges (Head of Communications), Tom Goldsmith (Head of the Governance Office), Rob Greg (Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service), Paul Martin (Director of Security for Parliament), Penny Young (Librarian and Managing Director, Research and Information, and Managing Director, Participation), Mark Hutton (Stepping Up Lead), Patsy Richards (Interim Customer Service Lead), David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service) [ex officio]

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD—Marianne Cwynarski

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director)

SECRETARY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE—Marianne Cwynarski
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

SPEAKER’S SECRETARY—Peter Barratt
ASSISTANT SECRETARY TO THE SPEAKER—Ian Davis MBE
TRAINBEARER—Vacant
DIARY SECRETARY—Emma Bell
SPEAKER’S COUNSEL—Michael Carpenter, CB
SPEAKER’S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin

OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE—David Natzler
PRIVATE SECRETARY—Lloyd Owen
PERSONAL ASSISTANT—Louise Clarke

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Kathryn Hudson
REGISTRAR OF MEMBERS’ FINANCIAL INTERESTS—Heather Wood

SECURITY

DIRECTOR OF SECURITY FOR PARLIAMENT—Paul Martin, CBE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF SECURITY FOR PARLIAMENT—Emily Baldock
HEAD OF SECURITY OPERATIONS—John Groves
SRP PROGRAMME DIRECTOR—Christina O’Kelly

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS

SECRETARY TO THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Joanna Dodd

GOVERNANCE OFFICE

HEAD OF OFFICE—Tom Goldsmith
CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT FACILITATOR—Rachel Harrison
HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT—Paul Dillon-Robinson

Domestic Committees—

ADMINISTRATION: CLERK—Sarah Heath
FINANCE: CLERK—Helen Wood

Safety—

HEAD OF PARLIAMENTARY SAFETY—Marianne McDougall
PRINCIPAL CONSTRUCTION SAFETY ADVISER—Greg Brown

CHAMBER AND COMMITTEE SERVICES TEAM

CLERK ASSISTANT AND DIRECTOR GENERAL—John Benger
PERSONAL ASSISTANT—Charlotte Every
DIRECTOR OF DEPARTMENTAL SERVICES—Patsy Richards

Overseas Office—

PRINCIPAL CLERK—Crispin Poyser
DELEGATION SECRETARY—Nick Wright
INWARD VISITS MANAGER—Michelle Wenham
NATIONAL PARLIAMENT REPRESENTATIVE, BRUSSELS—Alison Groves
DEPUTY NATIONAL PARLIAMENT REPRESENTATIVE, BRUSSELS—Fraser McIntosh

Committee Office—

CLERK OF COMMITTEES—Andrew Kennon
PRINCIPAL CLERKS OF SELECT COMMITTEES—Mark Hutton, Colin Lee, Simon Patrick
BUSINESS MANAGER (LIAISON)—Anita Fuki
OPERATIONS MANAGER—Karen Saunders
BUSINESS MANAGER (COMG)—Richard Dawson

Departmental Select Committees—

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS: CLERKS—Chris Shaw, Eliot Wilson, Martin Adams
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: CLERKS—Mark Etherton, Helen Finlayson
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT: CLERKS—Elizabeth Flood, Katy Reid
DEFENCE: CLERKS—James Davies, Anna Dickson
EDUCATION: CLERKS—Richard Ward, Kevin Maddison, Jack Dent
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: CLERKS—Dr Farrah Bhatti, Gavin O’Leary
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS: CLERKS—David Weir, Sian Cooke
FOREIGN AFFAIRS: CLERKS—Kenneth Fox, Nick Beech
HEALTH: CLERKS—Huw Yardley, Mike Winter
HOME AFFAIRS: CLERKS—Carol Oxborough, Phil Jones
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CLERKS—Sarah Hartwell-Naguib, Daniel Whitford
JUSTICE: CLERKS—Nick Walker, Jonathan Whiffing
NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS: CLERK—Robert Cope
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: CLERKS—Simon Fiander, Grahame Danby, Marsha David
SCOTTISH AFFAIRS: CLERK—Jyoti Chandola
TRANSPORT: CLERKS—Gordon Clarke, Gail Bartlett
TREASURY: CLERKS—James Rhys, Chloe Challender, James Mirza-Davies
WELSH AFFAIRS: CLERK—John-Paul Flaherty
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES: CLERKS—Gosia McBride, Luanne Middleton
WORK AND PENSIONS: CLERKS—Adam Mellows-Facer, Margaret McKinnon

Other Committees—
ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT: CLERKS—David Slater, Carl Baker
JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS: COMMONS CLERKS—Robin James, Donna Davidson
LIAISON: CLERK—Andrew Kennon
JOINT COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: COMMONS CLERK—Nick Beech
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS: CLERKS—Stephen McGinness, Mark Ewbank
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: CLERKS—Rhiannon Hollis, Rebecca Davies
REGULATORY REFORM: CLERK—Chris Shaw
EUROPEAN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CLERKS—Eve Samson, Amelia Aspden
CLERK ADVISERS—Peter Harbome, David Griffths, Leigh Gibson, Terry Byrne, Alistair Dillon, Sibel Taner
JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS: COMMONS CLERK—Amelia Aspden

Scrutiny Unit—
HEAD OF UNIT—David Lloyd
DEPUTY HEAD OF UNIT (FINANCE)—Larry Honeysett
HEAD OF WEB AND PUBLICATIONS UNIT—Miranda Oliver-Wright

CHAMBER BUSINESS—

Public and Private Bill Office—
CLERK OF LEGISLATION—Liam Laurence Smyth
CLERK OF BILLS, EXAMINER OF PETITIONS FOR PRIVATE BILLS AND TAXING OFFICER—Matthew Hamlyn
CLERK OF PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BILLS—Fergus Reid
CLERKS: Fergus Reid, Glenn McKee, Marek Kubala, Katy Stout, Joanna Welham
PRIVATE BILL OFFICE—Neil Caulfield (Clerk of Private Bills)
BILLS SUPPORT OFFICER—Mark Oxborough

Committees—
COURT OF REFEREES: CLERKS—Matthew Hamlyn, Joanna Dodd
SELECTION: CLERK—Katy Stout
STANDING ORDERS, UNOPPOSED BILLS: CLERK—Joanna Dodd

Journal Office—
CLERK OF THE JOURNALS—Paul Evans
CLERKS: Elizabeth Hunt, Martyn Atkins, Richard Cooke, Katya Cassidy, Jenny Burch

Committees—
PETITIONS: CLERK—Anne-Marie Griffiths
PRIVILEGES: CLERKS—Lynn Gardner, Jenny Burch
PROCEDURE: CLERKS—Martyn Atkins, Katya Cassidy
STANDARDS: CLERKS—Lynn Gardner, Jenny Burch

Statutory Committees
SPEAKER’S COMMITTEE FOR IPSA: SECRETARIES—Lynn Gardner, Ben Williams
SPEAKER’S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION: SECRETARIES—Lynn Gardner, Ben Williams

Table Office—
PRINCIPAL CLERK—Philippa Helme
CLERKS: Sarah Davies, Mike Hennessy, Ed Beale, Judith Boyce, Gini Griffin, Libby Kurien, Sharon Maddix, Lydia Menzies, Catherine Meredith
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Francee Graham
BACKBENCH BUSINESS: CLERKS—Mike Hennessy, Ed Beale

Vote Office—
DELIVERER OF THE VOTE—Catherine Fogarty
HEAD OF PROCEDURAL PUBLISHING—Tom McVeagh
PROCEDURAL PUBLISHING OPERATIONS MANAGER—Stuart Miller
HEAD OF DISTRIBUTION SERVICES—Barry Underwood
OFFICIAL REPORT

EDITOR—Alex Newton
DEPUTY EDITOR—Jack Homer
PERSONAL ASSISTANT—Caroline Rowlands
DIRECTOR OF AUDIO/VIDEO—John Angeli
MANAGING EDITORS (COMMITTEES)—Clare Hanly, Jonathan Hoare
MANAGING EDITORS (HOUSE)—Paul Hadlow, Deborah Jones, Ann Street, Vivien Wilson, Ross Gunby, Adele Dodd, Emma Kirby, Jez Oates
SUB-EDITORS—Kate Myers, Juliet Levy, Ken Gall, Victoria Hart, Paul Kirby, Jez Oates, Tony Minichiello, David Hampton, Portia Dadley, Joanna Lipkowska, Richard Purnell, Bran Jones, Tricia Hill, Ian Oakhill, Saul Minaee, Will Holdaway, Keith Brown, Cara Clark, Tom Martin
HOUSE REPORTERS—Emily Morris, Mayah Weinberg, Jude Wheway, Paul Underhill, Felicity Reardon, Jim Barr, Angus Andrews, Paul Owen, Tom Martin, Lydia Davis, Owain Wilkins, Eugene Wolstenholme, Stephen Farrell, Vivienne Kenny, Richard Hallas, Helen Lowe, Emma Woolerton, James Mayne
HEAD OF ADMINISTRATION—Stephen O’Riordan
SENIOR HANSARD ADMINISTRATORS—John Brake, Brian Harrison
ANNUNCIATOR SUPERINTENDENT—John LeHunte

SERJEANT AT ARMS
Serpentarian of Arms—Kamal El-Hajji BEM
DEPUTY SERJEANT AT ARMS—Lesley Scott
ASSISTANT SERJEANT AT ARMS—Samantha Howlett
CLERK IN CHARGE—Laura Blake
ADMISSION ORDER OFFICE—Sarah Dinsdale
PRINCIPAL DOORKEEPER—Phil Howse
ACCESS MANAGER—Emily Cathcart

OFFICE OF SPEAKER’S COUNSEL
SPEAKER’S COUNSEL—Michael Carpenter
COUNSEL—Peter Davis (Domestic Legislation), Arnold Ridout (European Legislation)
DEPUTY COUNSEL—Peter Broooksbank, Philip Davies, Daniel Greenberg (Domestic Legislation)
PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT COUNSEL—Helen Emes
ASSISTANT COUNSEL—Joanne Dee (European Legislation)
ASSISTANT COUNSEL—Helen Kinghorn
LEGAL ASSISTANT—Klara Banaszak

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
HEAD OF OFFICE—Lee Bridges
HEAD OF CENTRAL COMMUNICATIONS—Vasilis Gialias
HEAD OF MEDIA RELATIONS—Annikka Weerasinghe
DEPUTY HEAD OF MEDIA RELATIONS—Sophia Linehan

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION SERVICES
LIBRARIAN—Penny Young
PERSONAL ASSISTANT—Brigitte Onyskiw
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION—Edward Wood
HEAD OF DEPARTMENTAL SERVICES/BUSINESS MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR—John Owen

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE
DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT—Steve Wise
CURATOR’S OFFICE—
CURATOR OF WORKS OF ART—Malcolm Hay
DEPUTY CURATOR AND HEAD OF INTERPRETATION—Melanie Unwin
ASSISTANT CURATOR—Emma Gormley
INDEXING AND DATA MANAGEMENT—
HEAD OF SECTION (INTERIM)—Anya Somerville
THESAURUS EDITOR—Elizabeth Marley
LIBRARY RESOURCES—
HEAD OF SECTION—Susannah Foulis
ACQUISITIONS MANAGER—Angela Rushbrook
COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT—Emma Clark
RESOURCES MANAGEMENT CO-ORDINATOR—Paul Lester

SPIRE BENEFITS TEAM—
SPIRE BENEFITS REALISATION MANAGER—Anne Thompson
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (POST)

DIRECTOR OF POST—Dr Christopher Tyler
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF POST—Chandrika Nath
ADVISERS—Peter Border, Sarah Bunn, Aaron Goater, Lydia Harriss, Abbi Hobbs, Caroline Kenny, Jane Tinkler, Jonathan Wentworth

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT—Aileen Walker

Education Service—
HEAD OF EDUCATION SERVICE—Dr Emma-Jane Watchorn
EDUCATION OUTREACH MANAGER—Amy Baxter
EDUCATION CENTRE MANAGER—Phillip Johnson
EDUCATION BUSINESS MANAGER—Giles Mason
SCHOOL VISITS MANAGER—Louise Palmer

Visitor Services & Retail—
HEAD OF VISITOR SERVICES & RETAIL—Amy Pitts
COMMERCIAL VISITS MANAGER—Matt Morgan
VISITS OPERATIONS & DUTY MANAGERS—Simon Featherstone, Sarah Hurcomb
HEAD OF RETAIL—Diana Christou
PARLIAMENTARY BOOKSHOP MANAGER—Sheila Mitchell

PUBLIC INFORMATION DIRECTORATE

HEAD OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT—David Clark
SELECT COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT MANAGER—Natasha Hallett
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES MANAGER—Leoni Kurt
COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT MANAGER—Hannah Roberts
UNIVERSITIES PROGRAMMES MANAGER—Naomi Saint
OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS MANAGER—Emily Unell
COMMUNICATIONS AND EVALUATION OFFICER—Gemma Webb

Public Information—
HEAD OF PUBLIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES GROUP—Matt Ringer
PUBLIC INFORMATION MANAGER—Holly Greenland
HEAD OF PUBLIC ENQUIRIES—Fiona Green
DIGITAL OUTREACH MANAGER—Laura Bristow
LEARNING PROJECTS AND CONTENT—Philippa Brown
DIGITAL PLANNING MANAGER—James Thresher

RESEARCH DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH—Bryn Morgan

Business and Transport—
HEAD OF SECTION—Tim Edmonds
LIBRARY CLERKS—Louise Butcher, Gabrielle Garton Grimwood, Douglas Pyper, Antony Seely, Djuna Thurley

Customer Services Team—
HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICE—Chris Sear
HEAD OF FRONT OF HOUSE—Hannah Russell

Economic Policy and Statistics—
HEAD OF SECTION—Lorna Booth
LIBRARY CLERKS—Jeanne Delebarre, Daniel Harari, Matthew Keep, Feargal McGuinness, Marianne O’Neill, Christopher Rhodes, Dominic Webb

Home Affairs—
HEAD OF SECTION—Pat Strickland
LIBRARY CLERKS—Jacqueline Beard, Lorraine Conway, Joanna Dawson, Catherine Fairbairn, Melanie Gower, Sally Lipscombe, Terry McGuinness (T) Dr Philip Ward, John Woodhouse

International Affairs and Defence—
HEAD OF SECTION—Vaughne Miller
LIBRARY CLERKS—Louisa Brooke-Holland, Arabella Lang, Dr Jon Lunn, Claire Mills, Ben Smith

Parliament and Constitution Centre—
HEAD OF SECTION—Lucinda Maer
LIBRARY CLERKS—Paul Bowers, Mike Everett, Neil Johnston, Richard Kelly, Jack Simson Caird (T), Mark Sandford, Isobel White
Research & Library Central Team—
  HEAD—Gavin Berman
  DIGITAL CONTENT MANAGER—Alex Fuller
  TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION OFFICER—Jeremy Hardacre
  LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER—Catrin Owens
  RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—Grace Rowley

Research Information Service—
  HEAD (INTERIM)—GILL COOPER
  SENIOR RESEARCH LIBRARIANS—Matt Barrow, Penny Turley

Science and Environment—
  HEAD OF SECTION—Ed Potton
  LIBRARY CLERKS—Dr Elena Ares, Dr Sarah Barber, Oliver Bennett, Dr Grahame Danby, Emma Downing, Sara Priestley, Louise Smith, Edward White

Social and General Statistics—
  HEAD OF SECTION—Richard Cracknell
  LIBRARY CLERKS—Grahame Allen, Cassie Barton, Paul Bolton, Dr Rachael Harker, Oliver Hawkins, Richard Keen, Rob Page, Tom Rutherford, Elise Uberoi, Daniel Wells (T)

Social Policy—
  HEAD OF SECTION—Wendy Wilson
  LIBRARY CLERKS—Alexander Bate, Hannah Cromarty, David Foster, Manjit Gheera, Susan Hubble, Tim Jarrett, Steven Kennedy, Robert Long, Christopher Murphy, Elizabeth Parkin, Tom Powell, Nerys Roberts

CORPORATE SERVICES
  MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND FINANCE DIRECTOR—Myfanwy Barrett
  DEPUTY HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES, AND DIRECTOR OF EFFICIENCIES AND JOINT WORKING—Martin Trott
  DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE—Alix Langley
  DIRECTOR OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—David Vere
  HEAD OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION—Anne Foster
  CHIEF ACCOUNTANT—Alex Mills
  HEAD OF FINANCIAL PLANNING AND BUSINESS SUPPORT—Amanda Colledge
  HEAD OF PAYROLL AND PENSIONS—Lucy Tindall
  STRATEGY, PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGER—Jane Hough
  HEAD OF ENTERPRISE PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT OFFICE—Charlotte Simmonds
  FINANCE BUSINESS PARTNER—Caroline Young
  HEAD OF LEARNING—Suzanne Stott
  HEAD OF HR OPERATIONS—Jenny Winters
  HEAD OF HR POLICY—Reg Perry
  HEAD OF HR ADVISORY SERVICE—Jo Regan
  HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE—Andy Vallins
  BUSINESS PARTNERS—Elaine Mason, Johan van den Broek, Harun Musho’d, Mike Page

Members’ HR Advice Service—
  SENIOR HR MANAGER—Barbara Joy

Health and Wellbeing—
  OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANAGER—Anne Mossop
  CONSULTANT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PHYSICIANS—Dr Paul Grimes, Dr Ira Madan
  WELFARE OFFICER—Tanya Harris
  CLINICAL NURSE ADVISERS—Karen St Cyr, Sally Dow, Sally Nightingale

Trade Union Side—
  TRADE UNION SIDE ADMINISTRATORS—Sandra Deakins, Denise Eltringham

INFORMATION RIGHTS AND INFORMATION SECURITY SERVICES (IRIS)
  HEAD OF IRIS—Victoria Payne

FACILITIES
  MANAGING DIRECTOR—John Borley, CB MA CEng MIET
  EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Katie Phelan-Molloy
  DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES FINANCE—Philip Collins
  DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT—Della Herd
  QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGER—Sean House
  DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER—Sarah McIlwaine
PARLIAMENTARY ESTATES DIRECTORATE

PARLIAMENTARY DIRECTOR OF ESTATES—Brian Finnimore
HEAD OF PROJECTS—Victor Akinbile
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, PROPERTY, PLANNING & DESIGN—Donald Grant
LEAD ELECTRICAL ENGINEER—Ugbana Oyet
LEAD CONTROLS/COMMUNICATIONS ENGINEER—Allan Trendell
LEAD MECHANICAL ENGINEER—Andy Greave
HEAD OF DIRECTORATE BUSINESS SUPPORT—Ann Moghaddami
HEAD OF MAINTENANCE—Mike McCann
KEEPER OF THE GREAT CLOCK—Steve Jaggs
HEAD OF PROGRAMME & PLANNING—Andrew Geehan
HEAD OF FIRE, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT—Martin Wittekind
FIRE SAFETY MANAGER—David Kaye, GIFireE
HEAD OF ARCHITECTURE AND HERITAGE—Adam Watrobski, BA (Hons), DiplArch, DiplConsAA, RIBA
HEAD OF PROPERTY AND WORKSPACE—Helen Arkell, BSc (Hons), MRICS
ESTATES ARCHIVIST AND HISTORIAN—Dr Mark Collins, BA, PhD

CATERING SERVICES

DIRECTOR OF CATERING SERVICES—Richard Tapner-Evans, BSc
EXECUTIVE CHEF—Mark Hill
OPERATIONS MANAGER—Robert Gibbs
CATERING MANAGER (TERRACE CAFETERIA, MEMBERS’ TEA ROOM AND JUBILEE CAFÉ)—Denise Durkin
PRIVATE DINING AND EVENTS MANAGER—Lee Holt
PRIVATE DINING AND EVENTS OFFICE MANAGER—Jason Bonello
HOSPITALITY AND EVENTS SALES MANAGER—Kay West
CATERING MANAGER, NORTHERN ESTATE (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 1 Parliament Street, 7 MILLBANK, MONCRIEFF’S
AND TOTHILL STREET)—Yvonne Sparrow
CATERING MANAGER, (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 7 MILLBANK, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET AND MONCRIEFF’S PRESS COMPLEX
AND TOTHILL STREET)—James Ellis
ASSISTANT CATERING MANAGER (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 7 MILLBANK, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET MONCRIEFF’S AND TOTHILL
STREET)—Katie Elliott
PARLIAMENTARY CATERING SUPPLY MANAGER—Antony Avella
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—Tanith Banks

ACCOMMODATION AND LOGISTICS SERVICES

DIRECTOR OF ACCOMMODATION AND LOGISTICS SERVICES—Fiona Channon
PARLIAMENTARY LOGISTICS MANAGER—Wesley Auvache
MEMBERS’ ACCOMMODATION MANAGER—Lis Gerhold
ACCOMMODATION MANAGER—Susanna Lumsden
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT—Craig Jaggs
HEAD OF FACILITIES SERVICE DELIVERY—Brendon Mulvihill
FACILITIES SERVICE DELIVERY MANAGERS—Doreen Irving, Noel Kirby, Simon Mansfield, David O’Nions,
Les Stockwell
HERITAGE CLEANING MANAGER—David Ray
POSTMASTER—Mark Morrish

PARLIAMENTARY DIGITAL SERVICE

DIRECTOR OF PARLIAMENTARY DIGITAL SERVICE—Rob Greig
DEPUTY DIRECTOR—Tracey Jessup
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER—Steve O’Connor
DIRECTOR OF THE CYBER SECURITY PROGRAMME—Steven Mark
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT—Emma Allen
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS—Rebecca Elton
DIRECTOR OF LIVE SERVICES—Rob Sanders
HEAD OF CYBER SECURITY—Mark Harbord
HEAD OF MEMBER SERVICES—Graham Peek

OTHER PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

CLERK OF THE CROWN IN CHANCERY—Richard Heaton
COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL—Amyas Morse
PARLIAMENTARY AND HEALTH SERVICE OMBUDSMAN—Dame Julie Mellor, DBE

18 May 2016
Mr Speaker: The House has directed the Speaker to make a statement at the beginning of each Session about the duties and responsibilities of hon. Members.

I begin by reminding Members of their duty to observe the code of conduct agreed by the House, and to behave with civility and fairness in all their dealings. The House asserts its privilege of freedom of speech. It is there to ensure that our constituents can be represented by us without fear or favour. It is an obligation upon us all to exercise that privilege responsibly. It is enjoyed by Members of Parliament only in their work in this House: as private individuals we are equal under the law with those whom we represent. In our proceedings, every Member should be heard courteously, whatever their views.

Parliament should be open to those whom it represents. We should seek to explain its work to those who elect us, and make them welcome here. The security of this building and those who work and visit here depends upon all of us. We have a duty to be vigilant, and to assist those whose job it is to maintain this place as a safe place to work.

In this new Session of Parliament, I will be enforcing more closely the convention of Ministers taking up to 10 minutes when delivering an oral statement to the House. The official Opposition spokesperson may make a contribution of up to five minutes, and the third party spokesperson a maximum of two minutes. For urgent questions, the Minister may speak for up to three minutes; the person asking the urgent question and the official spokesperson, where different, a maximum of two minutes each; and the third party spokesperson a maximum of one minute. Members wishing to take part in statements, urgent questions and business questions must be in the Chamber, in accordance with very long-established convention, before they begin, and colleagues should not expect to be called to ask a question if they are not in their place as the statement, the urgent question or business questions begins.

Before moving to the first business of the new Parliament, I would like to express my very best wishes for the 2016-17 Session to all hon. Members and all those who work here.

OUTLAWRIES BILL

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time.
Queen’s Speech

Mr Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are already available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences.

My Ministers will continue to bring the public finances under control so that Britain lives within its means, and to move to a higher wage and lower welfare economy where work is rewarded.

To support the economic recovery, and to create jobs and more apprenticeships, legislation will be introduced to ensure Britain has the infrastructure that businesses need to grow.

Measures will be brought forward to create the right for every household to access high speed broadband.

Legislation will be introduced to improve Britain’s competitiveness and make the United Kingdom a world leader in the digital economy.

My Ministers will ensure the United Kingdom is at the forefront of technology for new forms of transport, including autonomous and electric vehicles.

To spread economic prosperity, my Government will continue to support the development of a Northern Powerhouse.

In England, further powers will be devolved to directly elected mayors, including powers governing local bus services. Legislation will also allow local authorities to retain business rates, giving them more freedom to invest in local communities.

My Government will support aspiration and promote home ownership through its commitment to build a million new homes.

Following last week’s Anti-Corruption Summit in London, legislation will be introduced to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion.

My Government will continue work to deliver NHS services over seven days of the week in England. Legislation will be introduced to ensure that overseas visitors pay for the health treatment they receive at public expense.

New legislation will be introduced to tackle some of the deepest social problems in society, and improve life chances.

A Bill will be introduced to ensure that children can be adopted by new families without delay, improve the standard of social work and opportunities for young people in care in England.

To tackle poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability, addiction and debt, my Government will introduce new indicators for measuring life chances. Legislation will be introduced to establish a soft drinks industry levy to help tackle childhood obesity.

Legislation will be introduced to help the lowest-income families save, through a new Help to Save scheme, and to create a Lifetime ISA to help young people save for the long-term.

My Government will continue to reform public services so they help the hardest-to-reach.

A Bill will be brought forward to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life. There will also be a fairer balance between schools, through the National Funding Formula.

To ensure that more people have the opportunity to further their education, legislation will be introduced to support the establishment of new universities and to promote choice and competition across the higher education sector.

My Government will legislate to reform prisons and courts to give individuals a second chance.

Prison Governors will be given unprecedented freedom and they will be able to ensure prisoners receive better education. Old and inefficient prisons will be closed and new institutions built where prisoners can be put more effectively to work.

Action will also be taken to ensure better mental health provision for individuals in the criminal justice system.

My Government will continue to work to bring communities together and strengthen society.

Legislation will be introduced to prevent radicalisation, tackle extremism in all its forms, and promote community integration.

National Citizen Service will be placed on a permanent statutory footing.

My Government will continue to safeguard national security.

My Ministers will invest in Britain’s armed forces, honouring the military covenant and meeting the NATO commitment to spend two per cent of national income on defence.

They will also act to secure the long-term future of Britain’s nuclear deterrent.

My Government will continue to play a leading role in world affairs, using its global presence to tackle climate change and address major international security, economic and humanitarian challenges.

My Government will continue to work to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. It will play a leading role in the campaign against Da’esh and to support international efforts to bring peace to Syria through a lasting political settlement.

Britain’s commitment on international development spending will also be honoured, helping to deliver global stability, support the Sustainable Development Goals and prevent new threats to national security.

Prince Philip and I look forward to welcoming His Excellency the President of Colombia on a State Visit in November.

My Government will continue with legislation to modernise the law governing the use and oversight of investigatory powers by law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies.

Legislation will strengthen the capability and accountability of the police service in England and Wales.
My Government will hold a referendum on membership of the European Union. Proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights.

My Ministers will uphold the sovereignty of Parliament and the primacy of the House of Commons.

My Government will continue to work in cooperation with the devolved administrations to implement the extensive new powers in the Scotland Act and establish a strong and lasting devolution settlement in Wales. My Government will work in Northern Ireland to secure further progress in implementing the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Other measures will be laid before you.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[1st Day]

Mr Speaker: Before I call the mover and seconder of the Address, I can inform the House of the proposed subjects for the remaining days of debate on the Loyal Address: Thursday 19 May—transport and local infrastructure; Monday 23 May—defending public services; Tuesday 24 May—Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad; Wednesday 25 May—education, skills and training; Thursday 26 May—economy and work. I shall first call Mrs Caroline Spelman to move, and then Dr Phillip Lee to second, the Address.

2.35 pm

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

It is an honour to be asked to propose the Loyal Address, especially in Her Majesty’s 90th year. When I was asked to see the Chief Whip, my first thought was: what have I done? The relief in discovering that it was for a good reason was followed almost immediately by the angst of how to do it well. I looked carefully at how my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) tackled it last year. Unfortunately, he cannot be with us today as he has to attend a funeral. We all now know of his unswerving admiration for Hillary Clinton. We have shared with him the anxieties of the primaries, so I put all colleagues on alert that if they are standing next to him when the news of the presidential election comes through, be prepared to provide moral support whichever way it goes, but especially should Hillary be trumped.

First, may I say to my constituents in Meriden how grateful I am to them for electing me to Parliament? I am always proud to represent them. A lot has changed since my first day here 19 years ago. I was often the only woman in meetings. I was one of very few women around the Cabinet table with school-age children. This could prove awkward, such as at the shadow Cabinet meeting interrupted by the news that one of my sons had fallen off a drainpipe at school.

In 1997, only 18% of MPs were women. This has now risen to a total of almost 30%—not yet parity, but we are heading in the right direction. It has also been a great privilege to help mentor newcomers, and in return I have been especially grateful to Baroness Shephard for her mentoring down the years.

The Chamber now looks more like the electorate at large. On all sides! Better decisions are made when those who make them are more diverse. For example, when assessing the priorities for public transport, men rate reliability and cost as the most important factors, but women put something else first—their personal safety. Put the two perspectives together and a better outcome is achieved.
I hope that by now the nearly new Members are beginning to make friends in all parties and discover that they can have allies across the Floor. In fact, the work of Parliament is often enhanced by the friendships that transcend party lines. When I was party chairman, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) asked me to organise a debate with him on the subject of dying well, as we each had a parent with a poor experience of that in hospital. The Whips did not bat an eyelid at that. The only objection was to the title: dying was considered far too controversial, and we had to call it end-of-life care.

I also worked with the right hon. Gentleman on the Modern Slavery Bill, as we both served on the Joint Committee of both Houses. If ever there was an outstanding example of a cross-party approach to tackling a terrible injustice, this is it. The Home Secretary deserves the credit for securing a piece of landmark legislation, which is a world first in this area. The legal expertise of Baroness Butler-Sloss forced us all to think very hard how to get this absolutely right, and I felt that it was my red-letter day when the noble Lady uttered these magic words to me: “I think the right hon. Lady has a point.”

I have been in a cross-party prayer fellowship all the time I have been here. It consists of two Conservative MPs, two Labour MPs, one Liberal MP and one Democratic Unionist MP. We could not have done that better by using proportional representation if we had tried. We and our families met up in each other’s constituencies, and my children were initially perplexed by the fraternisation until I explained that it was like when your friend supports Aston Villa and you support Liverpool. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) and I may not see eye to eye on Europe, but his rich baritone and my alto voice have produced delightful harmony.

I welcome the clear references in the Gracious Speech to the life chances agenda, and I am pleased that this is to be a key theme in the year ahead. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) pioneered this approach, and the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has the experience and the ability to drive it forward. My constituency has a council estate of nearly 40,000 people, and I have seen how the life chances of my constituents have improved through the regeneration of housing and schools by Solihull Council. When I took a Minister on a visit there recently, two tenants emerged from one of our 37 refurbished tower blocks to express their delight that their energy bills had halved as a result of the new energy-saving features. The Minister turned to me and asked, “How much did you pay them to say that, Caroline?”

Buildings can be regenerated but it is the life chances of the human beings within them that really make the difference, so I am delighted that so many of our young people are getting apprenticeships as engineers, including many young women, in the great tradition of those women who built the Spitfires in the last world war. All of this is made possible by the renaissance of manufacturing and the economic recovery that we have seen.

Parts of my constituency are rural, and despite being at the very centre of England, we have mobile and broadband not spots, so I am glad to hear that a renewed effort is being made to address the digital divide. With my Church Estates Commissioner’s hat on, may I remind the Government of the offer of church spires and towers to help to crack this problem? They may bring us closer to God, but a proper signal can feel like heaven on earth to those who have had none.

Prison reform is well overdue. We know that reoffending can be dramatically cut with the right kind of help. The Justice Secretary and the Education Secretary know how important it is to improve the life chances of school children, as far too many prison inmates are unable to read and write. I am glad that the Justice Secretary is now using his reforming zeal to give prisoners a better chance to turn their lives around. I have witnessed at first hand how this can be achieved. I helped to set up a charity called Welcome to tackle drug and alcohol abuse and to get people free of addiction and into work. We started with just one employee in a community hall, now we employ more than 20 and we do the triage for the NHS in our borough of 200,000 people. Some of the best advocates are our volunteers who have achieved this themselves and are role models for others.

No party has a monopoly on compassion, and Members on both sides of the House have sought to help the vulnerable. On entering politics, it was my personal resolution to speak for those who were unable to speak for themselves. Few people in our country are more vulnerable than a child leaving care. The state has not often proved to be a great parent, and knowing how hard it is to be a parent, we should not be surprised. But I take my hat off in particular to the parents who adopt. We need more parents to come forward to foster and adopt, so I welcome the Government’s intention to speed up adoption—indeed, this was the objective of my private Member’s Bill on the subject—but children can still be left too long in care and the damage can be irreparable. Let us improve the follow-up care and keep it going until a young adult is fully fledged. Eighteen may be the notional age of adulthood, but, in my experience, it takes a good few more years of parental support before young adults’ wings can take life’s turbulence.

New measures are clearly needed to prevent sections of society feeling alienated, but I appeal to the Government not to take a hammer to crack a nut. Good role models and moderate voices are what are needed, and I have high expectations of the new Mayor of London, who is not only an excellent cricketer, as the Lords and Commons cricket team will testify, but uniquely well placed to lead. Good luck, Sadiq—no pressure!

Let me return to my opening theme of making friends across the House. Over the years, there have been a good few Members whom I have sought to encourage after they had suffered setbacks in their parliamentary careers. My key piece of advice has been, “Don’t give up! Get stuck back in and fight for the causes you know and care about, and this House will ultimately respect you for it.” May I therefore say a heartfelt thank you for the way the House has helped me rediscover the fulfilment
of being an elected Member of this mother of all Parliaments. As long as you have the chance to make a difference, there is no such thing as having had your day. We are elected to change things for the better and to take up the issues that confront us, so seize the day! I commend the motion to the House.

2.46 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): It is a privilege to second the Loyal Address, and I am honoured to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) this afternoon. This is not the first time I have done so. Among her many achievements, one of her proudest must be that she is captain of the parliamentary ski team, of which I am a junior member. In that role she has responsibility for leading a team of large egos and hidden talent, some with little sense of balance or direction, navigating up peaks and down slippery slopes. I cannot imagine where she gained the experience, but such skills make her an extremely valuable member of this Chamber and of her party.

I was surprised to have been given the privilege of seconding the Loyal Address this afternoon. I am not, for example, the son of a bus driver, although my father did once drive a milk float in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker). Just as an aside, why is it always the case that we have to wait so long for these sons of bus drivers, and then two come along at once?

It might be my education. I am, like the Leader of the Opposition, an ex-grammar school boy and like him, I gather, I rather screwed up my A-levels, so perhaps there is hope for me yet. Or it might be my extensive experience of PR before entering politics. As the House knows, I am a practising doctor. Unfortunately, in a medical context, PR does not stand for public relations, but is shorthand for the type of examination that involves putting on rubber gloves, applying gel and asking a man to cough. May I give my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a little advice? If, in the future, he finds himself in that position, may I suggest you get complicated with me!

Many of my predecessors in this role have had a reputation for humour, so I think that it was courageous of the PM to ask a doctor to second the Loyal Address. As the House can already tell, medical humour is a famously acquired taste, and it would be all too easy to share some of the stories of which every doctor has an infinite supply—many may not be appropriate for this place and its refined audience. However, I can perhaps report on the lady who complained of, as she put it, a "vaginal secret". I resisted the temptation to ask whether her erotic symptoms were erratic in nature. Or the elderly man who said that his secret for looking so healthy was to do Kama Sutra exercises every morning, only to be corrected by his wife: "Gareth, I think you mean Tai Chi!" If colleagues do not think that I deliver this speech very well today, just be grateful that we are not holding this debate at the weekend, when I understand from some that doctors do not perform as well.

I had hoped that my medical background would be an advantage in politics, but I have been disappointed. My first disappointment came when I stood for election as the Conservative party’s candidate in Blaenau Gwent. I am not sure that the current hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) is with us today, but I am sure he would agree that sporting a blue rosette outside the Tredegar Kwik Save takes a certain type of character: mostly delusional, and perhaps even masochistic. In fact, the president of my constituency association, Mr Rob Stanton, was elected to Wokingham Borough Council with more votes than I received at that election. However, I was able to comfort myself with the fact that my modest 816 votes nevertheless represented the biggest swing to the Conservative party of any candidate in Wales that night. In retrospect, I should have taken more note of the lady in Abertillery market who, when I asked her why she supported Labour, replied, "Don’t you get complicated with me!"

Delivering this speech is, of course, really an honour for the constituency of Bracknell, which I am privileged to represent. It is a particular honour in this year of Her Majesty’s 90th birthday. The constituency has long-standing royal links. It is proud to host the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, which celebrated its bicentenary in 2012 and has trained successive generations of British, Commonwealth and international officers serving in Her Majesty’s Army and elsewhere around the world. My constituents also enjoy access to the extensive woodland of Swinley Forest, which is wonderfully maintained by the Crown Estate. With its vibrant economy and town centre regeneration, the Bracknell constituency has a very bright future.

This is the 63rd Gracious Speech that Her Majesty has given since her accession to the throne. On this occasion, it is apt to look back to Her Majesty’s first Gracious Speech and at the changes that there have been since. The preservation of peace was the first emphasis in 1952. Our country was still recovering from war. The grandfather of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) was Prime Minister. The nationalisation of iron and steel was the subject of heated debate. Slums had to be cleared and people housed. This led to the creation of new towns, of which Bracknell was one. Communicable diseases such as tuberculosis challenged our young health service. Abroad, closer unions were foreseen to cement the ties on which peace depended: with the United States of America, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, with the Commonwealth and with a recovering Europe.

The vision of the post-war political generation was a big vision: of a country that would never again suffer the insecurity and hardship experienced by those who had to pick up arms and fight for our existence; of every person being able to get a chance in life—of health, education and employment; and of a society that is fair, just and free, in which freedoms are earned because we value our country, our environment, our world, and in which rights are balanced by responsibilities, for each other and for ourselves; and, most importantly, to prepare for the future. Variations of this vision have guided successive Governments ever since, with varying degrees of success.

The generation Her Majesty addressed in 1952 had fought for that vision, displaying a deep consciousness throughout our nation that individual lives are fleeting: that we must take care of the world we inherit—conserve it—so that we pass something better to our children;
that we achieve more by coming together with our neighbours, with our friends and with our former enemies by respecting our riches, and each other; and that humanity is the vital bond without which our society, globally and nationally, our communities and our families will disintegrate.

On a personal level, I am humbled by the experiences of that wartime generation. My grandfather was under fire at the age of 20, in the tail end of a Halifax bomber. I also recall caring for an 89-year-old Polish patient who was short of breath and experiencing angina. He had taken the time to put on a tie and a suit adorned with military ribbons, and he apologised for taking up my time. I asked him about his military experience. He told me that his village in eastern Poland had been overrun by the Soviets in 1939. He was deported to a Siberian work camp and, in his own words, wore the same socks for two years. He was handed over to the British in 1942 in Baghdad, and fought with Montgomery’s 8th Army across north Africa and up the spine of Italy via Monte Cassino. When reflecting on his heroic story, I humbly ask whether my generation would display the same values, the same stoicism, the same modesty, the same courage, and the same respect for others, and I recall his loyalty to his adopted country.

The closest I have come to fighting has been as a doctor battling ageing, obesity and the challenges of cultural dislocation. In the course of Her Majesty’s reign, life expectancy has increased by a decade. The percentage of people aged over 85 has grown by a factor of five. The world’s population has virtually trebled, and our own has gone up by a third. The proportion of our population of foreign birth has more than trebled, albeit from a low base. It is clear that we must not only treat the symptoms of the challenges that come with such marked change, but strive to cure their causes. That is why this Government’s commitment to helping to improve the life chances of those who have the misfortune to be born or raised in circumstances over which they have no control is admirable and right.

The generation Her Majesty addresses today must rediscover the values of the past to face an ever-accelerating pace of change. It is a world that is more connected and more conscious of its differences, but also more conscious of what we have in common than ever before. This time, we have the opportunity to rediscover those values peacefully, and the important legislation outlined in this Gracious Speech will help us to do so. The challenge of overcoming extremism without compromising our humanity is one that deserves the support of the whole House. My right hon. and good Friend the Home Secretary knows that dealing with our society’s failure to integrate some communities will be integral.

The space industry received the attention it deserves as one of Britain’s most successful industries with a power to inspire that is unmatched. I am sure that all members of the previous Parliament recall that I mentioned the UK space industry in my maiden speech in 2010. As British astronaut Tim Peake was a graduate of Sandhurst, I am shamelessly going to claim him as having been educated in my constituency. As such, I am concerned for his welfare. Tim is due back from the international space station just before the EU referendum vote, but if he is slightly delayed, and the country votes to leave in June, he need not worry about getting home, since the European Space Agency sits outside the European Union. Seriously, though, the Government’s support of the space industry will help to secure Britain as a globally recognised centre for high technology, whether we are inside or outside the European Union.

Finally, some hon. Members will know that I have kept my own counsel on June’s big European event, but the time is fast approaching when I feel I should make my position clear, if only to deal with the alarming possibility that as time moves on, I and other hon. Members who have taken a similar approach will have to deal with the advances of two charming men, one with blond hair and one with spectacles, approaching us in the Members’ Lobby to ask when we are coming out. I can see no good reason why we should exit—at least not before the semi-finals, and preferably not after the pain of extra time and a penalty shoot-out.

Keeping up with change is a tough enough job for any Government. Conservative Governments do not just want to keep up; they want to do better. That is why I am not only privileged to represent the good people of the Bracknell constituency, but proud to second this motion on the Gracious Speech.

3.1 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am pleased that we have dispensed with the Outlawries Bill, which will ensure that we have civility and freedom of speech in this Chamber. I intend to adhere to the civility part of it; it is up to others to decide on the freedom of speech.

July will mark the centenary of the battle of the Somme, an episode of needless carnage and horror. This week marked the centenary of the Sykes-Picot agreement, in which Britain and France divided up the Ottoman empire into spheres of influence, arbitrarily establishing borders that have been the cause of many conflicts ever since. Those two events should remind us in this House of two things: first, the decisions that we take have consequences, and secondly, it is our armed forces that face the consequences of failed foreign and military policy. Our duty to our armed forces is to avoid the political mistakes that lead to their being sent unnecessarily into harm’s way. As the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) pointed out, the effects of war go on for the whole lifetime of those who take part in it.

By tradition, at the beginning of each parliamentary Session, we commemorate the Members of the House we have lost in the last year. In October, we lost Michael Meacher. He was, as all who met him knew, a decent, hard-working, passionate and profound man. He represented his constituency with diligence and distinction for 45 years. He was a brilliant Environment Minister, a lifelong campaigner against injustice and poverty, and a brilliant champion of the rights of this House and of Parliament. We remember Michael for all those things.

Harry Harpham sadly had only a few months to serve this House. He represented his constituency and the concerns of the steel industry in Sheffield with incredible diligence. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), who now represents the constituency, told me at his passing:

“We have admired the bravery and courage he showed in his life, which was formed during the miners’ strike and carried him forward for the rest of his life.”
Harry and Michael were incredibly decent and honourable men who were absolutely dedicated to serving their communities and standing up for strong socialist principles. We commemorate them both.

I congratulate the mover and seconder of the Queen’s Speech motion. It is a job I have never had to do myself—it is one of those powers of patronage. First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) on her excellent speech, which I attribute to the excellent training she received early in her career. It is possible that many members of her own party are unaware that sister Spelman, or comrade Spelman, was, like me, a full-time union official before entering Parliament. While industrial strife raged across the country during the early 1980s—I was part of it—[HON. MEMBERS: “Was?”] They are just too fast, Mr Speaker. While that was happening, the right hon. Lady was travelling the whole country defending sugar beet workers from disreputable and exploitative bosses. At least, that is what I think the National Farmers Union was doing at that time. Alas, time changes things, and she and I now sing from a slightly different hymn sheet.

Talking of which, I understand that the right hon. Lady has been a stalwart of the parliamentary choir for sing from a slightly different hymn sheet. That time. Alas, time changes things, and she and I now sing from a slightly different hymn sheet.

The right hon. Lady has an excellent reputation for her outstanding work in international development, both in opposition and then in government. She steered her party—some might ungraciously say kicking and screaming—into delivering the pledge that 0.7% of our GDP would be spent on international aid. I pay a huge tribute to her for the way in which she championed the rights of women and young girls in the developing world. She stood up for their needs and their rights and ensured that our aid budget, correctly, went disproportionately to help them, and I thank her for that.

I think that underneath it all, the right hon. Lady is a bit of a closet radical, actually—so we will talk later. After some research, I can exclusively reveal to the House the roots of her radicalism. Her constituency includes the town of Dorridge, and the waters of Dorridge are very important. In the early 18th century—long before she was elected, I should add—her constituency was a nest of rebellion and sedition, led by a local landowner, George Frederick Muntz. A refugee, Muntz was one of the founders of the Birmingham Political Union, an organisation that was pivotal in the introduction of the 1832 Reform Act. The union later became part of the Chartist movement, to which we trace the origins of socialism in this country and the Labour party. Naturally, I hugely admire the Birmingham Political Union for what it did.

A member of the parliamentary choir, the right hon. Member for Meriden was in fine voice today, and I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking her for her speech.

I turn to the seconder of the Loyal Address, the hon. Member for Bracknell. Before joining the House, he worked as a doctor. Today, he has lanced the myth that doctors are bad communicators. In his maiden speech, he said: “I am often asked why I... moved away from being a doctor to being a Member of Parliament. To my mind, people who come in here should want to make this country a better place.”—[Official Report, 16 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 913.]

The hon. Gentleman and I come from absolutely opposite sides of the political spectrum, but we are both sincere in sharing the same goal: to make our country a better place for those who live here.

Researching the hon. Gentleman’s career, I thought I had uncovered yet more evidence of the deep fractures that exist within the Government today. I was informed that he was a leading member of an organisation known as the Grumblers. However, we have been into this in some detail, and further research indicated that this was not another group of malcontents on the Government Back Benches—that is already full—but a cricket club of which he would have us believe he is a leading light. I did not want to leave any of that research undone, so I approached the club to get a sense of the hon. Gentleman’s character before making today’s speech. [Laughter.] Yes, it’s definitely coming.

The House will be eternally grateful for the words of Mr Anton Joiner, the chairman of the Old Grumblers cricket club, for his insightful and helpful response to my request. If I may quote from Mr Joiner’s letter, the House will be all the better informed. He wrote:

“Dear Sir,

We are glad you have established contact with our team, as we are desperately seeking recovery of several seasons’ overdue match fees by our hon. Friend. Please communicate our willingness to waive penalty interest in return for prompt payment.”

The letter goes on:

“In an undistinguished and tragically all too long career as a top order batsman, the good doctor managed an average of just 11.2 runs with the bat. His efforts with the ball yielded a solitary wicket—that of a French farmer’s wife during a tour match in Brittany in 2008.

The hon. Gentleman’s generosity knew no bounds:

“As a Doctor, Mr Lee advised on numerous sporting injuries to club players. The misdiagnosis of many led to a string of unnecessary early retirements and an acute player availability crisis, from which the team has only recently recovered.

As Captain of the Old Grumblers Cricket Club, I rarely had to handle as obstinate and disruptive a character as the Doctor, who stubbornly refused to stand in any conventional field placement and very openly demonstrated a disdain for team sport, command structures... Presumably this led him to the logical career choice of Tory backbencher.”

The letter concludes:

“Please pass on my regards... and the attached invoice.”

I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman is a good sport as I understand that he is an equally distinguished rugby player, but those stories were beyond my research capabilities and must be saved for another occasion. I thank him for his more acceptable exploits in the House today.

The Opposition will judge the Government’s legislative programme against three tests. Will it deliver a more equal society, an economy that works for everyone and a society in which there is opportunity for all? Sadly, it appears that many proposals in the Queen’s Speech militate against those aims, as have the proposals in previous years. Still this Government do not seem to understand that cuts have consequences. When they cut adult social care, it has an impact on national health service accident and emergency departments. When they saddle young people with more debt, it impedes their
ability to buy a home or start a family. When they fail to build housing and cap housing benefit, homelessness and the number of families in temporary accommodation increase. When they slash local authorities’ budgets, leisure centres, libraries and children’s centres close. When they close fire stations and cut firefighters’ jobs, response times increase and more people are in danger of dying in fires.

This austerity is a political choice, not an economic necessity. It is a wrong choice for our country, made by a Government with the wrong priorities. Women have been hit hardest by the cuts. More than 80% of cuts fall disproportionately on women. As the Women’s Budget Group has pointed out, all the cuts mean that opportunities for women are systematically reduced and diminished in our society. The Government are failing to deliver an economy that meets the needs and aspirations of the people who sent us here—a Government who are consistently failing to meet their own economic targets. They have failed on the deficit, failed on the debt, failed on productivity and failed to rebalance the economy.

Once again, the northern powerhouse was announced if only the rhetoric matched the reality. In March we discovered that the northern powerhouse has 97% of its senior staff based in London—a northern powerhouse outsourced to the capital. For all the Chancellor’s rhetoric, there has been systematic under-investment in the north, and only 1% of projects in the Government’s infrastructure pipeline are currently in construction in the north-east.

Much could be said in a similar vein about housing. The Government claim to aspire to build 1 million new homes, but housebuilding has sunk to its lowest level since the 1920s. So out of touch are those on the Government Benches that they think that £450,000 is what people can afford for a starter home. The announcement again today about Britain’s digital infrastructure is welcome. Perhaps this time it will become a reality—I hope it does. Perhaps the Chancellor—sadly, he is not here today—is a convert to our fiscal rule. It is a rational rule, backed by leading economists, which allows for borrowing on capital spending.

I point out to the Prime Minister that whether on the northern powerhouse, building homes or investing in digital infrastructure, simply saying things does not make them happen. It takes commitment to fund them. This Government are failing to deliver even on their own proposals, although often that is for the better. The Prime Minister said two weeks ago:

“We are going to have academies for all, and it will be in the Queen’s Speech”.—[Official Report, 27 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1423.]

Just a fortnight later, there is no sign of that. Parents, governors, pupils, teachers and headteachers will be relieved to get final confirmation today that the wrong-headed proposals to impose forced academisation have finally been dumped.

The Government have been forced to back down on a number of issues in recent months: on tax credits, the tampon tax, freedom of information, Sunday trading, and aspects of the Trade Union Bill and the Housing and Planning Act 2016. To call that “disarray” would be generous, and that is without discussing the resultant black hole in the Government’s finances.

Perhaps the most worrying proposal of all is the decision to try to redefine poverty and deprivation. Apparently, it is all about instability, addiction and debt—all things that can be blamed on individuals, about whom Governments like to moralise. Well, no! It is about 1 million people in our country using food banks, record levels of in-work poverty and the fact that absolute child poverty, after housing costs, is up by half a million. Poverty is up in disabled households on the same basis. Homelessness has gone up every year since the Prime Minister took office, and 100,000 children spent last Christmas in temporary, insecure accommodation. The causes of that are cuts to welfare benefits, cuts to employment and support allowance, the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, wages being too low, insecure jobs, and housing—whether to rent or to buy—being too expensive. We will not tackle poverty by moving the goalposts. Poverty and inequality are collective failures of our society as a whole, not individual failures.

On current form, much of what Her Majesty announced today will not require her signature. I very much hope that the Government’s proposals announced today to consign into ever deeper debt those seeking to learn will be rejected.

I hope there will be a cross-party consensus on one element of the Government’s proposals—[Interruption.] The hon. Member of all people should understand what I am about to say. I am talking about the proposal to repeal the Human Rights Act, which was introduced at the very start of the Labour Government. It brought the European convention on human rights into British law, thus empowering British citizens and giving rights to everybody in our society. We will defend our Human Rights Act as we defend the human rights of everyone in this country, and indeed all those who benefit from the European convention on human rights.

I understand—this is quite bizarre—that the Home Secretary is the driving force behind tearing up the Human Rights Act and leaving the convention, which is strange because she has very strong European credentials. What it shows is this: whether we are in or out of the EU, the main obstacle holding back the people of this country is not the EU, but the Conservative Government—a Conservative Government who are displaying a very worrying authoritarian streak.

The primacy of the House of Commons is not in doubt. We are committed to replacing the House of Lords with a democratic Chamber, but we will scrutinise sceptically any proposals that seek to weaken the ability to hold the Government to account, as the other place rightly does. Democracy requires accountability for the decisions that are made.

The national health service is in record deficit, yet there is no legislation in the Queen’s Speech to improve it. Perhaps the Prime Minister can belatedly adopt the central medical principle of first doing no harm. Unfortunately, pending legislation will affect the NHS—the decision last year to cut nurses’ bursaries. Will the Prime Minister confirm that that decision will be put to the House and voted on in this Chamber? It is opposed by all the unions involved in the NHS and the royal colleges representing nurses and midwives.

The move to dissuade people from taking up nursing is all the more bizarre coming as it does at a time when the Government are planning to train nurses to take on more responsibilities from doctors.
We welcome the Government’s proposals to support driverless cars in our society, but can they address a Secretary of State for Health who appears to be asleep at the wheel in control of the NHS?

With regard to the sugar tax, we have made it clear previously that we will look favourably on proposals to tackle childhood obesity.

We welcome the Government’s U-turn on forced academisation.

Several hon. Members rose—

Jeremy Corbyn: I will continue my speech, if I may, Mr Speaker.

As with schools, we would like to see all Ministers being good or even outstanding, but they need the freedom to listen to the public and the people who understand services best, so we look forward to scrutinising the surviving proposals in the Government’s education Bill to ensure that they are better thought through. Just as we have opposed the increase in unqualified teachers in our classrooms, we hope that the Government will get to grips with the £800 million being spent annually on supply teachers because of the recruitment and retention crisis in schools. With school budgets scheduled—

[Interruption.] We just agreed to behave with civility in this Chamber. Some Government Members have very short memories. [Interruption.]

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, am I not right in thinking that it is a customary courtesy in this House for people, though they do not have to, to give way in speeches that last over 20 minutes?

Mr Speaker: The essence of the hon. Gentleman’s point was encapsulated in that first sentence: customary, but it is not required. There is no obligation. Members may want the right hon. Gentleman to give way, but he is not obliged to do so. I gently say to the hon. Members for Winchester (Steve Brine) and for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) that they can have a go, but if the right hon. Gentleman does not want to give way they will not advance their cause by shouting. That, in itself, is uncivil, of which the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is never guilty.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

School budgets are scheduled to receive their biggest real-terms cut since the 1970s. Education is actually quite important in our society. The Government can therefore ill afford to be spending so much on supply teachers. We have to move away from agency Britain. We will look at the proposals for a national funding formula that would encourage the Government to look, for example, at the school meals and breakfast policies that have been introduced in Labour Wales, which help young people in Wales.

We welcome moves to speed up adoption. That is in the interests of both children and those families committed to adoption, but the priority has to always be the welfare and safety of the child. But at a time when social services and children’s services are being slashed, we have to ask whether the funding will match that desire. We should also put on record—I am sure all of us can agree on this—our thanks to all those families who foster, adopt and give children the very best lives they possibly can. They are heroes in our society.

Students today are in more debt than ever. I make it clear to the Prime Minister that he will not get any support from the Labour Benches on raising tuition fees. The Government are penalising students, announcing the abolition of maintenance grants last year and now announcing that fees will be raised even further. This is a tax on learning—as the Chancellor of the Exchequer called it in 2003—from a Government that cut taxes on capital gains. What message does that send about the economy they want to create? It is that wealth generates more wealth with minimal tax—that and effort and hard work land you in a lifetime of debt, with no support while you make that effort. What an insult to the aspirations of young people wanting an education. We are deeply concerned too about the implications of a free market, free-for-all in higher education.

The Government have committed to more apprenticeships. We welcome that if it means more high quality apprenticeships and if it inspires young women to become engineers and young men to become carers. Apprenticeships give opportunities to every young person in our society. But they should not be seen by any employer as a means of circumventing paying a decent wage, while offering little training. We all hear too many cases of that.

We will scrutinise carefully proposals to give prison governors more freedom. It seems the policies of this Government have been to give greater freedoms to prisoners. That is the consequence of overcrowding prisons and cutting one third of dedicated prison officer positions. We welcome proposals to give greater time for education and reform and to reduce reoffending rates. When I was a member of the Justice Committee, I visited young offender institutions in Denmark and Norway. Their approach works. [Interruption.] The prison crisis is one that does not require laughter to solve its problems. The approach adopted in those two Scandinavian countries requires more funding and more staff, but it has a very good effect on reoffending rates.

There is, equally, an urgent need to invest in the care of prisoners suffering from mental health conditions. The alarming rise in the number of prison suicides in recent years means that two prisoners every week are taking their own lives, which is a truly horrifying statistic but only part of the disarray in our prisons. Last year, emergency services were called out 26,600 times, or every 20 minutes on average, to incidents in UK prisons. The tide of violent attacks in prisons is rising and has to be addressed. That is the House’s responsibility.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con) rose—

Jeremy Corbyn: No.

Many more of our public services are under threat. The Land Registry is threatened with privatisation—a move considered and then rejected in the last two Parliaments. Those Governments listened to the concerns of public and expert opinion. I hope and trust that this Government will consult and come to the same conclusion and that, rather than selling off the family silver, they will retain the Land Registry in public ownership and administration.
We are very clear that the BBC is a valued national institution, but its success is anathema to this ideological Government. Labour will continue to stand up for the licence fee payer and will fight any further Government attacks on the BBC and its independence. Whether it is the NHS, good and outstanding schools, the east coast main line in public operation or the BBC, the Government just cannot stand the threat of a good example of popular, successful public services. We will stand up for them against the Government.

The Opposition have long highlighted the injustice of the unequal funding allocations to local authorities. I hope that a local government finance Bill will provide an opportunity to address the disgraceful situation in which the poorest areas, mainly in the inner cities of this country, suffer by far the greatest cuts to expenditure. The cuts imposed on local authorities have had a devastating impact on services for both young and old. Just this week, despite the protestations of some local residents, Oxfordshire Council, the Prime Minister’s favourite county council, announced that it was closing half of its children’s centres. In the past five years, £4.5 billion has been cut from the adult social care budget, which has taken away dignity from elderly and disabled people. Again, the effects of those massive cuts in the adult social care budget fall disproportionately on women in our society.

We will scrutinise very carefully the devolution of business rates, which, if not handled correctly, has the potential to exacerbate inequalities between areas of this country. We have a deeply unbalanced economy, and we will oppose plans that widen regional inequalities, rather than narrow them.

On a positive note, we wholeheartedly welcome moves to devolve powers to re-regulate bus services, and we will look to expand those provisions more widely. Whole areas of the country, particularly in rural Britain, have no bus services at all, and they should be provided with them, particularly where people do not have access to their own cars.

We are very sceptical about competition in the water industry, which actually goes against the trend in much of the rest of Europe, which is of re-municipalising water and giving it back to communities—a Government committed to devolution might consider that, but this Government want competition. Perhaps we can have competition in reservoirs, pumping stations and mains pipes. We could even have three standpipes on every corner. Imagine the vision of Tory Britain: one for Evian, one for Perrier and one for Malvern water.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No, I will not give way. We have no objection—

Several hon. Members rose—

Jeremy Corbyn: Mr Speaker—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am well aware that there are Members who want to intervene, and it is perfectly reasonable of them to want to intervene. Equally, there is no obligation on the Leader of the Opposition to give way. [Interruption.] Order. Somebody mutters from a sedentary position, “Too long.” The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion; I am telling the House what the factual position is, however uncomfortable, which is that the right hon. Gentleman is in order. What is not in order is for Members to shout and barrack, in total violation of what has been set out at the start of our proceedings. I urge Members who may be irritated to behave with dignity.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No, I am not going to give way.

We have no objection to reviewing the franchise with regard to overseas citizens, but I hope the Government will take this point seriously and will be minded not only to look at those who have lived abroad for several decades, but to look at 16 and 17-year-olds in this country—old enough to marry, old enough to work, old enough to join the Army and rightly allowed to vote in the Scottish referendum, but not able to vote in our elections. There is something perverse in a Government enfranchising thousands of people who have not lived in Britain for years when they are disfranchising hundreds of thousands of British residents through their individual voter registration plan. That is why, as part of the EU referendum campaign, many of us are spending a lot of time encouraging young people to ensure that they are registered to vote. It is their future that is at stake.

Everyone in this House understands the risks posed by terrorism. This city, London, has experienced it before, as have other cities here and around the world. We will of course support strong measures to give the police and security services the resources they need, but we will also support checks and balances to ensure that powers are used appropriately. We would welcome any proposals from the Government to reform the Prevent strategy and instead to emphasise the value of community-led work to prevent young people from being drawn into extremism in any form.

In foreign policy, we must put our promotion of human rights at the centre. We cannot continue to turn a blind eye and, worse, sell arms to those countries that abuse human rights either within or beyond their borders. I welcome the forthcoming visit of President Santos of Colombia and I look forward to meeting him to discuss human rights in what is hopefully on its way to becoming a post-conflict society.

The Government’s legislative programme spoke of “humanitarian challenges”. We are grateful to Lord Dubs for taking on the challenge of making the Government more humanitarian. Just a few weeks previously, this Prime Minister was referring to refugees fleeing persecution as “a bunch of migrants” and “a swarm”. I have to say this: those words were wrong. I hope the Prime Minister will think again about them and recognise, as everyone should, that refugees are simply human beings, just like any of us in this Chamber, who are trying to survive in a very dangerous and very cruel world. We need to solve their problems with humanity, not with that kind of language.
All parts of the House will have been heartened by the increased turnout in the elections for police and crime commissioners—particularly welcome in Cheshire, Gwent, Humberside and Leicestershire—and we welcome any moves that will give them the powers to improve accountability for their communities. Our police forces mostly do an excellent job, but the recent Hillsborough inquest and the results of it showed that they must never be above scrutiny, to ensure that they do their jobs properly.

We Opposition Members know that decent public services are necessary for a good society, but also that they depend on tax revenues. We welcome any measures designed properly to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, but this Government’s record on this subject is one of continuous failure. Just a month ago, the Prime Minister welcomed here EU proposals on country-by-country tax transparency, but on 26 April Conservative MEPs yet again voted against these same proposals. Did they not get the memo from the Prime Minister? That same Prime Minister continues to allow UK tax havens not to issue public registers of beneficial ownership and he opposes wholesale the introduction of beneficial ownership registers for offshore trusts. People expect companies that trade in this country and people who live in this country to pay their tax in this country—it funds our public services. Aggressive tax avoidance and tax evasion are an attack on our NHS, on our schools, on care for elderly and disabled people and on our social security system that prevents poverty, homelessness and destitution.

Mr Speaker, if you want to deliver a more equal society, an economy that works for everyone and a society in which there is opportunity for all, it takes an active Government, not the driverless car heading in the wrong direction that we have with the present Government.

Mr Speaker: Government Back Benchers should calm themselves; they have the moment they have been waiting for. I call the Prime Minister.

3.41 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think we have just witnessed a parliamentary record of a 41-minute speech without a single intervention. I have been taking part in debates on the Queen’s Speech for the last 10 years and I have never seen a Minister or Opposition leader refuse to take them. Was there really no question from any Labour MP? Did Scottish National party Members have anything to say? I know that SNP Members have other things on their minds—actually, it is mostly the same thing on their minds—but there was a not a single question from them.

This Queen’s Speech builds on strong foundations—the deficit cut by almost two thirds as a share of GDP; the highest employment rate in our record; and our long-term economic plan means our economy is over 13% bigger than at the start of 2010. We have 900,000 more businesses; 764,000 fewer workless households; and poverty at its lowest rate in three decades. I am the first to say, however, that there is far more to be done to entrench our strong economic performance. We want more exports; we want higher productivity; we need better infrastructure. That is why one of the key measures in this Queen’s Speech is for the first time a universal service obligation to deliver broadband to every home and every business in our country. With this Government, economic security always comes first.

This Queen’s Speech uses the strong economic foundations to make a series of bold choices that will deliver opportunity for all at every stage of life. For children, we make the choice to rebalance the system in favour of faster adoption, so more children get a loving and stable home. For care leavers, we choose to put them first for training and jobs so that the most disadvantaged get a better chance to make a good life for themselves.

Mark Spencer: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way a lot, but I am going to make some progress first. I shall deal with the proposers and seconders, and then I will be happy to give way a lot. I predict at least 500% more than my principal opponent.

For all our young people, we offer the chance to do National Citizen Service. For school leavers, we make the choice to extend educational opportunity and allow the creation of new universities. For low-income families, we choose to offer new support to build up their savings through the first ever help to save scheme. For those who want to get on the housing ladder, we are choosing to build a million new homes. We choose to deliver, too, the biggest reform of our prisons system for a century, knocking down the outdated prisons and radically reforming education and rehabilitation of offenders. This is a Queen’s Speech that combines economic security with extending life chances for all. It is the Queen’s Speech of a progressive, one nation Conservative Government.

Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech was brilliantly proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman). Her speech was powerful, it was compassionate, and it included, I thought, some excellent advice. As the Leader of the Opposition said, she has a background in food and farming, and a union background too: she was in charge of sugar beet for the National Farmers Union, and was a consultant on food and biotechnology. So, Mr Speaker, you can imagine the shock among those in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when, in 2010, they began to get Secretaries of State for agriculture who actually knew what they were talking about. My right hon. Friend stripped away unnecessary burdens and bureaucracy for farmers, she produced the first natural environment White Paper for 25 years, and she secured not one but two separate United Nations agreements, taking huge steps forward to protect our environment.

My right hon. Friend referred to her work as Church Estates Commissioner, and everyone in the House knows that she is a deeply committed Christian. That would have come in handy during her time at DEFRA, when she had to deal with floods, droughts, food shortages, and even disease—indeed, everything short of a plague of locusts, which, of course, I will be predicting in my next speech on Europe.

While chairing the Conservative party, my right hon. Friend did a massive amount to encourage more women to stand for Parliament. I am the first to say that there is still more to be done, but the change on the Benches
around me is a significant tribute to her efforts. She talked about her charity work, and it seems as though, in pursuit of such causes, she is prepared to do almost anything with almost anybody. During her time in the House she has sung the “Flower Duet” with Sarah Teather, performed “The Vagina Monologues” with Jerry Hall, and, more recently, launched Environmentalists for Europe with Stanley Johnson; I now need to set her to work on other members of the family. Her speech was in the finest traditions of the House.

The Gracious Speech was brilliantly seconded by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee). He was witty, self-deprecating and thoughtful. Given his description of his medical examinations, and, indeed, his explanation of the true nature of PR, I will shortly be recommending him for a role in the Whips Office, where he could presumably carry out a number of important pieces of work.

As my hon. Friend said, he began his political life canvassing in Beaconsfield, where he was also the local GP. I am sure that he will welcome our record spending on health, and the progress that we are making towards a seven-day NHS. I am also sure that the quality of the speeches that he makes on Sundays is just as good as the quality of the one that we heard today. We look forward to hearing more.

Every time my hon. Friend goes canvassing, he is besieged not by political issues but by the medical problems of his patients and constituents, this bringing a whole new meaning to the concept of the MP’s surgery. He is also, I understand, a romantic supporter of lost causes. He told us in his speech about standing in Michael Foot’s old seat of Blaenau Gwent, and he told us that he got 816 votes. He did not point out that, at the time, he had 1,500 patients, which means that it was not that good a result! I am told that the seat is now a Plaid Cymru marginal, so things have changed.

I am told that my hon. Friend is an ardent fan of Queens Park Rangers, but we will not say too much about that, as at least one of my teams is joining him in the championship next season. He is also a passionate member of the England Supporters Club. He travelled with the England team to Japan in 2002, to Portugal in 2004, and to Germany in 2006. Of course, England lost on all those occasions. The House will be pleased to hear that we will be exercising our firm border controls, and not letting him anywhere near France this summer.

My hon. Friend and I have both benefited from your decision, Mr Speaker, to establish a nursery on the parliamentary estate. We thank you for that, as do our daughters, Florence and Tabitha. My hon. Friend has made his own contribution to the House—to which he referred—not least in his role as Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Space Committee. He told us about his passion for the issue, and, indeed, for Tim Peake, whom we all wish well. The modern transport Bill, which was announced in today’s Gracious Speech, will bring about something for which he has long campaigned: the first British spaceport, which gives the opportunity for people to be sent into orbit for prolonged periods, thousands of miles away from this place. We may have different candidates who we think should qualify for that honour, but I am grateful for the fact that we will both be supporting the Bill.

My hon. Friend told us that he is one of the few MPs who has not yet decided which way to vote in the EU referendum. He kept us guessing today, but I know that he, like everyone else, particularly on the Conservative Benches, will welcome the fact that we are keeping our promise to hold an in/out EU referendum. His thoughtful speech was also in the finest traditions of our House.

Let me join the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to two great Members of this House who passed away over the past year. Harry Harpham was only in this place a short time, but quickly became a very popular Member. He earned great admiration from all sides for the way he continued to carry out his work throughout his treatment for cancer. His widow, the new hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), is already continuing his great work of standing up for the constituency that he loved so much.

Michael Meacher represented his Oldham constituents in this place for a staggering 45 years. He was sometimes known as Tony Benn’s vicar on earth. He was a passionate campaigner for equality and on climate change. This House is a poorer place without those two Members, and we miss them greatly.

Let me welcome the Leader of the Opposition to his first Queen’s Speech debate. I was not entirely sure whether he would actually turn up. After all, he once described it as a “ridiculous...18th-century performance” and he has even suggested that the monarchy “call it a day” when the Queen completes her reign. I have to say that I think there is more chance of the Labour party calling it a day when he completes his reign. I have been doing my researches, too, and that may come a little sooner than people think. He recently placed an advert for a job in his office. It said:

“Fixed term contract for the period only that Jeremy Corbyn is the Leader of the Labour Party, or until 31st December 2016, whichever is sooner”.

Is there something we are not being told? I wondered what the cause was. Having done the job of Leader of the Opposition, I thought perhaps it was the long and draining hours. So in preparing for this speech, I asked my office to ring his office to find out. I promise I am not making this up. This is the answerphone message we got:

“Thank you for calling the office of Jeremy Corbyn MP, the Leader of the Opposition. Our phone lines are open between the hours of 2pm and 4pm every week day.”

I know he wants a shorter working week, but there are limits, presumably even for him. There were rumours that at one point he would be challenged for the leadership by the former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Obviously, I was thrilled by the prospect of making jokes about Labour moving from Islington to Barking. But I have a feeling that after today’s performance they will be moving to Barking without a leadership contest.

We face an extraordinary Opposition team. The shadow Business Secretary is anti-business. The shadow city Minister does not speak to the City. The shadow farming Secretary, who should be responsible for encouraging Britain’s livestock industry, is actually a vegan. The shadow Defence Secretary does not believe in defence and they are led by a proud republican who now has to call himself the Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition. [Interruption.] Does he want me to give way? He does not. If one were to propose all that for a script of “The Thick of It”, even with the entreaties of my right
hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport about the importance of diversity and innovation, the BBC would have to reject it as utterly far-fetched.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

Hon. Members: Hooray.

The Prime Minister: I will give way.

Tom Blenkinsop: Will the Prime Minister remind the House when either he or the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills actually went to meet Tata during the steel crisis? The Labour Front-Bench team, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and the general secretary of Community went when no Government Front Bencher was available— they were in Australia on holiday. Can the Prime Minister remind us when he actually met Tata?

The Prime Minister: I was at Port Talbot two weeks ago meeting Tata. Let me give Labour Members a tip. It is all right not intervening on their own leader, but if they are going to intervene on the other guy, try to think of a question that he will find difficult. However, to be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, he made an inspiring speech after the local elections. He said: “Across England we had predictions we’d lose councils. We didn’t. We hung on.” That will surely go down as one of the great rallying cries of Opposition leaders down the ages—“Go back to your constituencies and prepare to hang on!” To be fair, I have to say that there are days when I know exactly how he feels.

You can say what you like about the right hon. Gentleman, but he has never hidden his beliefs. While I may disagree with most of them, he has been totally consistent in his opposition to market economics, to choice in public services and to Britain maintaining strong defences, so I am not surprised that he opposes this Queen’s Speech almost in its entirety. But no one can say that the British people are not being offered a choice, and the first half of his speech was something that we all thoroughly enjoyed listening to, and I welcome him again to his place.

We want to see true equality of opportunity in our country. That is why we are reforming our schools, creating 3 million apprenticeships, establishing new universities, boosting entrepreneurship, cutting taxes for businesses and creating a dynamic economy in which people can make the most of their talents. But if we really want to make a true difference to people’s life chances, we have to go further in tackling the barriers to opportunity. We have to help those who have lived in poverty and those who grew up without the advantages of a strong family.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister explain why he is going back on his promise to introduce a White Paper on supporting disabled people into employment, given that he has cut £1,500 a year from sick and disabled people?

The Prime Minister: We are not going back on that promise. We want to do more to help disabled people into work. What we have seen in the last year is well over 100,000 disabled people get into work, and we will continue with that excellent work.

If we really want to help people’s life chances, we really need to help those who need help the most. That is why there is such a strong emphasis in this Queen’s Speech on adoption and care. When I became Prime Minister, some social workers were refusing to place black, mixed race or Asian children with white adoptive parents. I think that what was profoundly wrong and we changed the law to prevent it. As a result of that change and the other things we have done, adoption is today up 72%, but there is still a lot more to do. In a system that still favours foster parents or distant relatives, we choose to promote adoption which will provide more permanent and stable homes. To make sure our social workers get proper real-life training on the job, we are reforming training and raising professional standards for every social worker by 2020.

Young people in care already get the first choice of which school they go to, but we do not give them sufficient advantages when they leave care. It is time that we did so. So, in this Queen’s Speech we are saying to care leavers: you will get guaranteed entitlements to local services, funding for apprenticeships and a personal mentor up to the age of 23. All this will be included in our care leavers covenant, so that our most disadvantaged young people get the opportunities they deserve. These are the choices of a progressive one nation Conservative Government.

Mark Spencer: Can the Prime Minister assure the House that, whatever someone’s background and wherever they were born, if they have aspirations they will be given not only the inspiration to succeed but the education to allow them to get to where they want to be?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is no good just talking about opportunity in terms of giving people the chance to get on; we have to unblock those who are stuck in poverty, in troubled families or in care, or who are stuck because they cannot get adopted or have mental health problems. That is the modern agenda of this Conservative Government. Yes, there are the economic opportunities we have always talked about, but let us unblock the opportunities that have been blocked for too many in our country.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) rose—

The Prime Minister: I want to make some progress, but I will give way to the Scottish National party now that its Members have woken up.

Neil Gray: Further to the intervention by the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), I must point out that during his last appearance at the Dispatch Box, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) gave me a commitment that the White Paper on health and work would be published “well before the summer”. What has changed?

The Prime Minister: What has changed is that we are getting more disabled people into work. We want to make more progress with that, and we have a new
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who is absolutely committed to continuing that development. That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman will see in the months to come.

After a strong family, the greatest driver of opportunity is a good school. Under the last Labour Government, the number of pupils studying core academic subjects at GCSE halved and, according to the OECD, the generation educated under that Government is among the least literate and numerate in the developed world. This Government are determined to turn around that shameful legacy.

Already we have 1.4 million more pupils being taught in good or outstanding schools. The number studying the core academic subjects at GCSE has gone up. There are more teachers with degrees and more pupils studying maths and science. In this Queen’s Speech we will help to make that educational excellence available to all in our country. A national funding formula will ensure that schools get the money they need. Local authorities that are not delivering will be intervened on at once. Failing and coasting schools will be turned into academies without delay. We should be clear about the choice that we are making—rigour in standards, discipline in the classroom, excellence in teaching, autonomy in our schools and no tolerance of failure. Again, this is the policy of a progressive one nation Conservative Government.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): How is equal opportunity consistent with allowing the best universities to raise their fees so that instead of the brightest getting access to those universities, the richest do?

The Prime Minister: I am coming on to precisely that point. What we have seen since the introduction of fees is not only record numbers going to our universities, but record numbers from poorer backgrounds going to our universities.

A real Opportunity Britain will offer school leavers apprenticeships and a choice of a good university and a good job, and our Queen’s Speech helps deliver on all three. We are providing funding for 3 million new apprenticeships. We have uncapped numbers at universities so that everyone who could benefit from a university education can get one. Now we are legislating to make that educational excellence available to all in our country.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am sure the Prime Minister would agree that one of the best things we can do for our children is to give them a university education. I welcome the announcement in the Queen’s Speech that more universities will be enabled to open. I would love one in Somerset and in Taunton Deane. It is the best thing we can do for our young people.

The Prime Minister: I will look at what my hon. Friend says. When we look at economic growth and development, all the evidence is that having universities of a high quality in all our regions is a massive driver for growth and for retaining talent in those areas, as the contribution of the Manchester universities to the northern powerhouse shows so clearly.

Christopher Pincher: My right hon. Friend is being typically generous in giving way. All the secondary schools in my constituency are academies, a process begun by the Labour county council before it was booted out in 2009. I welcome the national funding formula that will help all schools. I hope, in Staffordshire, Will my right hon. Friend make sure that the academies in Tamworth are protected and are never abolished, as the Leader of the Opposition would like?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to academies and free schools. We want to combine that autonomy with the national funding formula and make sure that more of the money goes to the school itself. All these reforms go together to drive change in our education system.

On jobs, today’s figures show unemployment falling, employment rising and a new record for the number of people in work in our country. This Queen’s Speech builds on this record with more help for small businesses, further improvements to infrastructure, and measures to make Britain a world leader in the digital economy and in new industries, such as autonomous vehicles. We are determined to deliver a recovery that is rich in jobs.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): I apologise for being semi-comatose during the speech from the Leader of the Opposition—most of us were. The Prime Minister mentions the economy and productivity. Will he tell us why the word “productivity” does not appear in the Gracious Speech? Is it because the productivity record of the Prime Minister and this Government is so appalling?

The Prime Minister: It is because everything in the Queen’s Speech is about enhancing our productivity. If we make those digital investments, improve our transport system, build new universities and introduce certain changes in our schools, all those things will help to drive productivity, which is vital to our success.

Opportunity for all also means continuing to make sure that every part of our country shares in rising prosperity, so in this Queen’s Speech we continue to support the development of a northern powerhouse and the Midlands engine. In the next year we want to have elected metro Mayors in six of our largest cities, and with our plans, local authorities will have complete control over revenue raised from the business rates. For the first time, the decisions they take to attract businesses to their area will help grow their economies and benefit their bottom line. It is a huge change in our country.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Between 2000 and 2010, £350 million was removed from the city of Leeds Supertram and put into Crossrail. Since 2010, over half a billion pounds has been invested in Leeds, showing that we really do believe in the northern powerhouse.
The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We could add the plans for the M62, HS2 and electrification of the TransPennine line, which will all make the promises that we have spoken about a reality.

Believing in opportunity means never writing anyone off. For too long the young offender institutions and prisons in our country have not been working. They give the public the security of knowing that offenders are locked in, but they are not doing enough to turn around the lives of people who will one day be let out. So in our prisons we are going to apply the lessons learned in other public service reforms: publishing results; giving the people who run the services proper control over them; encouraging innovation; rewarding success; and not tolerating persistent failure.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): If the Prime Minister is serious about prison reform, why have prison budgets been slashed by a third since 2010, at exactly the same time as the prison population has been growing? Given that 47,000 prisoners are currently incarcerated for offences linked to drug use, is not it time to review a policy that treats drug addicts only as criminals, rather than as people who need our support as well?

The Prime Minister: I would make a number of points to the hon. Lady. First, I really think that we need to get away from the idea that we only measure progress in public services by the amount of money that is spent. The whole aim here is to try to do more with less. That is what we have done with so many parts of the public sector. The point about drugs is important. the first thing we have to do is ensure that our prisons are drug-free; not just free of drugs, but free of so-called legal highs, about which the Leader of the House made such a powerful case on the radio this morning.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I am going to make a little progress, but I promise to give way a lot more.

For decades we have been cramming people into crumbling prisons that were built for a different age, many of which, frankly, are now unfit for human habitation. These buildings do not help rehabilitation. Indeed, they are rife with bullying, intimidation and violence. So we have made a £1.3 billion commitment to get rid of many of which, frankly, are now unfit for human habitation. It is all very well for Labour to ask questions, but they had 13 years to reform our prisons. It took a reforming Tory Government to put it on the agenda.

We cannot extend life chances unless we also tackle the menace of extremism. In our country there is still discrimination that we must fight, opportunity that is blocked and glass ceilings that need to be smashed. But I think that we should all be proud of the fact that when we look around the world, we see that Britain is already one of the most successful multicultural, multi-faith democracies anywhere on earth.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I am going to make some progress, because I want to make this argument. Then I will happily take interventions.

Extremists hate that fact, because it challenges their whole world view—the preachers who say that Christians, Jews and Muslims cannot live together; the so-called community leaders who say women cannot travel more than a few miles beyond the city in which they live; the activists who insist on segregation at political meetings; and the religious schools that teach children not to mix with those from different religions, and that sometimes teach that Jews are the enemy. To those who say that pointing this out is somehow illiberal, intolerant or Islamophobic, I say, “Nonsense.” It is not real liberalism to walk on by and pretend that this is not happening, or to say that it is just part of someone else’s culture. Real liberalism means standing up for our liberal values, and that is what we need to do in our country.

I want to make one last point before giving way. It is certainly not the preserve of one party to make this point. Whether it is my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) on the Government side of the House or the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) on the Opposition Benches, I have heard powerful speeches on this from right across the House. So when it comes to our Queen’s Speech proposal for a counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill, whether we are disrupting the activity of the extremists or protecting young people in unregulated schools, I hope there will be all-party support to tackle the poisonous ideology that is at the heart of the extremist threat.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab) rose—

The Prime Minister: I give way to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee.

Keith Vaz: I am most grateful to the Prime Minister. It is very clear that one of the areas that is used by the jihadists to recruit British citizens, especially young British citizens, is the internet. Does he agree that more should be done, and perhaps enshrined in legislation, to ensure that the internet companies do much more to take down these websites and to pursue those responsible for this hate?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree about that. It is fair to say that over 170,000 pages have been taken down under this Government because of the work we have done with the internet companies. I have great hope here, because the internet companies originally said that they could not work with us on tackling online
child pornography, and then they did, and a huge amount of change has come about. They are now beginning to see that whether it be beheading videos, jihadist videos, or the rest of it, they need to act and demonstrate their own responsibilities. I am hugely hopeful that if we are clear in this House about what needs to be done and we work with internet companies, we can make a huge amount of improvement.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I give way to the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for his generosity. He will know that David Anderson, his own reviewer of terrorist legislation, who has seen the proposed extremism Bill in the Queen’s Speech, has said that it ran the risk of “playing into the hands of those who, by peddling a grievance agenda, seek to drive people further towards extremism and terrorism.”

Will the Prime Minister listen to his adviser and not simply give a propaganda victory to those who wish to do us harm?

The Prime Minister: I will of course listen to everyone about this Bill, but I do say to the leader of the Liberal Democrats that our liberal values in this country are being stamped all over by people saying, “You can’t travel out of the city you live in”, or, “You can’t mix with Jews and Muslims.” That is what is happening in our country. It is no good saying, as the Liberal Democrats sometimes do, “Let’s just focus on the violent extremists; everyone else is just exercising their freedom of speech.” That is not good enough in a liberal democracy; we have got to stand up and fight for liberal values.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Extremists are adept at grooming and brainwashing our young people. Does the Prime Minister agree that we should be even bolder in offering greater support and encouragement to the brave Muslims in our community who seek to stand up and challenge the intolerance and hatred that is exported by Daesh?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises the absolutely right. That is why what she says is so important: if we give in to the idea that spokesman who are extremist but not violent can somehow represent their communities, we completely disempower the moderate voices who want us to stand up for the liberal values that we should champion in this House. That is very important.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I give way to the hon. Gentleman who serves on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister have an early meeting with the Mayor of London in which he can discuss the issues of London and its security, and how we combat extremism in our capital. Will he then take the opportunity to apologise for his candidate’s racist campaign against Sadiq Khan?

The Prime Minister: Once again, let me congratulate the Mayor of London and say how much I am looking forward to meeting him to discuss this issue, because he can do a huge amount, working with the Government, with Labour colleagues, and with Liberal Democrats and others, to pursue this agenda about standing up for the liberal democratic values that we hold so dear.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: Let me give way to the hon. Member I mentioned—[Interruption.] Let me say something: I am not going to take any lectures from Labour Members about giving way. We are not allowed to drop the H-bomb of hypocrisy in this House—of course we are not—but for heaven’s sake: have a go at your own Front Benchers, matey!

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call Mr Chishti, the Prime Minister did not say this, but I am going to say it: Members should not shriek at the Prime Minister, or indeed at the Opposition, for that matter. If Members want to try to intervene, they should do so with civility. I call Mr Rehman Chishti.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. On extremism, Government efforts to tackle hate preachers who poison individual minds and destroy our communities have to be welcomed, and I applaud what the Prime Minister is doing in tackling non-violent extremism. Will he clarify how the Bill will define when an individual has crossed the threshold of what is and what is not acceptable, so that our enforcement agencies and communities know when to take action?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises the absolutely crucial point that will be at the heart of the debate. I expect it to be a difficult debate, because we are trying to balance two things: our profound belief about free speech in this country and our need to stand up for the liberal democratic values that I have spoken about. It is not good enough to say that this is too difficult and therefore we cannot take any action to try to stop the people who are poisoning minds, particularly those of young children.

Let me make the point about the importance of being able to go into unregulated education settings and to check whether extremism is being taught or promoted. If that is happening, walking by on the other side and saying, “That’s part of someone’s culture and we just have to put up with it,” is not good enough. That is what needs to change.

Above all, in this Queen’s Speech we are using our economic strength to choose to invest in the national security of our United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are legislating on the police, intelligence powers and human rights, and we are meeting our NATO commitment to spend 2% of our GDP on defence.

This Government will also make a further choice. To disarm unilaterally in the hope that others would follow would be an act of supreme naivety. It would be the ultimate false economy—an act of weakness, not of wisdom—so we will hold a vote in this House to secure the long-term future of Britain’s nuclear deterrent.
Britain has come a long way since the depth of Labour’s recession. We are building homes again, with over 700,000 more since 2010. We are creating jobs again, with over 2 million more people in work. We are investing in our NHS again, with almost 10,000 more doctors and over 10,000 more nurses on our wards than in 2010. We are building a greater Britain again, with a sound economy, strong defences and opportunity for all. These are the actions of a progressive, one nation Conservative Government, and I commend the Queen’s Speech to the House.

4.16 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by echoing the tributes of the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister to Members who passed away in the last year? Given that today is a day of heightened security, may I also take the opportunity—I do not think this has happened yet—to pay tribute to the great number of police, parliamentary staff and other agencies that have been working very hard, often behind the scenes, to make sure that everybody in this place, including visitors and the general public, are safe?

I can start by assuring everybody, on both sides of the House, that I have absolutely no intention of speaking for 41 minutes without taking any interventions. It is appropriate to give other Members the opportunity to speak in today’s proceedings.

It is also appropriate to commend the mover and seconder. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) for her long-standing interests, particularly in European issues, which are close to her heart. We are fellow German speakers and have found ourselves at a number of European events. I look forward to her contributions over the next five weeks, especially on the subject of why it is important that we remain part of the European Union.

The seconder, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), also has a significant interest in European issues and has worked with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. We have a shared interest, because my great uncle worked for Chancellor Adenauer after the war. The hon. Gentleman has considerable experience as a medical general practitioner and has been prepared to make difficult decisions on issues in Parliament. For example, he joined the Scottish National party and others in voting against the austerity programme that has strangled economic progress. The SNP is the only major Opposition party in the House of Commons that has bothered to prepare an alternative to the Queen’s Speech. It behoves serious Opposition parties not only to hold the Government to account, but to propose alternatives. The SNP’s alternatives prioritise strong action to encourage productivity and export growth in the economy, to support the most vulnerable through progressive action on work and pensions, and to deliver meaningful further devolution to Scotland.

At the top of our list of proposals in advance of today’s Queen’s Speech was an emergency summer Budget. Why? Because it would give the Government an opportunity to put an end to austerity. It could bring about an inclusive, prosperous economy through a modest investment in infrastructure and vital public services. Our proposals are detailed. They would boost investment and halt the austerity programme that has strangled economic progress. They would increase spending on public services by a modest 0.5% a year in real terms between 2016-17 and 2019-20, which would release more than £150 billion to Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom to remain in the world’s largest single market, which provides crucial social and equalities safeguards.

Much of the Queen’s Speech relates just to England and Wales, including the flagship prison reform Bill. It is understandable that that is an issue that needs to be tackled. The Scottish Government have increased spending significantly on modernising and improving the prison estate north of the border, and recently passed the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, which supports the reform of penal policy to reduce reoffending and tackle crime at source. We therefore understand why colleagues in the rest of the UK wish to emulate the kind of changes we have introduced in Scotland. Quite a number of other major pieces of legislation will impact largely on England and Wales—those that relate to education, adoption and, recently, independentistas—for Scotland.

With the usual caveat that we have not actually seen the proposals yet, I and my colleagues will be very interested in scrutinising and supporting the measures in the Queen’s Speech that are worthy of support. We are especially interested in proposals on combating tax avoidance and keeping up with rapid technological developments that will have a transformative economic and societal impact, such as 100% broadband access, which the Scottish Government are already committed, and driverless cars and drones.

The SNP is the only major Opposition party in the House of Commons that has bothered to prepare an alternative to the Queen’s Speech. It behoves serious Opposition parties not only to hold the Government to account, but to propose alternatives. The SNP’s alternatives prioritise strong action to encourage productivity and export growth in the economy, to support the most vulnerable through progressive action on work and pensions, and to deliver meaningful further devolution to Scotland.

At the top of our list of proposals in advance of today’s Queen’s Speech was an emergency summer Budget. Why? Because it would give the Government an opportunity to put an end to austerity. It could bring about an inclusive, prosperous economy through a modest investment in infrastructure and vital public services. Our proposals are detailed. They would boost investment and halt the austerity programme that has strangled economic progress. They would increase spending on public services by a modest 0.5% a year in real terms between 2016-17 and 2019-20, which would release more than £150 billion during that period for investment in public services, while ensuring—no doubt this will be important for Government Members—that public sector debt and borrowing fall over the Parliament.
It is a choice for the Government whether they pursue those proposals or not; we believe that they should do so. Such a Budget would stimulate GDP growth, support wage growth and tax receipts, and, by transforming productivity and innovation, act as a major signal of confidence in our economy. It would, of course, also do much for an inclusive economy. The modest increase in expenditure would stop the cutbacks that disproportionately burden the most disadvantaged groups, causing widespread suffering and inequality, and denying so many opportunities. It would also support trade and exports, which are important for all parts of the UK. The figures should worry all of us, because they are moving in the wrong direction. The UK is likely to fall short of its target to double exports to £1 trillion this decade by some £300 billion—an enormous shortfall. A summer Budget could contain measures to stimulate the type of investment needed to improve the dire UK trade and export figures.

If the Government were to follow our proposals, they could introduce a fair tax Bill. Incidentally, I know the Prime Minister is listening, so I should say that it is not too late for him and his officials sitting in the Box should they hear a good suggestion, to take down some notes and include it in their legislation, and I would encourage them to do so. Perhaps that could be a fair tax Bill to simplify the tax system in the UK and deliver greater tax transparency. How about a moratorium on Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs office closures so that there is a network of tax advice offices to support local businesses in navigating the tax system?

How about committing the Treasury to establishing an independent commission to report back in two years following a comprehensive consultation on the simplification of the tax code? How about strengthening tax transparency by guaranteeing that the beneficial ownership of companies and trusts will be made public? On that point, I have listened to the Prime Minister adopting a tone of concern over recent weeks, which I endorse. I have no reason to doubt his genuine intention to deal with corruption and tax avoidance, which is a scourge that means that the Government and Ministers do not have the resources at their disposal to support the public services that we all depend on. However, I just do not understand why, if we are to have a list of beneficial owners, it should be shared only by prosecuting authorities. It seems to me that the more public information we can have on all forms of beneficial ownership, the more it will be to the benefit of all.

On the issue of Scotland and the constitution, the Scotland Act 2016 was welcome progress in Scotland’s devolution journey, but Government Members will not be surprised when I say that it does not go nearly far enough. That was why Scottish National party Members, having been elected by the people of Scotland to raise these points in the Chamber, tabled 100 amendments to the Scotland Bill. It is interesting to note that the UK Government accepted not a single amendment. The people sent to this Parliament to represent the people of Scotland, and elected on a manifesto, presented those amendments to this House, but not a single one was accepted.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Is not the reality that this Queen’s Speech was not for viewers in Scotland—so much so that the Scotland Secretary has been nowhere to be seen on the Front Bench? I think that even my predecessor, Sir Teddy Taylor, had more to say about Scotland. Perhaps my right hon. Friend could encourage the Prime Minister to tell us what new plans he has to embolden our national Parliament in Edinburgh.

Angus Robertson: Of course, the Prime Minister had an opportunity, didn’t he?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: He still has.

Angus Robertson: Well, he does. He could of course intervene on me and outline the plans that he did not give earlier. I see that he does not want to take the opportunity—that is fine. We do of course have the right to take interventions, although I will be happy to follow your guidance, Mr Speaker.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: May I make a little progress? I will be happy to come back to the hon. Gentleman.

The SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech would deliver a Scottish home rule Bill, which would involve a strong package of powers for the Scottish Parliament. The wording is quite important, because of course the people of Scotland were promised home rule and near federalism. My degree is in politics, and I have had a look at federal systems around the world. There are a number of parties in the House that favour federalism, but we do not live in a federal state in the UK, and nothing in the Scotland Act comes remotely close to “near federalism”. That was not in the Queen’s Speech. It would have been good to see it there; perhaps the Government might think about it, but I have my doubts—“I have my doubts,” he says, looking at the poor Hansard writers.

The Government are unlikely to deliver a Scottish home rule Bill, but perhaps, given the unhappiness on the Treasury Bench about the House of Lords for the first time in a long while, the time has come for even the Conservative party to realise that there is a need for parliamentary reform. Let us be serious. We work in a Parliament where the second Chamber is not elected by anyone. Let me say that again: the second Chamber of the Parliament described as the mother of all Parliaments is made up of people elected by nobody. This is the 21st century. Please let us get on with replacing the House of Lords.

Mr Hanson rose—

Angus Robertson: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will support our proposal.

Mr Hanson: Absolutely. However, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong because some Members of the other place are elected. The former Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, Lord Thurso, was recently elected by three Members of the House of Lords.

Angus Robertson: I stand corrected, but I still think that that is totally unacceptable.
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has raised this matter. Is it not right that we inform the Prime Minister, given that he has appointed more Members to that unelected, unaccountable House of Lords than Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and John Major put together?

Angus Robertson: I am delighted to speak today on behalf of a parliamentary party that has never nominated a single person to the House of Lords and never will. However, if we wished to have a second Chamber with the oversight responsibilities that many people argue are necessary, why not have a Chamber made up of representatives of the nations and regions? This is the 21st century—why don’t we get on with it?

While we are doing that, why not consider electoral reform? The Leader of the Opposition raised that issue. He has clearly rowed in behind the changes that the SNP proposed for the independence referendum, which proved that giving the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds—the issue on which I made my maiden speech—is a sensible move forward. Sixteen and 17-year-olds should be fully enfranchised.

The time has also come to establish an independent commission on proportional representation to report on possible models for the Westminster Parliament, and I say that as a member of a political party that might do worse under proportional representation. It was our policy when we were under-represented and it is our policy when we represent almost every seat in the country. In my speech last year, I made the point that the SNP does not represent everybody in Scotland and that we are mindful of that. It is important for all of us as democrats to ensure that the electoral systems that we use properly reflect in Parliament every strand of opinion that has support, and this place should be no different.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I realise that SNP Members like to discard referendum results, but we had a referendum early in the last Parliament on changing the Westminster voting system. My constituents voted 2:1 and the country overall voted to keep first past the post. End of the matter.

Angus Robertson: Right. I noticed that the body language was a bit hostile. There is a debate to be had about what form of electoral system should be used. Some favour single transferrable vote and others favour the additional member system. Let us just agree that surely first past the post has had its day. It is long past its sell-by date.

Let me move on to issues that were not but should have been in the Queen’s Speech. I want to consider justice and home affairs. The UK Government’s approach to immigration has been heavy-handed and one size fits all, and has only fuelled the misconceptions about migrants. The Government had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, by public opinion on issues such as unaccompanied children on the European continent. The Prime Minister needed to be reminded of the UK’s role in the 1930s in taking in unaccompanied children from the European continent, and I commend him for thinking about that issue again. I hope that those changes can be brought about quickly so that those children arrive in the UK as soon as possible, and I reiterate that I hope he does not see 3,000 children as the height of his ambition.

Putting the Human Rights Act in danger is a matter of great concern to a great number of us—indeed, I would go so far as to say that I do not think the idea has a majority in the House of Commons. The Scottish National party will be happy to work with Members across the House, and we may even have started discussions with some right hon. and hon Members on that subject. We will work together to ensure that human rights are not undermined in the UK, and we will always seek to protect the national and transnational legislation that underpins human rights in our country.

The SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech would deliver a more measured approach to migration and reaffirm the importance of human rights. Why not have a migration Bill to ensure that the UK maximises the benefits of migration and that people who come to the UK are treated with respect? Why do the Government not report annually on migration forecasts, and produce a strategy that includes plans to maximise the benefits of migration? How about reversing changes to immigration laws that prevent UK citizens from living here with their partners and children from overseas? Those laws deprive businesses and public services of key staff, and prevent universities from competing for the brightest international students. How about reversing cuts to support for asylum seekers, and adopting a strategy of providing integration opportunities from day one? How about reintroducing a post-study work visa? All that could have been in the Queen’s Speech. Sadly it was not, but—I am looking at those on the Treasury Bench—there is still time.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): If we had a post-work study visa, families such as the Brains in my constituency, who are being forced out by this Government, would be able to stay in the highlands and make a valuable contribution to our economy.

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a good point—[Interruption.] I notice the Foreign Secretary shaking his head because he thinks that is a bad idea, but I ask him to please consider that case, that family, and their qualifications. Those are the kind of people we need. Scotland’s problem has never been immigration; it has been emigration. People have come to our shores from all kinds of countries, and they have contributed in all kinds of ways that have made Scotland the country it is today. I appeal to the Prime Minister and the Home Office to consider that case and reverse the ruling.

On human rights and enhancing equalities law, what about preventing the revocation of the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 to any devolved nation, without the express consent of the Parliament or Assembly of that nation? How about modernising the Equality Act 2010 to strengthen the rights and liberties of citizens across the UK? How about affirming and protecting the role of the European convention on human rights in the UK through entrenchment? The SNP is in favour of that, and we would welcome the Government thinking likewise, although unfortunately that is unlikely.

On social justice, the Government have orchestrated truly devastating cuts that have destroyed the safety net that social security should provide, and any of us who hold regular surgeries know that to be true. Instead of
“business as usual” the Government should return to the drawing board on social security and abandon their austerity agenda. The cuts have butched the aspects of universal credit that might—might—have created work incentives, and instead they have hammered low-paid workers. The time is up for universal credit, and the Government need to find a fairer solution and an alternative for children, for working, low-income families, and for disabled people.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the life chances—we have been hearing those words all day from the Government—of children in the 4 million families who are set to lose out because of cuts to work allowances will be severely disadvantaged because of those changes?

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend has fought a good fight on this subject and she will continue to do so. I hope that the Prime Minister was listening, because her point was extremely powerful.

At this point, I should like to bring up a pensions issue, because the Government are not acting on measures voted on in this House. The issue of those affected by the rapid pace of increases in the state pension age—the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—women—is not simple, but the Government should look at it. There is no debate about the need for changes in pensions—everybody acknowledges that. Privately within the Government, there is an appreciation that there is an unfairness.

There is also an unfairness and a similar inequality—those who represent constituencies with significant communities of people from the armed forces will know of it—for widows. Among other things, that should surely be looked at as part of a universal pensions Bill. We should have a commission to investigate the inequalities in current and future pensions policies. We should also develop access to automatic enrolment to incentivise pension saving. All of that matters tremendously.

Before concluding, I should like to address two other important issues. First, on defence, the UK has suffered a squeeze in many respects in conventional defence capabilities in recent years. Bases have been closed, including the ending of flying operations from two of Scotland’s three airbases. Crucial capability gaps have been exposed, including the absence of a single maritime patrol aircraft—not a single one is currently operational for the United Kingdom.

The Government have committed to bridging that gap, and I urge them to do so as quickly as possible. I urge them to look at co-locating thetraining of defence personnel with the maritime fleet. That makes perfect sense, and I can see that the Foreign Secretary, the former Defence Secretary, is thinking about it. It is ludicrous that a maritime state has been without maritime patrol aircraft for year after year.

Another important defence issue for people in Scotland is nuclear weapons. This Prime Minister, and unfortunately too many Labour Members, intend to vote for a replacement for the Trident system of weapons of mass destruction when the lifetime cost is more than £200 billion. Scottish National party Members will vote against, but how about a nuclear weapons consent Bill that would require the UK Government to seek the consent of the Scottish Parliament for basing the Trident nuclear weapons system in Scotland? How about respecting the views of the people of Scotland on that subject?

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): There is another defence issue. The workers in the Clyde shipyard have been told that 800 jobs are under threat because of delays to the Ministry of Defence procurement programme?

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner for his constituents on that and makes his case well. The Prime Minister is sitting on the Treasury Bench and I hope he was listening because, given what was promised in 2014 in the run-up to the Scottish referendum, it would be intolerable if he went back on the commitments made at that time.

On foreign affairs, I would like a return to something that was said not that long ago: that the UK should have an ethical foreign policy. I am profoundly troubled by the way in which the United Kingdom sells weapons that are used in armed conflict. The people who use the weapons are trained by the UK military, fly planes produced in the United Kingdom, and fire weapons made in the United Kingdom. Currently, that is being done by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The time has come better to regulate weapons trading. The Government should have brought forward a weapons trading Bill but they have not. We should end our existing arms deals with Saudi Arabia, following the example of our European neighbours. We should have an ethical foreign policy and the Government should pursue it. Sadly, they do not.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I made a commitment that I would not emulate the leader of the Labour party by speaking for 41 minutes, and I am running the risk of doing so.

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman will be as expert in maths as he is in many other matters, but he has 13 minutes to spare.

Angus Robertson: Thank you for your correction, Mr Speaker. In that case, I am delighted to give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Dr Julian Lewis: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is, as always, very courteous in these matters.

The right hon. Gentleman began by talking about some of the areas where he might agree with the Prime Minister. Before he concludes, will he answer this question? Does he agree with the Prime Minister on the question of extremism and indoctrination in our country? The Scottish National party has a very good record in opposing Daesh and everything it stands for. Does he agree that what the Prime Minister said was encapsulated by the late, great philosopher, Sir Karl Popper, in the paradox of tolerance? He said that we must tolerate all but the intolerant, because if we tolerate the intolerant, the conditions for toleration disappear and the tolerant...
go with them. Can the right hon. Gentleman reach across the party divide to support the Government on that, because it is important for all of us?

Angus Robertson: There are things in politics about which there should be no disagreement between mainstream political parties. Very much in the spirit of what the right hon. Gentleman says, I would hope the proposals the Government bring forward can garner the maximum support. That is why, only a few short weeks ago, I raised with the Prime Minister the death of an Ahmadiyya Muslim in Glasgow. That is why I went to visit the Ahmadiyya Muslim community here in London—incidentally, the oldest mosque in London is an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque—and why I am meeting the British Jewish community next week. This is not just about issues of intolerance towards or between different parts of the Islamic community; it impacts on the UK Jewish community. Sadly, there are a whole range of other forms of intolerance for which we should have no tolerance. I hope the Prime Minister and his colleagues bring forward something that can command support across the House.

We will look as closely at that as possible. A Conservative Member asked a very difficult question earlier, one with which we would all grapple: at what point does the radicalisation process become so problematic that the law is tripped?

There is also a really big challenge for all of us in this age of modern technology. There are many examples—this is a matter of public record—of people becoming radicalised very, very quickly. We know our security services are having to grapple—as, unfortunately, security services in Belgium and France have had to recently—with the dangers of terrorist group operations. The difference between flash and bang—between the thought and the terrorist act—is extremely short. These are very difficult questions for all of us. I hope this is an area on which we can find cross-party agreement.

I would like to conclude, Mr Speaker, without reaching the 41-minute mark. Sadly, the Queen’s Speech is in many respects anaemic. It contains many pre-announced proposals for measures that have been carried over. There is a very strong focus on legislation for England and Wales. Of itself, that is not a bad thing—we wish our colleagues in England, Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom success—but it has crowded out alternatives, many of which have been proposed by the SNP.

Sammy Wilson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I am concluding.

Surely what the UK requires is strong action on encouraging productivity and export growth in the economy; surely what the UK requires is support for the most vulnerable through progressive action on work and pensions; and surely what Scotland requires is the meaningful devolution we were promised. That is what the SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech proposes. I commend it to the House.

4.48 pm

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and to hear about his alternative Queen’s Speech. I was particularly interested in his proposal for a real home rule Bill for Scotland. What concerned me was that he made no reference to control by the Scottish people and the Scottish Parliament over their own fishing grounds or agriculture policy. Surely the logical position for those in Scotland who want home rule is that they want control over their own fishing and agriculture, which can be delivered only by voting leave on 23 June.

I was very much with the right hon. Gentleman on the concerns he expressed about maritime patrol aircraft. I have raised this issue in the House on a number of occasions. I do not think we have had a satisfactory explanation for how we are going to protect our borders against intruders, whether they are people traffickers, drug smugglers or whoever. It was a great mistake by the Government to disband the very effective maritime patrol system operating out of Hurn airport in my constituency.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman). It is great to hear she has really dug into the idea of being a Back Bencher. ‘Don’t give up the chance to make a difference’, she says, “Seize the day”. Indeed, that is exactly what I intend to do on 23 June.

At the heart of the Gracious Speech is the statement: “My Ministers will uphold the sovereignty of Parliament”. In my humble submission, that can be delivered only by leaving the EU, because our very membership undermines the sovereignty of Parliament. That is why my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor is so much in the Brexitite campaign: he realises that only by leaving the EU can we truly retain our sovereignty and have control over our own laws.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on his speech, but he omitted to say that one of the great benefits of the referendum has been that the Government have been forced to come to an accommodation with the British Medical Association and the junior doctors over weekend working. The Government, understandably, are trying to clear the decks of obstacles in the run-up to the referendum.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is still on the Front Bench. I congratulate and thank him for the joke against himself about the plague of locusts. It shows he has taken on board the very serious criticism, in a leader in The Daily Telegraph, over the way he had allowed his capacity for invective to extend to suggesting, through exaggeration, that the whole of our destiny was at stake in the referendum. This time last year, he was saying he could envisage our leaving the EU at his request. He said he would be quite prepared to do that if he did not get a sufficient deal. He went out to get a deal and he thinks the deal was sufficient, but in any event it was quite a marginal situation.

Some of the hyperbole coming from the people who want to remain in the EU—I say this with the greatest of respect to my right hon. Friend—suggests that at no time could it have been in the interests of the people of the UK to leave the EU. That must be manifestly absurd in the light of the fact that he was telling his 27 colleagues in the EU that he would be quite prepared to recommend that we leave the EU, with all the consequences that would flow. That is still one of the big unanswered questions in this referendum campaign. If he thinks it
would so obviously be doom and disaster if we left the EU, why did he call a referendum or ever let it be thought he might support the leave campaign?

The Government’s credibility has been damaged by a cavalier misuse of statistics designed to mislead the public in the referendum campaign. This time last year, I was arguing for an independent audit of the economic costs and benefits of the EU. In successive Sessions of Parliament, I have had a Bill providing for such a thing, and I put down a parliamentary question last June asking whether such an independent audit could be brought forward, but I did not get any substantive reply from the Treasury. Yet now we are told that the cost of leaving the European Union would be £4,300 per annum in terms of GDP per household. That rather good programme that the BBC is running at the moment poured scorn on that statistic—on Saturday, I think—when it said that GDP per household is not the same as income per household. In fact, GDP per household is some £66,900 per annum—and would every household not love to have £66,900 per annum on average? GDP per household is not the same as income per household, but it was being suggested that by 2030 every single household would have incurred a loss of that amount.

Then I looked at the leaflet that is part of the Electoral Commission brochure being circulated to every household as part of the referendum campaign and I saw, right at the top of the remain campaign propaganda, the assertion, quoting a CBI figure, that it would cost £91 billion if we were to leave the European Union. Because I was speaking last night to a group of accountants, I went and checked the origins of the figure produced in the remain leaflet. I found that, in March, PricewaterhouseCoopers did indeed do a study at the behest of the CBI. It is quite a substantial study, running to many pages, and is called “Leaving the EU: Implications for the UK economy”. That document makes it clear that if we remain in the European Union, real UK GDP in 2030, the date chosen by the Treasury for these exemplifications, will be about 41% higher than it is at the moment and that if we leave, it will be about 39% higher: a marginal difference of about 1% or 2% in 2030—not tomorrow or the next day, but 15 years out. It is therefore absurd for the remain campaign to use scaremongering, fear-creation tactics by trying to present to the people a totally different picture, which contrasts with data that the CBI itself commissioned from an independent firm of chartered accountants of international repute.

It is against that background that this Gracious Speech must be addressed, because the people are pretty cynical and sceptical. They are pretty sceptical about the Government’s claims that if we remain in the European Union, we will be able to retain control over our borders—implying that we have control at the moment over who comes to our country and who leaves from the European Union, which we manifestly do not. Even if those people have criminal convictions, we cannot deport them or prevent them from coming because of their human rights and the European Union’s freedom of movement rules.

When we have assertions in the Gracious Speech that the Government are going to do lots of wonderful things, including building another 1 million houses, one has to ask the question: if we are that short of houses, why are we contemplating having 3 million more migrants from the European Union by the year 2030? How will we be able to deliver on our manifesto pledge to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands when all the figures show that every year we get more than 300,000 coming in from the European Union? My challenge to my right hon. Friend—I would be happy to give way to the Prime Minister if he wishes to intervene on this point—is: how will we ever be able to deliver on that solemn manifesto promise unless we leave the European Union? I accept that when that promise was made, my right hon. Friend thought he would be able to get a much better deal from his 27 counterparts in the European Union, but having failed to secure that deal, how does he think we will ever be able to meet that important manifesto promise?

The Queen’s Speech refers to more and fairer funding for schools. Speaking as a Member representing a constituency in Dorset, I know how unfair the current funding system is. Surely, we know that the tremendous pressure on our public services is caused by high levels of net migration, and the same is true for infrastructure. The Gracious Speech refers to improving infrastructure for businesses. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visits Dorset, as he does on many occasions, he will know that the traffic conditions are dire—again because of the pressure of population and traffic on the roads, leading to high levels of congestion.

That feeds into pressure on the green belt. My constituents share the Conservative vision of the green belt being sacrosanct, but the erosion of the green belt through pressure from housing and industrial development is very great at the moment, and there is nothing in the Gracious Speech about fishing and agriculture, which are two important parts of the economy of the south-west of England.

A great deal in the Queen’s Speech is premised on the fact that we are going to leave the European Union after the vote on 23 June. I am grateful to the Government for ensuring that it appears in the Gracious Speech. I have already referred to the issue of sovereignty, but the only way to improve the number and quality of housing is to ensure that we do not experience this incredible pressure on our public services—forced on us by uncontrolled immigration.

Let me make a few further points. The Queen’s Speech says that “further powers will be devolved to directly elected mayors”. Let me say to the Prime Minister that there is no appetite in Dorset for directly elected Mayors, although there is an appetite for genuinely devolved powers. The Government need to start to think about differentiating large urban areas where an elected Mayor may be appropriate, from largely rural areas where there is no appetite at all for such directly elected Mayors.

The reference in the Queen’s Speech to “powers governing local bus services” is rather vague. If the consequence will be the unravelling of the 1985 legislation—I was a member of the Standing Committee considering the Bill dealing with buses—that introduced choice and competition into this country’s bus services, I would be extremely concerned. My constituents find that bus services are becoming less frequent, which is a real problem. They are prepared, they tell me—even if they are pensioners—to contribute something towards the cost of buses, so that they can...
retain a service. A free bus pass is no use if there is no bus on which to use it. I hope we will be able to look at that issue when the buses Bill is debated.

There is considerable scepticism about the assertion that local authorities will be allowed to retain business rates. Does that mean that all the business rates raised in a local authority area can be retained by that local authority? The advice I have been given suggests that it does not mean that, and that if a high resource is coming in from business rates in one area, there will be an equalisation system to ensure that not all those business rates will accrue to the local people. That needs to be made clear.

The Queen's Speech also mentions provisions relating to our prisons. During the last Parliament, the current Leader of the Opposition and I were on the same trip to Denmark, when the Justice Committee visited Danish prisons. We noted that the regime there was so liberal that prisoners received a higher income than they would have received in their home countries in eastern Europe, whence they had come in order to commit crimes in Denmark. There is absolutely no deterrent for people who come to Denmark from another EU country where wage levels are much lower. The number of burglaries being committed by people from eastern Europe is a big issue in Denmark, but there is no deterrent, because, even when those people are incarcerated, the penalties they pay are low, and the income they receive for working in prison is greater than the income they would receive at home.

We talk about the need to get more resources into our prison system and reduce the pressures on our prisons. Why can we not do more to ensure that foreign offenders can be deported rather than filling up our prisons? We have tried to make progress in our negotiations in the European Union, but so far we have failed. When we look at the small print in the Gracious Speech, we see a great deal that will be able to blossom and flourish when the people vote to leave the European Union on 23 June.

5.6 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I did not intend to be drawn on the issue of Europe, but I feel provoked by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) first to declare my firm support for remaining in Europe, and secondly to make it clear that remaining will protect the security of citizens. I spent three years negotiating on home affairs for the then Labour Government, and, in particular, on security and safety issues. I firmly believe that if countries are at the table, they can make a difference, as we have done and continue to do, but that if a country is not there, it cannot exert influence. If we vote “out”, the very next day we will be out of all the discussions that are necessary.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the work done by the National Audit Office at the behest of the Public Accounts Committee, and to the Committee’s subsequent work in examining the costs. That is, perhaps, close to the audit that he was seeking. It clearly shows that the net cost of the United Kingdom’s contribution to the European Union is the equivalent of 1.4% of the UK Government’s total departmental spending. I believe that that is a small price to pay for the benefits of being part of a wider community, including the peace and security that that brings.

I believe that, as a whole, the Gracious Speech is rather short on detail. I hope to outline some of the issues that I think Ministers and Departments should consider as they flesh out their plans. There is, of course, headlines when Her Majesty reads out her speech, but what worries me, on the basis of my five years as a member of the Public Accounts Committee and one year as the elected Chair, is that there is often not much more in the speech behind the headlines. I hope that the Government will heed our concerns about good policy planning, because all too frequently we have seen policy built on sand. A political pledge may be made in a press release, for instance, containing no detail and, crucially, no proper cost and impact assessments.

Let me deal with some of the specifics in the speech. If the Government finally get it right with their pledge to provide high-speed broadband throughout the country, I shall welcome that, but I must confess to a slight weary cynicism, because we have heard it all before. The Public Accounts Committee has expressed concern about the use of taxpayers’ money to fund, in particular, rural broadband. The low-hanging fruit was taken first, and many innovative technologies were priced out of the market. There are numerous “not spots” all over the country. The policy has been so successful that the Government have had to include it again in the Gracious Speech. Like the Public Accounts Committee, I shall be watching the position closely—both nationally and in my Shoreditch constituency, the home of Tech City and Silicon Roundabout, where, believe it or not, there are still so many “not spots” and problems with speed that businesses relocate to gain access to faster speeds, especially for uploading purposes. It is striking that the former editor of Tech City News, the web news vehicle for that area, had to use his home address to upload the video he recorded each week to round up the local news because his office, just off Old Street, did not have the broadband width to allow it to be uploaded there. It is important that, as the Government roll out the measure, they ensure that alternative providers get a look-in. Therefore, I welcome the access to land and buildings that seems to be indicated in the publicity, but we will be watching and we will no doubt look at the issue more closely.

Unsurprisingly—it was well heralded—the Queen’s Speech included measures on devolution and directly elected mayors. As a Member for the borough of Hackney in London, I fully recognise that a directly elected mayor can be a very good thing. I pay tribute to my colleague, the Mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, who was directly elected mayor for the first time in 2002 and who has overseen stability and good public service delivery in our borough. However, in the rush to devolution—it is going very fast—it is vital that it be properly thought through.

We heard from the hon. Member for Christchurch, and we hear it from other Members, that there is concern in some areas about the need or not, for a directly elected mayor. Although I recognise that the Government, as they are devolving power, money and responsibility, need to have someone accountable for that, other models may work in different places. Perhaps one size does not fit all.

The question remains: what powers will be passed down? We had a hearing recently with the permanent secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government, who indicated strongly that, once mayors
are elected with a manifesto, the negotiations over the powers they have may be reopened. How will that devolution be properly funded? Who will watch taxpayers’ money? We know that in the tri-boroughs—Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham—there was a discussion about having a local public accounts committee. That sounds like a great idea—I am in favour of public accounts committees, as you may understand, Mr Speaker—but we know that, for example, in Oxfordshire, the Prime Minister’s own county, when the council sought external auditors for its audit committee, it could find only one person. If in the whole of Oxfordshire, with the talent pool there, it could find only one person willing to be a lay person on the audit committee, that is a concern. There is also concern about resourcing and how we watch how taxpayers’ money is spent.

There is the issue of the retention of business rates. How will that work? In my area, we stand to gain quite a lot, but there is concern about redistribution to the areas where there are not businesses that would be able to accrue the business rates for the local tax payer. However, watching taxpayers’ money is key. Who decides what amount of money is right, for example, for Manchester? Once the Treasury has decided on the amount, it is for Manchester to come back and say it needs more. Who is to be the arbiter of that? It cannot be the National Audit Office in every case—it just does not have the capacity to look at that local level. We have lost the Audit Commission. Those of us who took part in the pre-legislative scrutiny warned that a lot was being thrown out when the commission was abolished. We have concerns and we will return to the issue as a Committee.

The Gracious Speech mentions mental health and the criminal justice system. My constituency hosts the John Howard Centre, a medium secure unit for people with serious mental health issues. I have spoken to patients in the unit who fear going back to prison because of the lack of mental health support in the mainstream prison service. Therefore, I wish the Government’s reforms of the prison service well. I also represent the Howard League for Penal Reform. I know that it will want the reforms to succeed, too. Again, the devil is in the detail and in the funding, of course. There has been a cut of about 20% in the budget of the Ministry of Justice. Eighteen per cent. of that 20% cut has been in prisons. We also know that there is a shortage of prison officers, so I will watch that one with caution.

The northern powerhouse is again mentioned in the Queen’s Speech. The Government thereof the policy team from Sheffield to that well known northern powerhouse—Victoria Street SW1. The team will join the 97% of civil servants working on the northern powerhouse who are already based in London. I may be a London MP but I know that that does not make sense. It is vital that the Government get the best input from around the nations and regions of the UK to ensure that policy is not London-centric.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I understand the point that the hon. Lady is making, but does she not appreciate that the whole point of the devolution thrust is to give more power back to the combined authorities and to local partnerships? That is what we are delivering, regardless of what happens to a small policy team or strategy team.

Meg Hillier: My point is that this is a litmus test for how seriously devolution is being taken. Whenever senior civil servants appearing before the Committee talk about devolving powers down, we always ask them how many civil servants will move from Whitehall to the regions. We ask them what the total percentage will be of the Whitehall civil servants who are going to shift, even if this does not involve the same people. If Whitehall is shrinking as a result of devolving powers and responsibilities to local regions and nations, we should see a reduction in the civil service. If not, we should seek an explanation for why that is not the case. We have seen some very fuzzy thinking on this, and the Committee is watching the situation closely.

The Investigatory Powers Bill has once again been mentioned in a Gracious Speech, as it did not make enough progress in the last Session. I strongly believe that we need to keep up with technology in order to keep citizens safe. In principle, therefore, I support the Bill, but I sincerely hope that the Home Secretary will listen and respond to calls from all the Opposition parties for appropriate governance and safeguards so that this legislation can gain cross-party support. We must unite against terror and those who wish our country ill, and we need to work together in that spirit to ensure that the Bill is the best bit of legislation it can be and that it achieves all its aims.

Talking about security brings me to the issue of tackling extremism and radicalisation. I do not believe that this can be done from Whitehall. It is important that Whitehall should set the framework, but the best way of doing this is to work at grassroots level. We have had the Prevent strategy in the past, but we need to ensure that we really work hard to deliver this, this time round. We need to do this in a spirit of unity, and it has been shocking to me over the past few weeks and months that senior Government Ministers—even the Prime Minister himself, from the Dispatch Box—have been casting aspersions on the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. That is beyond the pale. It is unacceptable that someone in his position has been pilloried in such a way when he is part of the solution and certainly nothing to do with the problem. I therefore hope that we can now move forward in a spirit of greater unity, because we need to tackle these issues as part of our long-term strategy to make our country secure.

The three main issues in the Gracious Speech that I wish to talk about are housing, health and education. Obviously, I am as concerned about what has not been included as I am about what has been included in the sketchy details. In the Gracious Speech, the Government are making a commitment to building 1 million homes, but let us replay what happened in the last Parliament. At the beginning of the last Parliament, the Government committed to releasing public land to build new homes. When the Public Accounts Committee looked into this matter five years on, however, the Government could not say how much the land had been sold for, how many homes had been built on the land or whether there had been any appreciable value for money for the taxpayer. You really couldn’t make it up.
The Gracious Speech mentions tackling poverty and the causes of deprivation in order to give every child the best start in life. I represent a borough that is in the top 11% for child poverty and I believe strongly that the main foundation for tackling poverty and giving people the best start in life is housing. A stable home is a basic right. The recently passed Housing and Planning Act 2016 will do huge damage to my city and my constituency. It pulls the rug out from under Londoners on low and moderate incomes. It takes social housing away from local authorities to pay for the right to buy. In my own borough, 700 such properties will have to be sold in the next five years to pay for the right to buy for housing association tenants.

I do not begrudge people wanting to own their own home or having the opportunity to do so, but that must not happen at the expense of others who need affordable quality homes that are permanent and secure to live in. There is also pay to stay, which was introduced to push up rents for people on a household income of £40,000 a year. To some hon. Members, that might sound like a lot of money, but in London it does not stretch very far at all. The average property price in London is now £691,969. It has gone up about £7,000 since I last raised the matter in the House a few weeks ago. There has been an 85% increase in the past six years.

As of February this year, the median rent for a one-bedroom property in my borough was £1,399 per calendar month. To afford that, people would require a gross household income of £48,000. I do not know where people who are expected to pay and stay are supposed to go. They could not afford to buy their own home and they could not afford to rent privately. That particularly affects a number of pensioners in my constituency. There is also the problem of overcrowded households. Adult children who cannot leave because of those prices keep the household income ticking over. They are paying not for huge palaces, but often for overcrowded accommodation.

Under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 there is a proposal to replace, one for one, homes sold under right to buy, but that is not necessarily like for like. The replacement homes could be of a different size, in a different location or even in a different city, and of a different tenure. It is not good enough for the Government to sit back and allow that to happen. I hope they will work with Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, to come up with a work-around—a London solution—because the Act will not work as it is. I am fed up with hearing Ministers and the Prime Minister talk about starter homes being the solution. Starter homes in London would need a household income of £71,000 on average to be affordable. The average household income in my constituency is £33,000 and there are many households with an income much lower than that. Government policies are fuelling house prices, but not providing a solution.

The figures underline the crucial need to sort out housing in my borough, where 11,000 people are on the council housing register. In 2014-15, 1,338 social rented homes were allocated. At that rate people will have to wait a very long time. There are 2,286 households in temporary accommodation. My surgeries are the busiest they have ever been in the 20 or so years since I was elected. I thought the situation could not get worse when I was visiting people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation twenty-something years ago. It is worse now. There are people living in hostels for a year or 18 months and others being relocated a long way away from schools and family, increasingly having no hope and no security. I do not know where people will go.

I speak also for people in private sector accommodation. I meet people in good jobs but not well-paid jobs—people in their 40s who have rented privately quite happily all their lives, and who suddenly find themselves priced out. They cannot buy and they cannot rent. Heaven forbid that they are on any housing benefit. People on low incomes in London require some housing benefit to pay the rent, but landlords do not want to look such people in the eye. Where do those people go? We are hollowing out London. People on low and moderate incomes cannot afford to remain in London. That must be tackled. The Gracious Speech could have and should have included a clear outline of how the Government will work with London. I hope the Housing Minister will take the matter up.

In the Gracious Speech there is the promise of a seven-day NHS, but in a series of reports the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have concluded, on a cross-party basis, that the NHS budget is far too squeezed. It is like a balloon—if it is squeezed in one place, the bulge moves somewhere else. Earlier this year we saw acute trusts nearly bursting, with three quarters of them in deficit. The proposal for a seven-day NHS has not been costed. NHS commissioners and providers in 2014-15 had a deficit of £471 million and the Public Accounts Committee concluded:

“There is not yet a convincing plan in place for closing the £22 billion efficiency gap and avoiding a ‘black hole’ in NHS finances.”

There are not enough GPs to meet demand and NHS England does not have enough information on demand, activity or capacity to support decisions on general practice—another conclusion from the PAC—and a target of 4% efficiency savings for trusts is unrealistic and has caused long-term damage to trusts’ finances.

Workforce planning is dire, with a 5.9% shortfall in clinical staff nationally. That masks a number of regional variations. There is a vacancy rate of more than 7% for nurses, midwives and health visitors, and a vacancy rate of 7% for ambulance staff. We have seen the fiasco of the handling of the junior doctors contracts. If the Government are planning to legislate on a seven-day NHS, they must do the maths, which are pretty basic. It is about time somebody gave the Health Secretary a simple calculator. We see from a number of reports that GP services are being squeezed and acute trusts are bursting. Increased demand for specialist services will squeeze acute trusts even more. There is an over-reliance on expensive agency staff and locums. The basic maths is not being done and much more needs to be done to ensure that this proposal is deliverable.
Currently, the seven-day NHS is a notion, a promise, a hope, but the evidence shows that it is not planned, it is not funded and it is not realistic. The Government must address these fundamentals. I think that there is cross-party support on both sides of the House for our national health service. It is something we all treasure and love, and that we all know is there for us when we need it. But it is not going to be there if we allow this approach to continue. There has to be a better approach.

Education was mentioned in the Gracious Speech. My borough needs no lessons in educational excellence. Thanks to the London Challenge, decent funding, committed teachers and headteachers, and the vision of our mayor, Jules Pipe, we have some of the best schools in the country, and a number that are ranked in the top 1% nationally. When I was selected to run for the seat 12 years ago, I was asked what I thought about university tuition fees. I pointed out that so few pupils in Hackney went to university that it really was a bit of an academic question in my borough. Now we see scores of young people going to Oxbridge and Russell Group universities. It has been a major success.

But I really worry now. It is easy for the Government to talk about raising excellence for all, but London is under threat. When they talk about fair funding, what they really mean is reducing funding in London. That is unjust, foolish and short-sighted, and it risks putting back the progress made by and for London’s young people. Nationally there are lessons to be learnt from London, but we must not hammer London while trying to resolve issues in the rest of the country.

There is a lot to look at in this Queen’s Speech, and my Committee will be busily examining it, but I really hope that the Government will learn lessons from some of their policies, particularly on housing and the funding of the health service, and that they will work out a better way of having a stable financial footing for these policies, so that where policies are good, they are deliverable, and where they are not good, we get a chance to amend them, and not just through secondary legislation, but in primary legislation that is debatable and amendable in this House, and the Lords must not be so neutered. The penultimate paragraph in the Queen’s Speech talks about the primacy of the House of Commons, but it is really vital that the experts in the Lords get their say too, to ensure that these policies are better. It is no proud thing for a Government to introduce policies that increase poverty, deprivation and inequality. I fear that, without proper scrutiny and detail, that is what will happen as a result of this Queen’s Speech.

I am also happy to take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) for starting our deliberations this afternoon with two first-class speeches. The speeches were different in style, but both were hugely amusing and insightful. They are to be congratulated on what they had to say and the manner in which they said it.

All Queen’s Speeches can be something of a curate’s egg; they tend to include a bit of detail, a bit of general aspiration and a bit of “Other measures will be laid before you.”

I do not suppose that this Queen’s Speech is an exception to that rule. However, I am keen to highlight three areas that appeal to me and that I think will be of interest to the country as a whole. It does not matter to me that the Bills on which I want to concentrate have a bearing only on England and Wales, because I think that the theory and public policy behind them should be of interest right across the United Kingdom.

The first issue that I want to deal with is the anti-corruption summit in London and the follow-on legislation that will tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. There is absolutely no question but that for far too long the police and public policy commentators have not given enough attention to white-collar crime, as it is sometimes called. Nobody dies, there is no blood and guts, and there are no obvious victims in so many cases of corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, but none the less these are serious crimes. If somebody went into a bank with a sawn-off shotgun and stole £10 million, we would all get rather exercised about it, and in the event of a prosecution and a conviction, we would expect the offender to be given a pretty handy sentence. Yet there seems to be a rather perverse sort of admiration for people who, through computer crime or through other clever tactics, launder money, evade tax or commit acts of corruption, in this country or abroad.

All these financial and economic crimes need to be borne down on with a sense of purpose, because they not only produce victims in this country—we see pension funds ripped open and lives ruined as a consequence—but damage the developing economies in countries where corruption is, to some extent, endemic. It was interesting for me to attend the Marlborough House talks last week. I did not go to the main summit addressed by the Prime Minister but to the event the day before addressed by the noble and learned Baroness Scotland, now Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at which a whole host of people, including the President of Nigeria, spoke with one voice about the need to tackle corruption, not only because it is wrong in itself, but because corruption in their countries damages their development, damages their economy, and makes the lives of their people, particularly poorer people, altogether more difficult. I welcome the onset of this new legislation, not least because it ties into something that I did when I was briefly in the event the day before addressed by the Prime Minister but to the event the day before addressed by the noble and learned Baroness Scotland, now Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at which a whole host of people, including the President of Nigeria, spoke with one voice about the need to tackle corruption, not only because it is wrong in itself, but because corruption in their countries damages their development, damages their economy, and makes the lives of their people, particularly poorer people, altogether more difficult. I welcome the onset of this new legislation, not least because it ties into something that I did when I was briefly in the Prime Minister but to the event the day before addressed by the noble and learned Baroness Scotland, now Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at which a whole host of people, including the President of Nigeria, spoke with one voice about the need to tackle corruption, not only because it is wrong in itself, but because corruption in their countries damages their development, damages their economy, and makes the lives of their people, particularly poorer people, altogether more difficult. I welcome the onset of this new legislation, not least because it ties into something that I did when I was briefly in the Prime Minister but to the event the day before addressed by the noble and learned Baroness Scotland, now Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at which a whole host of people, including the President of Nigeria, spoke with one voice about the need to tackle corruption, not only because it is wrong in itself, but because corruption in their countries damages their development, damages their economy, and makes the lives of their people, particularly poorer people, altogether more difficult. I welcome the onset of this new legislation, not least because it ties into something that I did when I was briefly in government, which was to introduce deferred prosecution agreements that allowed corporate malefactors to be dealt with pragmatically and effectively.

I am not so happy about the second thing that I want to draw attention to, which is the sentence in the Queen’s Speech that reads:

“Proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights.”
This idea of a British Bill of Rights has been knocking around the lampshade like a demented moth for some little while, and it may well be that if it has an armour-plated head, it can carry on knocking itself around the lampshade for a good while longer. I really do think it is a waste of intellectual and political energy for this—to mix my metaphors—dead horse to be revived. Of course the European convention on human rights and its application in our own courts, and in the Strasbourg Court, can occasionally be rather annoying, but that is not the point. The point of the convention, the point of the Strasbourg Court and the point of applying the convention law in our own courts, right across the United Kingdom, is to ensure that the courts can protect the interests of the people—the citizens.

I am not going to get too apoplectic about this, because I find that life is far too exciting already without getting apoplectic about a British Bill of Rights, and I will wait until the consultation is over—perhaps my obituary will have been written by then—before I deconstruct it. However, I urge the Government to make the consultation very thorough and to consider long and hard whether this is worth the political damage and in-fighting that it may well cause. I think it was the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) who said that there is no majority in this House, let alone in the other place, for a wholesale attack on the structure of human rights in this country. I suspect that he is right, but let us see what the Government come up with when they have finished consulting. I wish them all the best in their endeavours.

To come on to the meat of what I want to say—I promise to take just a little time, not far too long—I congratulate the Government on their prison reform proposals. One of the things in which I have become interested in the past 11 years is prison reform. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister became Leader of the Opposition in 2005 and rearranged the Opposition Front Bench, he invited me to become the shadow Minister for prisons, then shadowing the Home Office. I think that the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), who is in the Chamber, was the then Minister for prisons; if not, he certainly took on that role shortly after I became the shadow Minister.

The Prime Minister asked me to find out what was going on in the prisons of England and Wales, because the prisons world is, except to the few enthusiasts about such issues, an entirely secret world. Over the course of the next three or four years, I set about visiting about 65 of the 140 prisons, young offender institutions and secure training units in England and Wales. In all those prisons and places of custody, I found dedicated prison officers and hard-working senior management teams, including prison governors. They were all interested in doing a good job, but unfortunately the good things that went on in some prisons were not replicated in others. There was no general pattern of a sensible application of policy.

The inevitable problem that one saw as one went from prison to prison—this was quite easy to see whether one visited the big Victorian prisons of Manchester, Leeds, Wandsworth, Pentonville or Wormwood Scrubs, or more modern prisons such as Gatricey in my constituency or Glen Parva, a YOI that straddles the border of my constituency and that of South Leicestershire—was that of overcrowding. Although the Government’s proposed measures are entirely laudable and welcome, nothing of lasting value seriously can be done to reform and improve the condition of our prisons and prisoners—and thus to make them fitter to come out into the community and lead sensible and straight lives so that they can look after their dependants and themselves, get a job and become tax-paying members of society—unless we stop overcrowding our prisons.

Overcrowded prisons lead to churn. Someone sentenced in Canterbury Crown court for a particular offence might go straight to Canterbury prison, but probably not if it still specialises in overseas prisoners, in which case they will probably go to a relatively local prison. If Canterbury Crown court sends 10 or 15 people to prison every day and the local prison does not have sufficient space to house the inflow of just-sentenced prisoners, they have to be moved from Canterbury to Lewes or Maidstone, but how do those prisons fit in the 15, 30 and 45 prisoners that have been sent there? They remove 15, 30 and 45 of their own prisoners and shove them down the line, so there is a metaphorical jumbo jet of prisoners going around England, moving from prison to prison. One could say, “Well, that’s just bad luck.” However, their records and education certificates do not move with them, so when Prisoner Jones goes from Canterbury to Lewes to Exeter to Bristol to Birmingham, his medical and educational records are three or four prisons behind him. It is bananas, it is incompetent, it is inefficient, and it is a waste of life and public money.

We do that because in the past, we had Governments who were good at talking about prison reform, but did not get round to doing it. Now we must, and I think we have a Government who will, because the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Justice are genuinely interested in this issue. If the Prime Minister, who has said that he will not serve another term after this Parliament, leaves nothing behind him other than real proof that what we do to prisoners and what we do within prisons can allow our prisoners to emerge from prison as better citizens—off drugs, able to read and write, having received the mental health treatment they required and fit for a job—he will have done a really wonderful thing.

I am biased. First, as I said a moment ago, in 2005 I became the shadow prisons Minister and went on a literal and metaphorical journey to find out what was going on in prisons. I also researched and wrote a paper called “Prisons with a Purpose”, which I hope has informed, to some extent, the discussion we are now having on prison reform. It is inevitable that, as Front Benches change, other people come in and want to do things their way, rather than the way of their predecessors, but I like to think, in a rather self-regarding way, that the paper I wrote has proved to be valuable. If, unconsciously or consciously, my successors have drawn on it to produce good policy, that is a good thing.

The other reason I am biased is that when I came out of government in September 2012, I was fortunate enough to be invited to become a patron of Unlock, a prisons charity, and a little while later I became a trustee of the Prison Reform Trust. It is a happy coincidence that my hon. Friend the Minister for Children and Families is sitting on the Front Bench, because his brother James has just become the chairman of the Prison Reform Trust, and the name Timpson and doing good things for prisons and prisoners run together. In a
number of prisons—possibly in Liverpool and Manchester, and certainly in Wandsworth—Timpson workshops train guys who can then go out and work.

As General Ramsbotham, the unlikely but marvellous inspector of prisons, said, the three things that a released prisoner needs are a strong relationship—whether with their family, wife, husband or partner—somewhere to live and a job. The Timpson trick is to allow ex-offenders and ex-prisoners to set up shop, run it on their own and handle money. The business trusts those people and, in return, they pay back by earning money, supporting their families and providing a service to their customers. Yes, of course, the odd one fails, but the risk is worth taking. I hope the Government will feel encouraged by that example, and that they will feel that the public attitude towards prisons, prisoners and prison reform is not as conservative, with a small c, as old-fashioned or as ill-considered as many would have us believe. There is a fund of enthusiasm for good work in prisons, and I urge the Government to push hard for it and not to be upset by the occasional recidivist or the occasional disaster, because the overall direction of travel is good.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman take this opportunity to pay tribute to the mother of the Minister for Children and Families? I believe that she recently passed away. She was the primary driving force behind the amazing things that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just talked about.

Sir Edward Garnier: Of course I will—I do not want to make this a Timpson-fest, but I am happy to pay tribute to the Minister’s mother. I was fortunate enough to meet her, and I was very sad when she died, as I know my hon. Friend the Minister obviously was.

That family’s story, which goes beyond the fostering of a lot of disadvantaged children and the setting up of workshops in prisons, demonstrates what private enterprises, charities and individuals can do to turn things around. If the Government can harness that work and borrow the enthusiasm and spirit of volunteers, charities, professionals in the probation world and so on, they can produce an understanding that going to prison is not the solution for a prisoner but part of a much longer journey. I have been a Crown court recorder and sentenced people to prison, and from reading their histories I know that they are often the children of prisoners or from broken families. They are often mentally ill, and they are largely illiterate and unable to function. I have sentenced people to community sentences who do not even know how to tell the time. They are told, “You are required to be at such-and-such a place at 10 o’clock next Friday, where you will meet the probation officer,” and they ask, “How many sleeps is that?” It is as rum as that.

I hope that the Government will push this agenda on with great enthusiasm. There are charities that do good work for the mentally ill and for prisoners, but we need to join things up so that ex-servicemen, for example, who are under the care of the Ministry of Defence and get into trouble when they leave the Army, can be properly treated by that Department and by the Department of Health, and do not fall through the gaps between the departmental budgets. As I have said, we have to deal with overcrowding and stop the churn, and we must be braver and have more releases on temporary licence—that issue was spoken about over the weekend.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice, for the Committee’s report. It sounds the alarm bells and tells a story, but that story has been told and told and told. Now it must stop being told and something must be done. I hope that when the next Queen’s Speech is given this time next year, Her Majesty will not need to say:

“My Government will legislate to reform prisons and courts to give individuals a second chance”,
because that work will already have started.

I will speak finally about another pet subject of mine. The law on sentencing in this country is incredibly complicated—I would say impenetrable. I resigned as a Crown court recorder because when I went on a judges’ refresher course last October at Warwick University, I discovered that three pieces of legislation were passed at the end of the 2010 to 2015 Parliament that I had never heard of—and I follow criminal justice legislation carefully. Ludicrous. Ludicrous of me, one may say. We must stop treating this place as a criminal justice sausage machine, concentrate, and pass sensible legislation that does not repeat itself, and allows the courts to do justice, protect the public and enable wrong to be set right. I hope that one way in which we can do that is by codifying the criminal sentencing law in one easy, though no doubt big, volume so that judges can see what the law is, what has been amended, what has been repealed, what is still there and what is not yet in force, rather than having to look at 25 different books or internet sites to find out the correct sentence. That is not much to ask of the Government, and perhaps they could start.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Gracious Speech debate. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) for their contributions. It is a tough gig to undertake, but they did so with aplomb.

Today’s debate is very general, so I want to make some general comments before focusing on the same issues that the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough raised about prisons. As ever with a Gracious Speech, there are things on which we can agree. I look forward to the measures on tackling radicalisation in prison and generally. I think that they will contribute to putting in place a framework to reduce radicalisation and to stop young people from all communities turning to warped views of the Muslim faith, or indeed, as happened in Mold in my constituency, radical activity based on a national socialist view of the world. It is important to consider those measures in detail and to support them.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), I have a lot of time for the Investigatory Powers Bill, not least because I have spent three months considering the draft Bill in detail with several hon. Members and putting in place measures to ensure that the state can have access to the information
that it needs to stop paedophilia, terrorism, money laundering and other criminal activities, but also building in protections. The Bill was before the House in the previous Session and I look forward to its progressing with some amendments in this Session.

I cannot argue—nobody could—with measures to support and honour the military covenant. As a former Northern Ireland Minister, I look forward to further progress on the Stormont House agreement. The Prime Minister’s activities on anti-corruption and money laundering are welcome. We will see the proof of the pudding in due course, but there is broad support in the House for tackling tax evasion and corruption.

Although I am an Opposition Member, I will not dismiss all aspects of the Gracious Speech, because there are things in it that we should examine. However, some issues leap out about which we have real concerns. The right hon. and learned Member for Harborough coined a phrase, which will become welcome across the House: the current British Bill of Rights is “a demented moth” banging its head against a light.

Sir Edward Garnier: Lampshade.

Mr Hanson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman corrects me. I want to ensure that the facts are correct, so I take his point. I share his concern that we will throw away the Human Rights Act, which a Labour Government passed in the 1997-2001 Parliament, and replace it with a British Bill of Rights, which throws away our commitments to the European Court in Strasbourg. That does not just throw away our commitment to being part of the wider European Union; the European Court of Human Rights covers countries that are currently not in the European Union, such as Russia, where we face potential challenges. We are sending the wrong signal by ditching the Human Rights Act.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) that ditching the Human Rights Act would be a comfort to would-be tinpot despots (Angus Robertson) that ditching the Human Rights Act would be a comfort to would-be tinpot despots (Angus Robertson) that ditching the Human Rights Act would be a comfort to would-be tinpot despots (Angus Robertson) that ditching the Human Rights Act would be a comfort to would-be tinpot despots (Angus Robertson) that ditching the Human Rights Act would be a comfort to would-be tinpot despots. It is important that the Government keep these commitments.

Mr Hanson: On this occasion—and on the day Plaid Cymru supported the Labour First Minister in Wales—I am grateful for Plaid Cymru’s support. The issue jumps out of the Gracious Speech as one that will cause political controversy. The voice of the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough is therefore valuable because it sends a signal to the Government that the Bill will not have an easy passage.

The Gracious Speech also covers strengthening the economy to deliver security for working people, increasing the life chances of the most disadvantaged and supporting the development of the northern powerhouse. The Government have support on all three issues, but I ask them to consider what they mean in practice. In my part of the world, we have a claimant count of 2.8% of the population; 23.6% of the population are deemed as being incapacitated, and unemployment is 4.8%. We have major challenges in the steel industry, and with zero-hours contracts and second bedroom occupancy—the so-called bedroom tax. We still have 690,000 people living in poverty in Wales. If the Government are serious about some of the issues that they claim to be serious about in the Gracious Speech, they need to consider some real policy changes to support business and industry, work with the National Assembly and tackle poverty, which is partly caused by current Government policy. In my constituency and elsewhere, poverty is increasing because of Government policy on benefits and unemployment, while taxes for some of the richest people in our society are cut.

If the Government are serious about the northern powerhouse, they need to work closely with the Mersey Dee Alliance in north-east Wales and north-west England to ensure that we get the benefits from whatever the northern powerhouse means. I am pleased to see the Minister for Children and Families in his place. He knows the importance of Crewe and HS2 to north-east Wales. He knows the importance of electrification of the line from Crewe to Chester and onwards to north Wales. He will also know the importance of direct links to Manchester airport to ensure that not only Cheshire but north Wales benefits from the northern powerhouse, and he knows that it is important to reopen the Halton curve quickly to link north Wales to Liverpool airport and Liverpool. Those are all infrastructure projects that are technically badged “the northern powerhouse”. I am still not sure what the northern powerhouse means to the people of Cheshire and north Wales, particularly Flintshire in my constituency, but if it is to mean something, the Government need to flesh out carefully the finances and the long-term infrastructure projects that benefit Cheshire and north-east Wales and contribute to supporting the cities of Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds and others that are critical to the economic success of the north.

If the decision goes wrong on 23 June and we leave the European Union, the north will be particularly hit by that loss of European influence. I am pleased that the referendum is mentioned in the Gracious Speech and I hope that there will be a yes vote on 23 June.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The decision to close the BIS office in Sheffield and move it to central London has already been mentioned, and my right hon. Friend talks about the infrastructure projects necessary for the northern powerhouse to succeed. Does he agree that senior civil servant and policy-making jobs must be in the north and across the regions, so that they can be the eyes and ears of the northern powerhouse and deliver those vital projects?

Mr Hanson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point, and it is important that the northern powerhouse is not just about the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Tatton. That appears to be the northern powerhouse, but in my view it must be backed up and supported by civil servants, and I support my hon. Friend’s wish to maintain a strong presence in Sheffield and the north. North-east Wales looks to Liverpool and Manchester as much as it does to Cardiff for economic growth and activity, and we need cross-regional support on infrastructure projects, and people on hand to work with that.

Those are my initial observations on important issues, but I wish to focus on the points about prisons that were raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough. He was gracious enough to acknowledge that for two years and one month I was prisons Minister
when he was the shadow Minister, so I hope that I speak with some experience of dealing with what are difficult challenges in the prison system.

In the Gracious Speech the Justice Secretary indicated that there will be a prisons Bill, and I look forward to that—perhaps I may even make a bid for pre-legislative scrutiny by the Justice Committee, on which I sit. The Bill as trailed so far suggests that there will be a lot of discussion about the autonomy of prison governors to consider a range of issues, and six prisons have been identified by the Government to pilot and trial those reforms. We have prisons with “potential for reform”—whatever that might mean—and the potential for new-build prisons. That comes on a day when the Coates review has announced two statistics that put into context the points made by the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough. For example, today’s review shows that 42% of adult prisoners were excluded from school, and 24% of adult prisoners currently in the prison estate spent some or all of their time as young people in care before they reached the prison system.

Long-term, deep-seated issues have been highlighted by the Coates review and need to be examined by the Prison Service as part of the prisons Bill, but that raises some questions. I will not rule out support for the Bill—I do not yet know what my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench will think about it—but we must test what it will mean in practice, and now is as good a time as any to do that. What real autonomous prisons will prison governors have at a local level? Will they have autonomy over pay and conditions? If so, that would be a matter of great concern. Will they have autonomy over procurement, education and employment practices? What autonomy will they have, and how will they exercise them in the Prison Service when the Ministry of Justice in central London is managing the prison population and sector as a whole—the hon. and learned Member for Harborough, mentioned the Justice Committee—on which I sit, and learned Gentleman mentioned many of the pressures on prison population movements.

Who will judge prison governors and monitor their activity? What benchmarks will we set on that prison service, and how will we judge and monitor them? What will be the relationship with the chief inspector of prisons? What outcomes are expected from the six potential reform prisons? How will we judge whether prison governors have made a difference, particularly given that many prisoners in many prisons—I will speak about Wandsworth prison in a moment—have mental health problems or long-standing drug or alcohol problems. Many prisoners had long-standing unemployment problems before being imprisoned, and perhaps do not spend sufficient time in prison to benefit from schemes such as the Timpson scheme in Liverpool, which I had the pleasure of opening in 2006 or 2007 with the brother of the Minister for Children and Families, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Edward Timpson). It is a great scheme—I cannot walk past a Timpson establishment without wondering whether the person working there has been trained and supported by the family and firm.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman speaks with great expertise and eloquence on these issues, about which he knows a great deal. Notwithstanding the correct decision of the previous Labour Government to move to a social investment bond at HMPs Doncaster and Peterborough, in 13 years his Government failed to tackle recidivism among prisoners serving short sentences. Why was that?

Mr Hanson: I do not wish to get into too much of a party-political debate with the hon. Gentleman, but recidivism and reoffending did fall. It did not fall to the extent I would have wanted, but it did fall. The key point is to find employment prospects for those who are in prison, and deal with their drug and alcohol problems. We spent considerable extra resources on drug treatment projects, unemployment, schemes such as the Timpson training academy at Liverpool and other prisons, and on trying to make connections with outside employers. However, there is still a hard cohort of people, and one problem that the current Prison Service will face concerns those who are in prison for more violent offences and have longer sentences. We must consider how to deal with that.

What are the measures on which prison governors will be judged? For example, Wandsworth prison is a category B prison that currently holds 1,877 prisoners. Some 45% of sentenced prisoners currently in Wandsworth are imprisoned for less than one year, and 15% are in for less than three months, 6% for under a month, and 11.9% for less than six months. They will not be in prison for very long or so that a prison governor can make an impact on the recidivism of that prisoner. When the Bill is introduced, the Government need to give real thought to what happens in prisons such as Wandsworth, where 45% of the 54% of sentenced prisoners spend less than a year in prison, and the majority are there for under six months.

How do we judge a prison governor when an individual in that prison has mental health problems, or needs housing or employment outside prison? I worry that the Government are considering setting up a reform project for six prisons, at a time when some of the pressures on prisons are of their own making. For example, when I was prisons Minister, there were 7,000 more prison officers in prisons than there are today. Over six years this Government have reduced the number of officers, and assaults on prison staff have risen by 41%. Incidents of suicide and self-harm in prison have increased, and there are pressures on education and employment services.

One might expect a Labour MP to say those things, but as the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough mentioned, the Justice Committee—on which I sit, and which is ably chaired by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill)—last week produced a report on prison safety. I would like the Government to consider and respond to these points. The report’s conclusions state that “overall levels of safety in prisons are not stabilising as the Ministry of Justice and National Offender Management Service had hoped, let alone improving. This is a matter of great concern, and improvement is urgently needed.” It goes on to state—this is key to today’s Gracious Speech—that “it is imperative that further attention is paid to bringing prisons back under firmer control, reversing the recent trends of escalating violence, self-harm and self-inflicted deaths, without which we firmly believe the implementation of these wider reforms will be severely undermined.”

[Mr Hanson]
There is a real challenge for the Government to consider not just a reform prison programme for the future, but also what needs to be done now. I commend the cross-party report, and I look forward to the Government’s response. It also states that prison staff are not being retained, that recruitment is not matching the number of people who are leaving, and that there are fewer prison officers than are needed for an effective Prison Service. It is not sufficient for the Government just to put their wishes in the Bill and hope to reform prisons. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), knows that, and he needs to work with the Justice Secretary to deliver on those issues.

I intervened on the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) from the Scottish National party on reform of the House of Lords, which we need to look at. The former Deputy Prime Minister and former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), raises his hands in frustration, but many of us wish to change the House of Lords. I say this to the right hon. Gentleman, but it also goes to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron): the spectacle two weeks ago of a hereditary peer place being filled by three votes from the Liberal Democrat Benches filled me with horror.

Tim Farron: The right hon. Gentleman is not the only person who thinks that that was a comical and outrageous spectacle, but does he not realise that his party’s failure goes to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron); the spectacle two weeks ago of a hereditary peer place being filled by three votes from the Liberal Democrat Benches filled me with horror.

Mr Hanson: Let us put that to one side—we can revisit that. [Interruption.] No, I have always voted to abolish the House of Lords. I am simply suggesting that there could be common currency on looking at elements of reform. If the Government are to make changes to the Lords in this Parliament, let us get cross-party consensus on, for example, abolishing hereditary peers. If we do not abolish them, we could stop their elections. My noble Friend Lord Grocott has said that, when a vacancy occurs, we should no longer have elections. This House of Commons is being reduced to 600 Members, yet membership of that House is being increased, and hereditary peers are replaced by an electorate of three—the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale thinks as I do that that is ridiculous—so let us try to make changes.

Mr Jackson: I find myself uncharacteristically agreeing with the right hon. Gentleman—I am speeding on the road to Damascus. My worst vote in the previous Parliament was to oppose House of Lords reform, but let us remember for the record that a ludicrous proposal was put to the House without consensus—the proposal was for one 15-year non-renewable term. That obviously was not acceptable, but there is a basis on both sides of the House for further discussion on House of Lords reform.

Mr Hanson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s support and I agree that it is uncharacteristic for us to agree. Having said that, if the Government are introducing a Bill to change aspects of the House of Lords, let us look at changing aspects of it that are blatantly ridiculous. Hereditary peers are one such aspect. If the Government do not include that in any Bill, I give notice now, for what it is worth, that I will table an amendment to stop that practice and make changes. I am sure that that will put the Government and the business managers in a state of trepidation, but it is worth giving that notice now.

My final point is on Wales. There was no specific mention in the Gracious Speech of the Wales Bill, which was in draft form in the previous Session. It fell apart for a range of reasons that we do not need to go into, but that has caused a vacuum that is yet to be filled.

In the Gracious Speech, the Government say that they will “establish a strong and lasting devolution settlement in Wales.” I do not know whether that means that a Wales Bill will be forthcoming—I hope there will be so we can examine it—but I would be grateful if, in the next five or six days of debate, the Government and the Secretary of State for Wales confirmed that a Wales Bill will be considered in this Session.

Hywel Williams: The wording in the Gracious Speech is ambiguous, but I am given to understand by other channels that the Bill will be simpler and hopefully much better. The previous draft was described by a well respected academic in Wales as the very worst devolution Bill he had ever seen. That was one of the milder comments on the Bill.

Mr Hanson: I look forward to that Bill with excitement, but I want to add one new idea—it is revolutionary in many ways—arising from the recent elections to the National Assembly for Wales. My idea is that people who stand for Assembly elections should be registered to vote in Wales at the time of the nominations.

If I wish to stand for Flint Town Council, I have to live within its boundaries, as I do; if I wish to stand for Flintshire County Council, I have to live or work within its boundaries; if I wish to stand for the UK Parliament, as I have on every occasion since 1983, I have to be registered in the UK to vote; if I want to stand for the European Parliament, the same is true; and if I want to stand for police and crime commissioner in my area, I have to be registered in that area. On 5 May this year, some individuals—I count 21, but there may be more—did not register to vote in Wales and did not live in Wales but were on the ballot paper. Although there are arguments about it, it is worth exploring how an individual gets on the ballot paper when they do not live within that area.

For me, this is not a nationalist argument. My argument is that the arrangements for elections to Flint Town Council, Flintshire County Council, the UK Parliament, police and crime commissioner and the European Parliament are reasonable. A few people stood for the Monster Raving Loony party who lived, for example, in Malpas in Cheshire, Manchester, Ashbourne in Derbyshire, Belper in Derbyshire, London, Kent and Lincolnshire. We had Conservatives who lived in Leicester, the Wirral, Kent and Oswestry, and Liberal Democrats who lived in Northampton. One member of the United Kingdom Independence party, Neil Hamilton, a former Member of this House, lives in Wiltshire and he was elected.
As far as I am aware, he will stay in Wiltshire. Mr Reckless, who also served in this House, recently found a property in Wales prior to standing.

I simply make the point that some of those individuals were elected when they could not have stood for the town council, the county council or Parliament. That does not seem right and I hope the Government consider it as part of their proposals.

Overall, some parts of the speech I welcome, but some parts I will violently oppose. I want explanation of some parts of it, and I want additions to other parts, particularly on hereditary peers and Wales.

6.17 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): It is an honour always to speak in the debate following Her Majesty's Gracious Speech, and today is no exception. We have heard thoughtful speeches from the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), and from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), and it is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson). I was a bit worried by his potentially violent opposition to some of the Bills—perhaps the word “violent” was an exaggeration. He made important points about the northern powerhouse and how north Wales needs to be linked to it. As a Cheshire MP, I feel very strongly about that.

The right hon. Gentleman should be reassured that the Government have a strong commitment to the northern powerhouse. Others have mentioned the movement of a small strategic planning team to Whitehall, but there is a much broader strategic plan of infrastructure devolution and of supporting key industries to ensure that we fundamentally rebalance our economy. That is what I will focus my remarks on.

Macclesfield’s history is as a powerhouse of the silk trade. It is key that we think through our future to play a full part in weaving new economic threads into the northern powerhouse, through the excellence in Macclesfield’s case, in life sciences and astrophysics. Other constituencies have other skills and expertise, whether it is automotive engineering in Crewe and Nantwich, or aerospace or nuclear engineering elsewhere. We need to use those strengths to rebalance the economy, as the Government have ambitiously set out to do. They will be ably assisted in delivering the northern powerhouse by the local growth and jobs Bill, and by the bus services Bill, to name just two of the Bills in the Queen’s Speech, with the enthusiastic support of Government Members, and hopefully of Opposition Members.

There are many reasons to be cheerful in the Queen’s Speech: the education for all Bill for better schools, and how north Wales needs to be linked to it. As a Cheshire MP, I feel very strongly about that.

Last year, I said that this majority Conservative Government had hit the ground running. This year, I am delighted to see that the momentum continues apace. I notice that not all Labour Members are happy when I mention the word momentum—I cannot understand why. Indeed, it is interesting that while we on the Government Benches are taking the agenda forward, determined to be a Government for the 2020s, those on the Labour Benches are driving themselves backwards, determined to be an Opposition fit for the 1980s. That may well be a comfort blanket for them, but it is a great shame for the wasted talent on the Labour Benches.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a very good point. In fairness, having listened to the debate, there are some very thoughtful Labour Members who are making very sensible and constructive points. Is it not a shame that they are all on the Back Benches at the moment, rather than on the Front Bench?

David Rutley: As always, my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is quite interesting that that is the case. Very often, we see an array of talent behind the Labour Front Bench—not on this occasion, of course—who could serve their party better. The key thing to point out, however, is that that is their choice. That is the choice they made. We are making choices in government that will take the nation forward. If they want to take their party backwards, that is up to them.

On the Conservative Benches, we want to focus on priorities that will take the Government and the country forward. We want to focus on rebalancing the economy, improving life chances, achieving aspirations and ambitions for all, and to grasp the nettle of Britain’s long-standing productivity challenge. Politicians across the House rightly want to support and encourage hard-working people and hard-working families. However, productivity in the UK has lagged for decades and has struggled to rebound after the financial crisis. The Government are right to put a greater focus on how the energy of British workers can be better aligned with more productive outcomes.

To their credit, the Government have been clear about the challenge we face. As this ambitious Government know, the continued successful delivery of the long-term economic plan requires an increase in the longer-term trend rate of productivity growth. By working towards a more balanced, open and trading economy, the Government have signalled their intent to leave no stone unturned in ensuring our activity improves our productivity. I therefore welcome the Bills on education for all, and on higher education and research, which will have a positive impact on productivity, and the Bills to improve connectivity in transport and in the digital economy. All those Bills, and the wide range of initiatives being put forward by the Government and set out in the Red Book, will help us to move forward to promote a more dynamic economy and improve productivity. It is this context that highlights the key action being taken on infrastructure projects, not least on railways and not least in the north of England, but also on the roads, with the largest investment since the 1970s.

There will be action on skills, investing to deliver 3 million apprenticeships during this Parliament, building on the 2 million in the previous Parliament. There will be action on science, protecting spending in real terms...
until the end of the decade. The network of catapult centres will be expanded. There will be support for the life sciences, particularly in the Cheshire corridor that I am proud to represent, placing high value-added science, including space science at Jodrell Bank, at the heart of the northern powerhouse.

I particularly welcome the announcement of several Bills that will embrace technological change and seek to keep the United Kingdom at the leading edge of science and technology, not least the modern transport Bill. The Queen’s Speech points to the possibilities and opportunities for commercial space travel, drone technology, driverless cars, and small and micro-satellites. I want the north-west to play its full part in realising for the 21st century many of what were just 20th century science fiction dreams.

We are well placed to build on our superb science base. Look at Jodrell Bank, now home to the world’s largest radio telescope project and permanent host of the international headquarters of the ambitious Square Kilometre Array initiative. To achieve that at Jodrell Bank, the University of Manchester and its supporters, including the Government, had to face down fierce competition from international bids. It is truly a world-class centre of excellence now, just as it has been a centre of excellence for radio astronomy since 1957, as host of the world-famous Lovell telescope.

That excellence extends to life sciences. Nearby Alderley Park, now owned by Manchester Science Partnerships, is home to a medicines technology catapult and leads research into anti-microbial resistance. There is advanced manufacturing at AstraZeneca’s Macclesfield site, with its 3,000 highly skilled staff who are truly local heroes. Their work is vital to our local economy and helps to underpin AstraZeneca’s presence at what is now the UK’s largest pharmaceutical site, one that, incredibly, accounts for 1% of our country’s exported goods.

When the Bills on education for all and on higher education and research are published and debated, I hope we will see clear policy opportunities for supporting science and technology. They will be a key driver of economic opportunity in the north-west and a source of the productivity gains that are not necessarily as evident elsewhere. In Cheshire East, we have among the highest rates of productivity in the country. They are higher than those in Bristol and in Edinburgh, as I am always keen to point out—not that I am competitive or anything. I want to see other parts of the northern powerhouse achieve high productivity levels too. Indeed, the productivity challenge goes hand-in-hand with the Government’s vision for the northern powerhouse. As the Institution of Civil Engineers puts it, effective infrastructure drives growth and supports job creation.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about catapults and productivity. Does he support the Teesside bid for a materials catapult, which would help to drive new steel products, one of our basic industries that could create more jobs in the longer term?

David Rutley: I am not too familiar with the particular catapult the hon. Gentleman talks about, but I believe passionately that we need catapults in place to help us to move forward with technology advancement, certainly in areas where there is transitional change in an industry, such as in Teesside. It is vital that they are located in such areas. He should push hard for that initiative. We need catapults in the north to take us further forward.

The ICE believes passionately that we need to have effective infrastructure to move things further forward. It calls for key enablers to ensure we are successful in our transfer of power from Whitehall to town halls and strategic local partnerships. The priorities are: effective local leadership, fiscal devolution and devolved infrastructure strategies. The Queen’s Speech makes provision for all three, not least—but not only—in the local growth and jobs Bill.

There are measures for transport improvements in the north, for example with the publication of a bus services Bill. I look forward to bus and coach transport playing its full part in Transport for the North’s strategic improvements to physical connectivity in the northern powerhouse, with plans for smart ticketing across the north. We need to work on seamless journeys from train to bus to tram. Buses should also be remembered in the ambitious plans for a trans-Pennine tunnel. There is a great need for connectivity in other areas, in particular broadband. That is what makes the digital economy Bill in the Queen’s Speech so welcome.

For me and for the Government, enterprise is not just about increased productivity. Just as crucially, it is about social mobility and enhanced life chances in Macclesfield, in the northern powerhouse and across the country. Life chances featured prominently in Her Majesty’s speech today. I want to ensure that we enable more young people to achieve what I call the four Es of the enterprise economy: entrepreneurs, employers, exporters and employees. We need to help more people to achieve their ambitions, ambitions that may never have been achieved before in their families. I believe the Bills set out in the Queen’s Speech—the children and social work Bill, the education for all Bill, the prison and courts reform Bill and the lifetime savings Bill—will help us to make sure, as a one nation Government, that we leave no one behind.

The Queen’s Speech shows that the Government have a full agenda extending well beyond the EU referendum debate, which many of us are involved in. That said, I believe that opportunities to deliver on productivity, to strengthen our position in life sciences, and science more generally, and to build on the northern powerhouse will be best served by a vote to remain. Coming to that decision was not easy—there are legitimate arguments on both sides of the debate—but for me the economic arguments for staying part of the EU, particularly the single market, have been the main factors in helping me to make this decision.

Prior to becoming an MP, I worked for 20 years as a senior executive with companies such as PepsiCo International and Asda Walmart.

Alex Cunningham: The northern powerhouse Minister himself is on the leave side in the EU campaign. The hon. Gentleman has made a great case for the north—for infrastructure, transport and education—but we are seeing a shift of investment from the north to the south and a great concentration in London and the south-east. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the northern powerhouse could be much more than the slogan it is if there was a fairer distribution of the investment moneys available to local government?
**David Rutley:** The northern powerhouse is not a slogan; it is a clear, strategically thought through narrative for the north and a concept supported on both sides of the House, but we want to take these initiatives further forward. It is not a slogan but a clear set of strategies around devolution, supporting key industries and taking forward infrastructure initiatives. We have taken those forward and that narrative goes far wider and is far better thought through than anything—again, I do not want to be party political but the hon. Gentleman raised the point—proposed under the previous Labour Government. In fact, Peter Mandelson himself said that the Labour party missed a trick on these issues. I think that that is the case. Given, however, that the hon. Gentleman is so keen on the issue, I am sure he will join the Government in helping to take forward these Bills, which will enable us to achieve our ambitions for the north.

I wish to return briefly to my reasons for siding with the remain campaign. As I said, the choice was finely balanced, but I believe that there will be more opportunities to export if we remain. Export opportunities outside the EU are obviously important and the north-west would be able to realise some of those initiatives and opportunities outside the EU, but let us bear it in mind that more than 50% of the region's exports go to the EU. We need not only to seek to extend our global reach but to secure and strongly underpin our access to the single market. It is in our economic interest so to do.

This long-term Government have once again built on their long-term agenda for long-term success. I welcome the Bills in the Queen's Speech that will consolidate our long-term economic plan, boost productivity, enhance life chances and add fresh momentum to the exciting development of the northern powerhouse. That is why I commend the speech to the House.

6.33 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I start by commending the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) for the grace and humour with which they moved and seconded the Humble Address. These occasions can show the House at its best and worst, and I think we would all agree that their speeches were examples of the former. As the Prime Minister did, I also pay tribute to Harry Harpham and Michael Meacher, whose contributions here are very sadly missed.

I hope you will permit me, Mr Speaker, also to remember our former colleague, David Rendel, who has died in the last couple of days and whose by-election victory in 1993 was transformational for our party's fortunes. Those of us who knew him will remember his absolutely phenomenal hard work for the constituency of Newbury, which he continued long after he ceased to be its MP. We will also remember his dignity, decency and grace to so many people, whatever their background or political persuasion. He will be sadly missed by many of us, and we wish to send our condolences to all his family at this desperately sad time.

I was most excited to learn that the modern transport Bill will enable the development of the UK's first commercial spaceport, not least because it means that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) will be able to go home more often. Despite the opening line of today's speech, there is no “strengthening economy”. Economic growth has slowed, construction output has fallen, the CBI has downgraded its forecast, sterling has plummeted and foreign investment is collapsing. This is the first time in six years that the Queen's Speech has not mentioned the deficit, so where has the Government's credibility gone and where is the long-term plan? The Liberal Democrats helped the Chancellor to balance the books, but the backward steps in the last 12 months are entirely of the Government's own making: a Budget with a £7.5 billion black hole, a colossal, self-inflicted constraint on public spending and a referendum born of internal Tory management threatening our country with economic instability. Instead of looking at the politically difficult situation immediately in front of them, Ministers should have been looking to the future. There were some futuristic ideas in today's speech, but while driverless cars point the way to the future, a driverless Government do not. It could have been a speech for the next generation, but sadly it was a speech devoid of vision.

The Liberal Democrats will not follow the Leader of the Opposition in simply reading out an extraordinarily lengthy list of criticisms of the Queen's Speech; we will be constructive and propose alternatives. Let me, therefore, offer the Conservative party a vision for an ambitious, modern, liberal Britain that celebrates all of Britain's communities, fights for equality of opportunities and delivers future prosperity through world-class education, creativity and innovation. It is through education that we can give the biggest boost to people's life chances: it sits right at the heart of what Liberal Democrats stand for; it is the key to freedom and opportunity for all, not just some; it is the essential investment. We are concerned that the curriculum focuses too much on meeting targets and passing exams, rather than giving children the practical skills, confidence and creativity they need to meet the challenges of the future economy.

The Government's policies are only making things worse. Teachers are demoralised and school budgets are stretched to breaking point. Children are missing out, as subjects such as music, art and sport are cut. So let us use our opportunity here to make a difference and leave a lasting legacy for future generations: an education system where everyone can aspire to be the best they can be; an innovative economy powering us through the 21st century; a properly funded NHS; properly funded social care and mental health services; a commitment to desperate refugees fleeing violence and terror and begging for our help; radical plans to make our country carbon neutral by 2050; investment in skills; and an ambitious plan for housing that builds homes that are genuinely affordable.

Furthermore, rather than tinkering with Parliament, let us replace the other place with a fully elected second Chamber, as the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) pointed out moments ago. Governments sometimes get tired and clapped out and run out of ideas, but it usually takes 12 years, not 12 months. This programme is so sparse and vacuous it is positively Blairite, which is probably why the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) was so opposed to it.

**Mr Jackson:** I admire the hon. Gentleman's chutzpah, but it is ironic that the 100 or more Liberal Democrat peers, completely unelected and unaccountable, are
disregarding the Salisbury convention and the legislative precedent of the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 and circumventing the programme of this elected Government, which we won a mandate for last May.

**Tim Farron:** The hon. Gentleman earlier described himself as a convert to reform of the House of Lords. It is a pity he was not so in the last Parliament, when we could have done something about it. I will not take any lectures from him on Lords reform, given that the Liberal Democrats are the only people who have doggedly stuck with it for the best part of a century. We do not agree with first past the post for this place, but we still stand. It is the system we have, and rather than take notice of an old convention between two establishment parties, I will take the side of the people, and if we can stop tax credit cuts by using the other place, we will jolly well use it, and if he wants to reform the House of Lords, we will be with him in the Lobbies. We heard the Leader of the Opposition’s response earlier on. I worked out that it lasted 30 seconds longer than the entirety of “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band”, the album by The Beatles. He did not take any interventions from either the Government Benches or from those behind him. Maybe he was scared of a little help from his friends.

With this utterly threadbare Queen’s Speech, it seems as though the Government are running out of steam before anyone has even bothered to fill the kettle. Of the 30 announcements in the Government’s legislative agenda, we have heard 28 of them before. I am especially delighted that the Government have announced the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill, which has been waiting to get on the statute book since December 1954. It would be easy for Opposition politicians to stand up and say everything is terrible, but it is not, so I will not. I welcome the better markets Bill, for example, just as I did when Ed Davey announced it two years ago, as well as the criminal finances Bill announced by Danny Alexander in February last year, the national citizen service piloted by the coalition in 2011, the pensions Bill announced by Steve Webb in 2014, the soft drinks levy announced in the Budget and the commitment to build 1 million homes, as featured in last year’s Queen’s Speech. Just in case we did not hear them the first time, they clearly needed to be said twice.

The Prime Minister has my support on much of what he says about boosting education in prisons, adoption and transparency on mobile phone and broadband speeds, although a universal service obligation for broadband, for which I have been calling for many years, will only be any good if the speed designated is quick enough to help rural communities in particular. I understand that 10 megabits per second is being talked about. A 10-megabits-per-second download speed probably means a 1-meg upload speed, and that is no good for rural communities or business. But mostly, this is a Queen’s Speech with more repeats than ITV3—more repeats, indeed, than Dave. The higher education Bill was in November’s Green Paper. The education Bill has already been a White Paper. Broadband was announced last November. The NHS charges are already happening.

The right hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) mentioned the Government’s obvious mapping of the Human Rights Act, an idea that has now made its third appearance in the Queen’s Speech. He said it was akin to a demented moth flitting about a lampshade. I wonder whether I can stretch his analogy and say that now is the time we got a nice big copy of “Erskine May” and squashed that moth. The Human Rights Act enshrines fundamental liberties such as the right to free speech, protest and assembly, and the right to live a life free of torture. Which of those freedoms does the Conservative party want to oppose? The devolved settlements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have the European convention and the Human Rights Act hardwired into them. This Tory Government seem obsessed with unravelling the Union by their actions, all for the sake of appeasing their Back Benchers.

**Sammy Wilson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that human rights legislation has been used to protect some of the worst criminals and allow them to walk the streets, which has angered many people across the United Kingdom? That is why it needs reform.

**Tim Farron:** There will always be outcomes that displease people. If there is a process of adjudicating against the Human Rights Act, it is right that it should be left to the judiciary. It is wrong for politicians to meddle, because the reality is that for every person we read about on the front page of a tabloid newspaper having been exonerated in some way because of the Human Rights Act in a way that people would perhaps disagree with, there are hundreds upon hundreds of less glamorous cases, which we never hear of and which nobody writes about, involving people who have been protected by the Human Rights Act. Let us ask ourselves this question: when we stand up to Vladimir Putin and others who threaten human rights in their own countries and others, what leg do we have to stand on if we undermine human rights here at home? The Government should ditch these ill-thought-out plans or risk them falling flat on their face when they are introduced in Parliament.

**Mr Jackson:** It seems to me that those advocating against reform of human rights in this country want to have it both ways. Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that we have the Human Rights Act by leave of this House. When the House votes, as it did in October 2011, by 228 to 22 on prisoner voting rights—when the sovereign Parliament of this country has made a decision, notwithstanding the decisions of a supranational legal entity—does that not mean anything to the hon. Gentleman?

**Tim Farron:** First, that is not in the Human Rights Act. Secondly, the critical thing in all of this is that, whatever one’s position on the European Union, the reality is that in this world we all pool our sovereignty, whether it is in the European Union, or through an international court, the United Nations, NATO or what-have-you. The question is, what is the purpose of pooling that sovereignty? In this case, it is about us saying that we are part of an international community that puts human rights at the centre of everything we do. We must not forget that people fought and died in two world wars in the 20th century to enshrine and defend the concept of human rights. It is not for us to decide to put a line around ourselves and say that our human rights are of a lesser standard to somebody else’s. Our human rights are shared because we are all human, not just because we are British.
Beyond the Human Rights Act, we have the snooper's charter, which apparently refuses to go away—another repeat introduction. This should be its final outing. It must be dropped once and for all. We all want a Bill that keeps us safe and keeps the Government in check, but trying to fight terrorists by gathering more and more irrelevant information is a losing battle. Access to Facebook messages, medical records or even a child's baby monitor is completely the wrong approach. The Government must reconsider.

The Liberal Democrats will take no lessons in liberalism from a Prime Minister who has tried to bring forward the most intrusive snooping legislation in the western world. He is absolutely no liberal, and when he is attacked by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) for advantaging State for Health and his Ministers, for finding a way forward—drivers operate the doors and everything else, although there may be other staff on the train.

This Queen's Speech did nothing to address the key issues at stake; it was just re-runs and repeats. An opportunity to put forward a radical, new, invigorating, innovative, creative and ambitious programme for Government has been missed.

6.47 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The first reference I want to make to a referendum is to the words of Dr Johann Malawana, the junior doctors' leader, who has said he is going to put forward the agreed proposals from ACAS in the referendum for junior doctors, hoping that they will agree them.

I pay tribute to Sir Brendan Barber of ACAS, to the British Medical Association leaders and to the national health service employers, together with the Secretary of State for Health and his Ministers, for finding a way forward that will be good and better for doctors in training and for patients, and that will help to make the national health service work in a way that people want it to. It will not abolish all the problems, but it is a great way forward.

As I understand it, some of the adaptations that have come forward during the last 10 days' negotiation will be even better for doctors who have caring responsibilities. It seems to me that we lost sight of that in the years since my wife was Secretary of State for Health. It is a good idea if people can become fully qualified no matter what their caring responsibilities are at any one time. If they have had to hold back because of taking time out, they could then come forward and catch up with the rest. I pay tribute to that.

I will not say much more about the referendum coming up on 23 June because, as I have tried to explain to some of my people before we start having meetings about it, it is not a clash between two things in total. If we come out, we will still almost certainly be part of the Common Market, and we will almost certainly be contributing our money and having free movement of labour. If we stay in, we will not be proposing to join the euro or the Schengen area, so it is a question of how we move forward.

On balance, my personal view—I agree with the majority of the population about this—is that it is better to stay in and to help Europe to do things that are good for Europe and good for us, rather than saying that we are concerned about only ourselves, not our near neighbours.

I shall speak about general issues facing Members of Parliament. I look on being a Back Bencher—that was the reason I came into Parliament; I did not come in to try to become a Minister or a Cabinet Minister—as rather like being a general practitioner in politics. A large aspect of that is trying to reduce avoidable disadvantage, distress and handicap, and to improve wellbeing—it is a mixture of wealth and welfare. What really matter are such issues as getting better education and training, and a better start in family life, and getting better support for those whose families go through deformation and reformation.

The role also involves looking at issues of the day with two eyes. I represent junior doctors and their patients. I also represent rail workers and rail travellers. To those involved in the disputes in the Southern and Govia Thameslink rail services at the moment, I see no reason to justify the interruption to services, whether that be through organised sickness absence or strikes.

Many people who have caring responsibilities, and the many people travelling on the railways whose jobs bring in less than rail workers, need a reliable service. This is a public service. Obviously, some issues can be so great that they justify a strike, but the fact is that about 40% of Southern services are driver controlled all the way through—drivers operate the doors and everything else, although there may be other staff on the train. Moving further on that approach is not a convincing reason to justify an all-out strike.

Sometimes I suspect operators do not use the right language. If they propose that ticket office staff should be operating in a ticket office without walls, that would be a better way of putting it than saying that they are going to close ticket offices during certain hours of the day. They need to find the language, as Sir Brendan Barber and his team have with ACAS, that will allow people to come together and find out what they can do together that will be good for those they serve, as well as for themselves.

Let me turn to other issues that come up for Back Benchers. I pick up causes, one of which came about as a result of an incident in my constituency regarding leasehold, when some elderly, frail and poor people...
found themselves paying for something they should not have paid for. They tried to go to the lower-level property tribunal, but found that those representing the freeholders managed to spin the issue between different courts, keeping the case away from low-cost dispute resolution. With the help of the Bar pro bono unit, it took one barrister one day to cut through all that, and my elderly people were paid a rebate of £70,000 without further court action.

That case led me to meet people in Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, now a charity, which was created, and is mainly supported and led, by Martin Boyd and Sebastian O’Kelly, who I think give more advice to more leaseholders in trouble than most people who do the same thing professionally—and they do it without pay. What they have achieved is remarkable.

We need to respond by making sure that Parliament recognises the 6 million residential leaseholders in this country, who can often find themselves exploited. Why is it that people who buy a retirement flat find that when they try to sell it, or their executors do so after they have died, it is worth so much less? There is something wrong with the system. As it happens, the Chancellor loses out because lower property values mean that less is obtained through stamp duty when new buyers come in.

Another problem is caused by court-created law. I cannot explain this issue off the cuff because it goes beyond me, but I can refer to a recent upper tribunal lands chamber decision, whose neutral citation number for 2016 is UKUT 0223 (LC), case Nos. LRA 20, 21 and 35/2015. The case was between the trustees of the Sloane Stanley estate and Adrian Howard Mundy; between the trustees of the Sloane Stanley estate and Arnaud Lagesse; and between Sophie Nathalie Jeanne Aaron and the Wellcome Trust Ltd. A decision of 160-odd clauses was reached about the value that applies when people are trying to get a leasehold extension.

We all know that George Thomas—Lord Tonypandy—a former Speaker, came to public notice when he fought for leasehold rights for south Wales residents. We now need to do the same thing again. As I understand it, the judgment has transformed the valuations of expiring leases. No consideration was undertaken in Parliament, yet this upturns what was believed to be the way to approach these valuations for the last 10 years, so it is time that we got Departments—whether that is the Ministry of Justice or the Department for Communities and Local Government—to come together and, perhaps after putting it before a Select Committee first, assess whether Parliament needs to take formal action on this issue. Otherwise, we are letting a judgment go forward without the attention of the potential auctioneers or the potential purchasers of what those buying it will be letting themselves in for.

Returning to the Martin Paine issue, it applies where a young person or couple buy a low-valued flat and have the lease checked by their lawyers, but later on discover that Martin Paine has informally rewritten the terms of the lease—extending it but, for example, doubling the ground rent every 10 years. That situation might be difficult in itself, but the greatest difficulty comes from the way the lease is written, as lawyers do not normally spot that the ground rent has been doubled back to the time when the lease was originally granted.

Let us say the lease was originally granted in 1959. The first ground rent demand could be not the expected £15 but, say, £2,000. That would mean that the rent would increase to £4,000 in 10 years’ time, and then later to £8,000, £16,000 and so on, so the flat becomes worthless. I understand that if enough fuss is made or enough publicity issued, Martin Paine will offer to buy the property back. He sometimes appears to remark it without drawing the attention of the potential auctioneers or the potential purchasers of what those buying it will be letting themselves in for.

It is not for me to judge whether that is criminal, but doing this on an organised basis certainly demands attention. I ask the Competition and Markets Authority, the Office of Fair Trading or the police to check this and stop it. I warn the solicitors that their indemnity societies mean that they should be looking to see why this is going on.

I could provide a number of other examples that I would not suggest are necessarily criminal, but they are certainly odd. I mention embedded management companies, and I would ask some of the major developers to check whether there are clauses in their leasehold agreements that make clear the right of leaseholders to come together to buy their properties or to take over the management company. They need to make sure they are effective, and if they are defective, they should be made to put it right at their own cost. We should not ask the victims to pay all the costs and take all the risks—especially of going to court—to get things put right.

Let me turn briefly to medical cases. I shall shortly meet two of the people I most admire in the medical world. One is Dr Kim Holt, who suffered persecution by her trust when she warned about the baby P case, before it acknowledged that it did not have the right staffing. The other is Dr Peter Wilmshurst, who had to face a crooked company that threatened him with defamation when he pointed out that its research was wrong. There are other examples.

I am waiting for the result of an Manchester employment tribunal case involving Mr Aditya Agrawal. I shall make no further comment, because we have not yet seen the result, but when it comes out, I hope to ask Mr Speaker whether we can have a debate on why the hospital trust had had over 100 confidentiality agreements over the last five years—and a compromise agreement that is a secret as well. This is the sort of pattern that we should not have in our national health service.

Then there is the police and the case of Gurpal Virdi. He is still waiting for the police to accept his case when they prosecuted him for a week and a half unsuccessfully—it was obviously going to be unsuccessful—in Southwark Crown court, when he was said to have assaulted somebody 28 years ago.

The police did not interview the officer recorded as arresting the complainant. When Mr Virdi arrested the
complainant six months later, the police did not interview the officer with him, who could have given evidence about the relationship, if any, between the complainant and the police officer.

Our job in Parliament is to stand up, without making wild accusations, and to be persistent about issues until either the law or practice changes. Anyone in our constituencies who feels they have suffered an injustice should be told, “Do come to a Member of Parliament or a caseworker, and if it is serious and if it matters, we will work at it.” We may not always be successful, but it is our duty to try to help.

6.59 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Let me, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, echo the expressions of gratitude to the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) for proposing and seconding the Gracious Speech. I am sure that they do not expect any media or press coverage of their speeches, and I am sure that none of us who are left in the House at this stage expect that either. The part has already been taken, and is always taken in these proceedings, by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), who gets in early and is therefore guaranteed a prime spot.

It is indeed a pleasure to take part in the debate. As was mentioned earlier, this was the 65th Gracious Speech made by Her Majesty the Queen. I am sure that, as ever, others will point out on her behalf that she is not responsible for the contents of any of her speeches, but given that she recently celebrated her 90th birthday, it was a remarkable achievement. Once again, we pay tribute to Her Majesty for her long service to this country of ours.

I want to deal with a couple of general issues that affect the United Kingdom as a whole before turning to issues affecting Northern Ireland, which was referred to in the Gracious Speech. Let me begin by talking about the security of our country. Security is one of the most important issues facing any nation today. Given the uncertain world in which we live and all the threats that are out there, this is probably one of the most dangerous times in our history, so I am pleased to note that the Government have once again committed themselves to meeting the NATO defence expenditure target of 2% of national income.

Unless we step up to the plate, along with our partners in NATO and other international partners, we will simply fall further and further behind when it comes to protecting our citizens. Currently, five members of NATO meet the 2% threshold: the UK, the United States—which pays three quarters of the NATO bill—and only three other European countries, Poland, Estonia and Greece. That points to a very important fact. As we consider the Brexit debate, and the importance of partnership with our European neighbours and other countries in the context of Europe, I sometimes feel that the United Kingdom’s contribution to international aid, the defence of Europe and, indeed, the defence of western values is taken for granted, and that other countries that speak a great deal about the need to be part of the European Union fall down in that respect. Big countries that talk a lot about the need for European solidarity do not exhibit the same solidarity and commitment when it comes to the defence of Europe and of western democracy.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who is indeed a friend of mine, for allowing me to intervene. When he and I were in the United States last week, it came to our notice that many NATO members are paying only one quarter of what American citizens are paying to defend their own country. That is shameful. We really must encourage NATO members—particularly those further east—to pull their finger out.

Mr Dodds: As members of the NATO parliamentary assembly, the hon. Gentleman and I participated in meetings with our American colleagues to discuss that very issue. I look forward to the NATO summit that will take place in the summer, and to seeing other countries contribute more to defence spending and defence budgets. Unless more is done, we shall be in danger of seeing, particularly in the United States, growing support for those like Donald Trump who ask, “Why should we pay the bill when people in Europe are not prepared to make a contribution that is modest in comparison with ours?”

I welcome the Government’s commitment to bringing forward the decision on the UK’s nuclear deterrent, which needs to be made soon. My colleagues and I will certainly support a decision to seek renewal of that deterrent. In the context of security and the military, our party and I also welcome the commitment to full implementation of the military covenant. In a year that marks the centenary of the battle of the Somme, and in view of all the more recent conflicts in which men and women from Northern Ireland have served in great numbers and with great gallantry and courage, the military covenant is more salient than ever, and we in Northern Ireland want to see it implemented in full in our part of the kingdom as well as elsewhere.

There are issues with which we in Northern Ireland are grappling. We look forward to continuing engagement with the Prime Minister and the Government with a view to ensuring that where there are gaps—through no fault of ours—they can be filled by action either here at Westminster or in Northern Ireland. We need to ensure that none of our brave men and women who have served in the armed forces miss out on entitlements that they are given, as of right, in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Strong views have been expressed about the introduction of a British Bill of Rights on this side of the House—although, I hasten to add, not on the behalf of my party—and equally robust remarks have been made by Conservative Members. I think it worth reminding the House that that was a manifesto commitment on which the current Government were elected. I find it somewhat odd to hear Government Back Benchers decry it and describe it as terrible, given that they stood for election on the basis of a manifesto that explicitly included that commitment.

My view is simple. As I understand it, we are not talking about the withdrawal of this country from the European convention on human rights; we are talking about an assertion by the House that the final arbiter in decision making will be this sovereign Parliament. We are saying that this sovereign Parliament cannot be overridden,
especially when it comes to decisions that are clearly and utterly opposed by the vast bulk of the people of the United Kingdom, not on a party political basis but across the board. We are talking about the reversion of a bit of common sense into the issue of human rights.

We shall want to discuss further with the Government the modernisation of the law governing the use and oversight of investigatory powers by the police and others. Given our background in Northern Ireland, we are all too well aware of the importance of enabling the security forces to tackle terrorism and deal with other threats that emerge out there. We know that the law has not always been able to keep up with the advancement of the digital age, the internet and so on, and we are keen to ensure that the security forces are not deprived of any useful and necessary tool that they may require to combat terrorism. However, it is clear that we need adequate safeguards, and we need to be careful about the extent to which outside bodies and third parties are able to access information and data. As I have said, we will discuss the issue further with the Government when the legislation is introduced, but we are concerned about the range of organisations that may be given access to information and data. We are in favour of the principle, but we need to look at the details very carefully.

In the context of legislation to prevent radicalisation and tackle extremism, I thought that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) made important and pertinent points about the balance between tolerance and intolerance. It is important for us to tackle intolerance, but, as a number of Members have said, we need to be able to judge when we have overreached the point at which it is a question of tackling extremism on the one hand and denying free speech on the other. We have to be very careful that we do not end up in a situation where there is an accepted norm, an accepted expression of views, and anyone who deviates from the accepted politically correct norm is seen to be an extremist. If we do not deal with the matter carefully, we will go down a worrying and dangerous path. Again, we will give the proposals serious consideration. We do not disagree at all with the main aim of the Government. We support it, but we need to see details of how the proposals will operate before we can give them total support.

Many of the Members who have spoken have referred to the EU referendum. I am on record as saying that the Government’s ability to govern is somewhat hampered at the minute by their concentration entirely on the referendum. I welcome the fact that we are having a referendum. It was an issue that I and colleagues pushed strongly for many years. We wanted a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, which unfortunately was denied to us by the Labour Government, and then the cast-iron guarantee of the incoming Government was not followed through.

On the referendum and Brexit, there are arguments on both sides, but it is dangerous in the context of Northern Ireland for people to go around saying that if we leave the EU that will result in violence coming back to Northern Ireland, and a destabilisation of the political institutions to the extent that we will have trouble on the streets again. All these “leading economists”—99% of whom did not predict the biggest single economic shock of the past 150 years—tell us that leaving will lead to a united Ireland, trying to scare people in the most outrageous way. In the debate on Brexit and Northern Ireland, I appeal to people to use careful and considered arguments and not to engage in that kind of language because whatever the outcome of the referendum, I am convinced that Northern Ireland’s political institutions will endure. They have come through far worse than this and they will be stable. It is important to put that on the record.

The Gracious Speech talks about support for “implementing the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements.” I welcome that. Those agreements were forged primarily at the direction and the behest of the Democratic Unionist party, along with others. I pay tribute to our former leader and First Minister, Peter Robinson, who did an enormous amount of excellent work to bring those agreements about. I also pay tribute to the other parties that stuck the course and finalised those agreements, as well as the Government, particularly the current Secretary of State.

There have unfortunately been a number of setbacks on the security front. We have seen the elevation of the security risk in recent days. There is a more serious risk of attack on the British mainland by dissident republicans. Just yesterday, we had a significant find of arms and ammunition in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). In my constituency, we had the tragic and awful murder of a young father, Michael McGibbon, who was killed in the most atrocious circumstances. Again, I pay tribute to his widow, who has spoken eloquently about peace and moving forward in Northern Ireland and has spoken out against paramilitarism. In the implementation of the Stormont House and Fresh Start agreements, one of the key elements is the combating of paramilitarism.

On the negotiations to set up a new Northern Ireland Executive, we had elections just last week, and I am glad to say that our party was returned with an overwhelming mandate to be the leaders of the Executive. Last week, Arlene Foster, our new First Minister, was elected, along with Martin McGuinness as Deputy First Minister. Issues such as paramilitarism and violence have bedevilled Northern Ireland in the past and are still being pursued by a tiny minority of people on both sides of the community. It is important, as we set out on another Assembly term, that we continue to forge ahead and demonstrate to people in Northern Ireland that politics is working—and it is, as the Assembly elections last week showed. We are now moving into the third full term of uninterrupted devolved government—cross-community partnership government—in Northern Ireland. That is an enormous achievement, but the message must go out that, in implementing the Fresh Start and the Stormont House agreements, with the support of the Government here, the people who want to drag us back and inflict violence and darkness on many people in their communities will not succeed.

We are determined in Northern Ireland, with the new Executive being set up, to major on the issues of health, education, jobs, infrastructure and keeping household bills down. That is what our five-point plan was about. That is what the election was about. It is important that we spend the next five years in Northern Ireland making sure that that happens.

There are some people who unfortunately have decided to walk away from government in Northern Ireland. It is said that the Ulster Unionists have decided, albeit after a poor election result, the worst in their history, not to take their seat in the Executive. It is sad that the
Social Democratic and Labour party is debating whether to take its seat in the Executive. However, I believe that the people of Northern Ireland want an inclusive Government. They want leaders who will stand up and take Northern Ireland forward. If others are not prepared to grapple with that task and to take on the mantle of leadership, we and others who stand with us will not be found wanting.

7.16 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) and I agreed with everything he said.

The state opening of Parliament serves as a timely reminder to all of us of just how fortunate we are to have a monarchy, rather than a presidency, and how well we are served by Her Majesty the Queen. She is above party politics and we all rejoice in that fact. It also serves as a timely reminder of how hard fought democracy is. That is why it is such a tragedy that there continues to be a low turnout in our local elections, and in our elections for police and crime commissioners. I just hope that there will be a big turnout for the referendum on 23 June.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on the splendid way in which they proposed and seconded the motion. Their speeches were thoughtful, measured and struck the right chord with the House. It was a big event for both those colleagues and I congratulate them on how they fulfilled their duties today. There was also a contest between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I would simply say that I thought that the Prime Minister won that contest by a short head.

A number of comments have been made about the Gracious Speech being rather thin. I am not at all surprised that it is somewhat cautious. Just a year ago, we assembled in this place following the general election. If we believed all the pundits, it was a surprise that a Conservative Government with a majority were elected. If we believed all the pundits, it was a surprise that if they want to get their prisons more efficiently and professionally. This is a positive step. I know that some people might say, “Oh, dear, this is a step towards privatisation and there have been one or two glitches along the way”, but this is a measure that the House should support.

I am proud to have a Government delivering security for working people, increasing life chances for the most disadvantaged and strengthening our national defences. I am glad that the Government will continue to ensure that the public finances are kept under control so that Britain can live within its means and invest in the infrastructure that business needs. I am also delighted to tell the House that, according to the latest Government statistics, the number of unemployed people in the constituency that I represent has fallen to 754 and the claimant rate is down to 1.7%.

I welcome the legislation that will allow local authorities to retain business rates. We have not had the full details yet, but I would have thought that all businesses would welcome that, as those in Southend West will certainly do. This will provide more freedom to invest in local communities. I very much hope that, at a council meeting tomorrow night, it will be agreed that we will act quickly to ensure that we have a minority Conservative council in Southend under the excellent leadership of Councillor John Lamb.

I am also pleased that the Government will support aspiration and promote home ownership through their commitment to building 1 million new homes. This will ensure that Britain is a strong property-owning democracy. Unfortunately, I do not think many of those properties could be built in the constituency that I represent. Unless we are going to build on our parks, there is just no room for any building in the constituency. However, I dare say that many of my colleagues will be delighted with the announcement.

Conservatives are often portrayed as being in favour of hanging and flogging and wanting the most severe punishment for criminals. I was rather taken by the speech by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) on prison reform, and I certainly welcome the measures in the Gracious Speech on that matter. I served on the Health Select Committee for 10 years, during which time we visited a number of prisons, which was rather depressing. I have been most influenced in this regard by my former colleague and very good friend, Ann Widdecombe, who was the Minister with responsibility for prisons. Unlike my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough, she actually visited every one of the 140 prisons in this country; she was determined to do so. There were some tricky occasions, but after she had done her tour, she left me in no doubt that our prisons needed reform. However, no Government have tackled this issue until now.

It is absolutely right that we should protect British citizens from dangerous criminals, but sending people to prison and teaching them how to commit further crimes is crazy. It is also crazy to send people to prison so that they can fuel their drug addiction. The purpose of prison should be to turn people’s lives around. I therefore support the idea in the Gracious Speech that prison governors should be given greater independence in their own operations and management. I support freeing prison governors working in the public sector from centralised state control to enable them to run their prisons more efficiently and professionally. This is a positive step. I know that some people might say, “Oh dear, this is a step towards privatisation and there have been one or two glitches along the way”, but this is a measure that the House should support.

I particularly welcome the rules on sanctions relating to how long inmates can spend outside their cells. One of my constituents recently had a terrible experience. He was affected by a breakdown in communication in prison following a request for compassionate leave to attend his mother’s funeral. He was a low-category prisoner but through a terrible miscommunication he was unable to attend the funeral. Things like that just should not happen.

These measures are also much needed in the light of the concerns raised by the Chairman of the Justice Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), which we have heard a lot about this afternoon. The Committee’s report has described an escalation in prison violence, disorder,
I absolutely rejoice that we are having a referendum on the EU. I voted no in 1975 because I did not want a united states of Europe with one Government and one currency, and I am even more convinced now that we should leave the European Union. I shall deal with my reasons a little later in my speech.

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree. I am relieved to tell the House that there was no arsenic in the water that I have just drunk: I am still standing.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I very much agree with where my hon. Friend is coming from on the British Bill of Rights. Does he agree that it was particularly absurd for the Liberal Democrats to talk about the major parties at the time of the 1911 Salisbury convention when they were of course one of those major parties, in their previous incarnation as the Liberal party? On the Bill of Rights, does my hon. Friend not think it absurd that the famous ruling in which this House was overruled on the question of votes for prisoners was presided over by a Russian judge?

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree. I am relieved to tell the House that there was no arsenic in the water that I have just drunk: I am still standing.

I welcome the adoption Bill. It is much needed to give children in care the chance to be adopted by new families. I pay tribute to our hon. Friend the Minister for Children and Families. Reform is necessary to improve the standard of social work and opportunities for young people in care in England. I am sure that the provision for joint arrangements for carrying out local authority adoption functions in England will serve Southend Borough Council’s adoption and fostering service well. I have any number of constituents who want to foster and adopt children. The Government are right to tackle poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability.

I am a former vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on childhood obesity and I will be interested to see how the tax on soft drinks works in practice. It is a step in the right direction. I hope we can reduce the 19.1% of children aged 10 to 11 who are obese in the UK. When I was on the Health Committee, on which I served for 10 years, the inquiry into obesity was my idea and a number of colleagues in the House served on that, but I got frustrated because, although we produced a wonderful report, we could not get joined-up Government thinking, we could not get the supermarkets to agree to the traffic light proposal, and we could not
get the food and drink manufacturers to agree to use less sugar, salt and fat in the products that we eat and drink, so I am slightly sceptical about how the proposal will work out, but I wish it well.

I welcome the higher education Bill. I very much approve of the Government’s proposals to ensure that universities provide value for money, reward high-quality teaching and encourage diversity and choice for students. I further welcome the ranking of universities to determine whether they are eligible to raise tuition fees or not. I commend the creation of a new regulator, the office for students, and the introduction of the teaching excellence framework, which will make it fairer for students to choose which university is best for them, and will monitor the performance of universities as well. As the Bill will allow new universities to open, I hope consideration will be given to granting such status to South Essex College Southend Campus, which was recognised as providing one of the most innovative and exciting learning and working environments in the country. Many of my constituents are enrolled as students there.

I know that what I am about to say will upset Scottish National party Members. I firmly support the Government’s determination to keep our nuclear deterrent. At a time when the world as a whole is pretty unstable, it would be madness not to renew Trident so I am glad to see that in the Queen’s Speech.

I was glad to see mention of climate change. I have the honour of being chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the Maldives. Anyone who travels there can see the serious effect of climate change on that country. A few years ago its President held a famous Cabinet meeting underwater.

On the transport Bill, I am in favour of the Government promoting electric cars. I am told that we have a new electric connector in Derby Gate, which I understand two or three of our colleagues will use. Electric cars are a clean form of transport, if only their energy lasted longer than 250 miles or whatever their capacity is at present, and they are much quieter than conventional petrol or diesel cars. However, I am not a fan of driverless cars on our roads. I might have misunderstood this proposition, but I will need a lot of convincing about that.

From a safety perspective, I can see the presumed logic: since 81% of car crashes are the result of human error, self-driving cars might be a solution. But nothing is infallible, and self-driving cars do not completely eliminate the likelihood of a car accident, which would give rise to the question who holds responsibility for an accident—the driver, the car manufacturer or the software developer. Driverless cars would not be able to guarantee safety in all weather conditions, and given that self-driving cars heavily rely on GPS, how can we be sure that this new technology will be proof against hackers? This move to popularise driverless cars would undermine the skills that are needed to drive a car manually. Drivers and passengers would be helpless in the event that something went wrong in the driverless car they were in. In a wider context, driverless cars might make a large part of the workforce redundant, including driving instructors. I was fortunate to be able to pilot the Driving Instructors (Registration) Act 2016 successfully through Parliament, so I worry about that aspect.

I welcome the proposal for the regulation of civilian drone aircraft. The Government are right to ensure the safety of all aircraft from trespassing drones, including those at Southend airport, which is used by my constituents.

I look forward to the publication of the Chilcot report. The Gracious Speech always ends with the statement that other measures will be laid before us. This House must never, ever allow an inquiry to drag on for seven years. That is ridiculous and has cost the British taxpayer a huge amount of money. The report is to be published on 6 July. We should not draw a line under it; we should look at the way that inquiries are held in the future. In 2004 I and a group of MPs laid a measure to impeach the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. I intend, through negotiation with the Clerks of the House of Commons, to see if we can use that procedure again if the Chilcot report finds that the then Prime Minister was guilty of misleading the House about the weapons of mass destruction reaching this country in 45 minutes.

Although I was on the Opposition Benches at the time, I was one of the colleagues who came to the House determined to vote against the intervention. I listened to the then Prime Minister and he could not have been clearer about the dossier and the weapons of mass destruction reaching us in 45 minutes. If the Chilcot report concludes that the then Prime Minister misled us, the families of those service personnel who lost their lives will expect Parliament to deal with the issue. Once the report is published, the Government need to decide how we deal with the people who misled us.

There is a further measure that I hoped would be in the Queen’s Speech. The way that the Government have spent money in the EU referendum campaign. We are told that the Government support our remaining a member of the European Union. As half of my party does not support that, I am puzzled about the veracity of that claim. The rules supplied by the Electoral Commission dictate that Vote Leave and Britain Stronger in Europe have a grant of £600,000 and a spending limit of £7 million, along with campaign broadcasts, free access to meeting rooms and free mailshots.

Even though both sides are allowed the same amount of money, there has been significant Government spending which is totally wrong, including the money spent on leaflets, with the remain campaign using civil service funds and other public funds. A leaflet was published by the Government in April containing 14 pages of absolute rubbish about the reasons for remaining members of the EU. Why are we having a referendum if the person heading the negotiation has suggested that leaving would be so dangerous that we would practically face a third world war? That is crazy.

Mr Jackson: It is actually worse than that, because although the Government ostensibly support remaining in the European Union, that was on the basis of a comprehensive renegotiation of our relationship with it, which most people agree has not happened. In fact, neither the Conservative party nationally, nor the parliamentary Conservative party, has ever been consulted on whether we should be campaigning as a Government to remain in the European Union.

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It was quite wrong to spend £9.3 million on that leaflet and to send it to 27 million households. I have
also learned that the Government have been using civil service funds to boost their campaign, and Vote Leave is not allowed the same opportunity. That tells the country and Parliament that the Government as a whole are not neutral on this issue, which they jolly well should be. Therefore, at this very late hour, with only five weeks left, I urge the Government to allow both campaigns to have access to Government funds and civil service offices, or to disallow either campaign from accessing the civil service or public funds. I strongly encourage the Government to enact legislation specifically to stop Government intervention in any future referendums.

Therefore, I do welcome the Gracious Speech. I am not surprised that it is cautious, because it is quite difficult to manage Government business when there is a small majority. Above all else, I hope that the House will unite to support the measures on prison reform.

7.41 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I join other Members in congratulating the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on their speeches today, which were an adornment to this occasion. I also think that the Leader of the Opposition did rather well, at least for the first few minutes of his speech—it rather fell away after that. A very long time ago I was on the staff of the University of Bangor and, as such, sometimes had to recycle some very old lectures, but at least I took the care to preface them with the phrase, “Same old lectures; all new jokes.” That might be a strategy for the Leader of the Opposition next time.

I am afraid that the Queen’s Speech provided pretty thin fare. One might even suppose that the Prime Minister and his friends are occupied with something else. So as not to disappoint the Welsh media, and particularly the BBC, I should repeat the traditional Plaid Cymru response to a Queen’s Speech: “A bit of a slap in the face for Wales; and not a lot in it for Wales.” Having done that, I can now explain myself.

On the claim that it is a bit of a slap in the face for Wales, if one looks at the prisons Bill, one sees that there will be profound changes to the prisons system, but as far as I can see we will still have no provision at all for women prisoners in Wales. They are very small in number, but they all have to travel to prisons in England, which causes great difficulties for their families. I am sure that many Members will agree that many of those women are wrongly imprisoned anyway. I was very glad to hear other right hon. and hon. Members make similar points with regard to prison reform. By the way, we still have scant provision for young people in Wales. We are just about to have a new super-prison open in Wrexham, HMP Berwyn, but that huge institution—it will hold 2,000 prisoners—will apparently be unable to guarantee that a Welsh-speaking pastor will be available, even though it is serving largely Welsh-speaking north Wales. There is therefore a great deal that could be done.

With regard to the claim that “there is not a lot in it for Wales”, it has been widely trailed that the spaceport will be in Newquay. I want to pay tribute to the excellent case for Llanbedr made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). I am sure that the Members representing the other five potential sites will say the same thing, but Llanbedr stands out, to me at least, as the obvious choice.

Of the Bills set out in the Queen’s Speech, by my count there were three that apply to England and Wales and a further five that apply to England only. That is devolution for England, I suppose. It is little noted, but it is devolution by default. That is not a bad thing, but I think that we really should be planning all of this, rather than falling into it by accident. England-only Bills also have implications for Wales, of course, because Welsh people access services in England, particularly health services, so changes to provision on Merseyside, in Manchester and in London do have direct and indirect effects on health in Wales. The funding of England-only policies sometimes has profound implications for funding for Wales through the Barnett formula. No mention was made of that particular elephant in the room today, of course. Barnett staggers on even though clearly it needs to be reformed.

As has already been mentioned, of the 30 odd announcements made today, significantly, 28 have already been trailed in some form or other. That is the case with the only Wales-only Bill, which I will come to in a moment. Looking at the 37 paragraphs of the Gracious Speech, I see that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland rate just one specific mention, although that mention could have great significance for Wales, for we are to have yet another stab at a Wales Bill. This will apparently be simpler than the previous draft Bill, which was panned by nearly everyone involved. As I noted in an earlier intervention, a prominent Welsh academic called it “much the worst devolution bill that I have seen”, and that was one of the milder responses.

We could have great expectations of the Wales Bill. There are many examples of things that I would like to see in it, but just two will suffice this evening. It needs to be recognised that we now have a body of Welsh law that is growing and will continue to grow, because the Welsh Assembly is passing laws—that is another elephant in the room. We need recognition of that fact, and that could be achieved, at least in my opinion, by recognising a distinct Welsh jurisdiction. Now, what that would actually look like is a matter of considerable discussion, and some of it is extremely obscure legal discussion that I am entirely unqualified to participate in. However, the plain fact is that we now have Welsh law but an England and Wales jurisdiction, and that must be addressed in some way. Another point relating to the Wales Bill is the devolution of policing to the Welsh Government. There is now great support for that across Wales, not least from the four police commissioners, two of whom have been Plaid Cymru nominees.

We in Plaid Cymru worked constructively with the previous Secretary of State, putting forward quite positive proposals, none of which was realised because the draft Bill was withdrawn. By now we have a new Secretary of State, and indeed a new Labour shadow. I hope that they will be able to work together, and with us, to realise that next step in the process of Welsh devolution. A former colleague of ours, Ron Davies, famously said in 1997 that devolution is a process, not an event. We have had several attempts at that process. I think that now is the time for a substantial leap forward in Welsh devolution through this Bill.

One thing that I think we really do need to have in the Bill is a change to the electoral system. We have in Wales and in Scotland—I am not sure about Northern Ireland—something called the d’Hondt system, which
is an additional member system. I do not intend to go into the theology of the matter this evening—I might leave myself—but I will say that we really do need a different system. That system delivered a less proportionate result in Wales than the first-past-the-post system did in May last year in the elections for this place, with Labour getting 28 of the seats on something like 35% of the vote, even under a system of proportional representation. I might as well say now that I and my party are in favour of STV—the single transferable vote. I will say no more about that now, but I will certainly be trying to impress that point on the Secretary of State and the House when the opportunity arises.

Like the SNP, Plaid Cymru has an alternative Queen’s Speech in which we put forward our own measures—the House will forgive me if I indulge in a bit of sloganeering here—to make Wales stronger, safer and more prosperous. I have been saying that for the past six weeks in preparation for the Welsh elections, so it is rather difficult to get it out of my head, like an irritating pop song. It includes plans for an EU funding contingency Bill to safeguard vital funds in the event of Brexit, a specifically Welsh issue that we need to address; a UK finance commission Bill to put an end to the historic underfunding for Wales; a north Wales growth fund to deliver genuine infrastructure and investment for the north; a policing Bill to make good on recent independent and cross-party recommendations to devolve policing, a Severn bridges Bill to enable the Welsh Government to put an end to the bridges tax on economic growth; and a broadcasting Bill to devolve powers over broadcasting to Wales. Those are just six of the points in our alternative Queen’s Speech. I will expand briefly on some of them later.

That is Plaid Cymru’s positive alternative: not preoccupied with our economic decline, though that is real enough, I am afraid; not obsessed with the City of London at the expense of the rest of the UK; not, like some in other parties, hanging on the nail over Europe or at each other’s throats on the fundamental course their party should take; and not rejected by the voters and shunted into a siding. Clearly, those people are not in their places this evening. Rather, we are looking to the future of our country—to supporting Wales’s interests and delivering policies needed to make Wales a stronger, safer and more prosperous country.

Unfortunately, Wales is still at or near the bottom of league tables across Europe on economic performance. The Government here should be doing everything they can to promote growth in Wales, making Wales an attractive place to do business, investing in roads and railways, and upgrading the digital infrastructure. The headings of the digital economy Bill read well enough, and I am glad to see them: a legal right to fast broadband, a universal service obligation, and automatic compensation when things go wrong. We would be very happy to support such measures. However, I am afraid that my constituents, and indeed people throughout rural Britain, may be excused a hollow laugh at this Bill, because I am afraid we have heard it all before. I hope that the Government succeed, but one must be slightly sceptical.

I hope you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to recount a short story to do with the digital economy. It is about mobile phones, not broadband. I have abandoned the use of a smartphone in my constituency, because there is no point in most parts of it. I now carry one of those flip-top, oyster-type phones that were all the rage. I think, in 1997—but it works well enough. The other day my office had a phone call from one of the leading digital phone companies announcing to us that the city of Bangor in my constituency would have 4G. There was general rejoicing around the office, and we were just about to put out a press release welcoming this wonderful development when my colleague, Alun Roberts, said, “We’d better phone them up, just to check.” That is what he did, and the company then confessed that it was Bangor, Northern Ireland, not Bangor, north Wales.

Mr Dodds: Great news!

Hywel Williams: Yes, indeed—wonderful news, but wrong Bangor, unfortunately. I am afraid that sort of thing happens rather often.

Let me turn to some of the detail that I wanted to put on the record. I referred to our EU funding contingency Bill, which would introduce statutory contingency alternative funding arrangements should we leave the European Union. A couple of weeks ago, the Prime Minister confirmed to me at Question Time that the Government could not say now that regional funding under the convergence funding would continue if we left. That funding is extremely important to west Wales and the valleys, because we have intense economic problems. There are also questions around the common agricultural policy. It is imperative that plans are put in place to safeguard businesses, farmers, communities and projects in west Wales and the valleys. We have already sunk to the economic level of parts of former communist eastern Europe, and it is really important that these funds are not held up in any way in the event of Brexit.

I mentioned the problems around Barnett. There are ways out of this, although I concede that it is a complicated area. We would want to see the establishment of a commission to resolve funding disputes between the UK Government and the devolved national Governments. Barnett has been roundly condemned over many years, not least by the independent Holtham commission set up by the Government over five years ago. Establishing an independent commission is essential in the context of the emerging debate over the fiscal framework. If the Welsh Government started levying taxes and varying income tax, how would we figure that out? How much should we lose in our grant from London, and how do we ensure that this sort of settlement is fair? We want to look at a fiscal framework within the tax-sharing arrangements between the UK and the Welsh Governments. The commission would also adjudicate on the appropriate deduction method that is employed so that Wales does not miss out on potentially extremely large amounts of money as a result of inappropriate or unjust methods being used, or of so-called cannibalisation of the Welsh tax base. I will not go into that now.

There is a highly respected academic institution at Cardiff University called the Wales Governance Centre. In one of its recent reports, it concluded:

“An independent adjudication commission should therefore be an essential component in the UK’s emerging fiscal framework” as a way of solving the problem all round. It continues:

“A 2015 report by the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law recommended the establishment of an independent body to advise HM Treasury about devolution finance and particularly about
grant matters. This body could be modelled on the Australian Commonwealth Grants Commission and named the UK Finance Commission. The Bingham Centre report also proposed that this body or another independent body be responsible for adjudication in the event of disputes between governments that cannot be resolved through joint ministerial processes."

That is the way out that I commend to the Government and that we will be proposing.

Much has been said today about the northern powerhouse. We would want to see a north Wales growth deal looking at matters such as electrification of the north Wales main line. We still, unfortunately, have not an inch of electrified rail in north Wales. It would also lead to the inclusion of Welsh rural areas on the UK’s list for the EU fuel duty rebate, which is another important matter in rural areas. There are several other matters that we would like to see dealt with, such as a major upgrade for the A55.

As I said, we would want a broadcasting Bill establishing a BBC trust for Wales and dealing with other matters regarding the responsibility for S4C, the world’s only Welsh language television channel: in fact, the universe’s only Welsh language channel: there is no other. We believe that that responsibility should be transferred to the National Assembly, as should the funding for the channel, which is currently with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and that the Welsh Government should appoint a board of members for S4C.

I have already mentioned police devolution, so I will conclude with the Severn bridges Bill. We will introduce a Bill in this place to transfer responsibility for the Severn bridges to the Welsh Government when the bridges revert to public ownership in 2017. This will enable the National Assembly for Wales to decide on the appropriate level at which to set a charge, if it sets a charge at all. At its current high rate, it is a tax on the Welsh economy.

Those are some of the very ambitious measures that Plaid Cymru will promote. No doubt some people, both here and in Cardiff, are willing to trundle along on a “business as usual” basis, but as the Labour party discovered in Cardiff last week when we were choosing a First Minister, “business as usual” is not Plaid’s business.

7.59 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams). I do not support his party or the SNP, but it is striking that they have both come to this House with alternative Queen’s Speeches and set out an alternative vision, which was sadly lacking in today’s speech by the Leader of the Opposition.

I want to join the tributes paid by Members on both sides of the House to Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of her 63rd Gracious Speech. Hers is a remarkable example of service to our nation. Given that I am following the Plaid spokesman, perhaps I should also say how good it was to see the Prince of Wales in his place in the House of Lords today.

I also want to join the tributes paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee). My right hon. Friend showed, as ever, that she is passionate, caring, thoughtful and generous to her colleagues and friends on both sides of the House. She delivered a fantastic proposing speech. My hon. Friend, with whom I occasionally have been known to disagree, was hilariously funny and deeply insightful. His deeply serious point about the post-war consensus and the values that underpinned it was one of the most eloquent descriptions of that era in our politics that I have heard in this House.

We should be looking to build consensus. I support the Gracious Speech because it is deeply ingrained with the values of one nation conservatism, which are among the reasons why I went into politics. Members on both sides of the House should be able to come together and support its opening lines, which mention using “the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences.”

It was disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition delivered a political tirade that was more a rerun of his response to the Budget statement than a response to the Gracious Speech. Labour Back Benchers have made much more intelligent and engaged speeches. The Queen’s Speech focuses on prison reform and I pity some Labour Members for the prisoner’s dilemma that their party continues to face. I hope that they will be able to emerge from it in due course. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who is still in the Chamber and waiting to speak, is one of the very few Labour Back Benchers who enthusiastically supports the new leadership. I am sure we will hear a different argument from him.

Many of the measures in the Queen’s Speech, including on moving to a higher wage and lower welfare economy, should be supported by Members on both sides of the House. On rewarding work, I am glad that national statistics show that wages have risen by about 2% year on year ahead of inflation and that the rate of increase is even faster in my own constituency. I am also very pleased that unemployment in Worcester is back below 1,000. When I stood for election in May 2010, the figure was 2,545, so by my calculations, there has been a 60% fall in unemployment since Labour left office and Worcester last had a Labour MP. Youth unemployment has also fallen by 69%—more than two thirds—since then.

I want to continue that work, and one of the crucial ways in which we can do so is through creating more apprenticeships. Hon. Members have already spoken about the Government’s drive to create 3 million apprenticeships, and I welcome the fact that that featured in the Queen’s Speech. I have seen in my own constituency how apprenticeships can not only give people the chance to earn and learn, and to start their careers, but transform small businesses and help them to realise that, by harnessing the youth, vigour and ideas of young people, they can themselves grow and learn new things.

I want to compliment three businesses that have contacted me in the past few days. Rock Power Connections and Instant Scenery told me in the past couple of days that they are taking on their first apprentices, while Green Lighting Ltd is a Worcester firm that recently won a Queen’s award for innovation and received the apprentice of the year award from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire chamber of commerce. Those small businesses are taking people on, giving them a chance and enabling them to earn and learn. We want to see more of that.

The Gracious Speech mentions giving business the infrastructure it needs to grow, which is crucial. It also mentions access to high-speed broadband. Like Members on both sides of the House, I welcome that ambition
and hope to see it better achieved in the years to come. Great strides have been made on access to high-speed broadband in my rather urban constituency, but I acknowledge that there is a long way to go in other parts of the country, including in areas such as those represented by my rural neighbours and the hon. Member for Arfon. I remember serving on the Welsh Affairs Committee during our inquiry into broadband. There is clearly a greater distance to travel in rural Wales, and I hope that the Government can help to deliver it there, as well as in the rest of our United Kingdom.

The Gracious Speech mentions making Britain a world leader in the digital economy, which is hugely important in the fast-changing and fast-developing world in which we now live, including in Worcester, which has a growing and ambitious cyber-security cluster. Businesses such as Open GI and PCA Predict are exporting UK technology to the world. The UK has a crucial opportunity to provide leadership in the digital economy, which is one of the reasons why, when we come to the European referendum, I will argue that we should stay in and fight our corner to get the best deal possible so that such businesses can thrive and export all over the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) made a plea for a catapult in his area. Worcestershire has a very strong claim to host the sensors catapult, which would be based not in my constituency—I am being altruistic—but in that of my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), in Malvern, where radar was invented and firms such as QinetiQ are leading the world in the science of sensors. Such a development in that excellent location would certainly contribute to jobs and growth in my constituency.

Beyond that, we need physical infrastructure for transport, and I am pleased that the Queen’s Speech mentions that. In Worcester, that comes down to roads and rail. I will keep pushing in this Parliament, as I did in the last Parliament, for investment in our crucial southern link road and the dualling of the Carrington bridge. I will badger the Transport Secretary about that until it happens.

We also want a faster train service. The Prime Minister spoke eloquently about the benefits of investing in infrastructure. His constituency and mine are served by the same lovely, scenic and devastatingly slow train service currently run by Great Western Railway on the north Cotswolds line. He has previously responded positively to questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) about getting upgrades for that line. We must keep driving for that. My constituents live less than 120 miles from London and it is absurd that it takes them two and a half hours to get there by train. The journey really ought to take under two hours.

I was intrigued to hear the suggestion in the Queen’s Speech of devolving new powers to govern local bus services. I share the concerns raised by a couple of hon. Friends. I do not just want those powers to be given to directly elected mayors; I want the proposal to empower our county councils and to help them to deliver better support for bus services. Worcester has some very good bus services run by First, but there are not enough of them. The need to get better and more regular bus services to those areas that need them comes up time and again on the doorsteps. That is vital.

The detail of the proposed Bill includes apps and technologies, and it mentions bus companies opening themselves up to better use of technology. That has been pioneered fantastically in London and Transport for London has done some really good work on it. Indeed, I take the bus to Westminster every morning and it is incredibly convenient to be able to look up on an app when the bus will arrive and whether it is worth walking to the next bus stop. I would like such a service to be made available to my constituents. Worcester City Council has plans and I would like to see them delivered.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), I am delighted to welcome the retention of business rates by local authorities. I campaigned throughout the last Parliament for business rate reform, and I was pleased with some of the Budget’s measures on that front, but I want to go even further, because the task has not been completed. I want to see more incentives in the business rate system for growing businesses that take people on.

Alex Cunningham: We all know that the tremendous development and investment in the south-east of England, which are worth billions of pounds, can really drive business rates, whereas in the north of England, things are a bit slower and there is not that extent of development. There needs to be some sort of balance to ensure that we can drive the economy. Perhaps the northern powerhouse will actually mean something in the future.

Mr Walker: Absolutely; the hon. Gentleman is right that we need to create balance in the system. Speaking for my midlands constituency, we are somewhere in the middle and we face that issue. We want to ensure that the Government fund our local authorities properly and that the business rates base is not eroded. That is an important point that we need to consider as we devolve more business rates. I support the strong bid from Worcestershire, combined with all the district councils, for greater devolution of business rates. I think that it could deliver well for my constituents if that bid was listened to.

I am delighted to welcome the focus in the Queen’s Speech on supporting aspiration and promoting home ownership, and I support the ambitious commitment to build 1 million homes. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), who said that he could not see any scope for more homes in his constituency, I welcome more affordable homes in Worcester. There have been some great developments in recent years on brownfield sites and record numbers of affordable homes have been delivered in the past year in Worcester under a Conservative council.

A lot of people have talked about the local elections. As has been widely spread about by the media, we were not as successful in the local elections in Worcester as I would have liked. The Greens won a seat and Labour regained a seat in which its councillor had defected. The Conservatives remain the biggest group on Worcester City Council but, unfortunately, we have seen similar shenanigans to what has gone on in Wales. Instead of being propped up by Plaid, in Worcester Labour is propped up by the Green party. I worry about that, to be honest, but I will work with whoever is in control of our city council, as I have in the past. When the Liberal
Democrats reneged on a deal with the Conservative party and went in with Labour a few years ago, I worked very effectively with the Labour leadership on the council.

I was disappointed, however, that when Labour took the leadership of the council at that time, 100 affordable homes were being delivered every year, yet it managed to reduce the number of affordable homes built in Worcester during its one year in office by a third. That was terribly disappointing and it went against the party’s manifesto commitments that it was elected to carry out. I hope that it does better this time around, because, as I said, with the Conservatives in control of the council over the past year, there has been record delivery of affordable homes. This issue matters. As the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) said, this is something that comes up regularly at our constituency surgeries. It is essential for any Government to deliver new homes. I am very happy to compare the record of this Government on delivering new homes with that of the last Labour Government.

On houses and homes, I hope that we will take further measures in this Parliament to prevent homelessness. I welcome the launch of the all-party group on ending homelessness, which was set up by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Macintosh), and the widespread cross-party support it has received.

We have heard a lot about the prison reform aspects of the Gracious Speech and I could not describe them better than my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier). I agreed with everything he said about that point, even if I disagree with him about the case for a British Bill of Rights. We need to see the sort of cross-party consensus that is driving prison reform forward on many more issues in the years to come.

The Gracious Speech talks about tackling “poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability, addiction and debt”.

In the last Parliament, I joined colleagues from both sides of the House, including many Labour Members, in campaigning for more action against high-cost debt providers—the likes of a certain firm beginning with W. The Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, who is on the Front Bench, was very involved in those campaigns. I was pleased that after much campaigning, we moved the needle and more action was taken to support greater financial education, to support financial advice services such as Citizens Advice through a levy on high-cost lenders, and to regulate some of the bad practice that was going on. I hope that that work continues.

I am pleased to welcome measures to help the lowest income families to save through help to save and the creation of the lifetime ISA. I have asked before—I take the opportunity of the Queen’s Speech to ask again, on behalf of Members on both sides of the House—that we look at how we can involve credit unions in that process. Credit unions have immense support across the House and do incredibly valuable work in all our constituencies. As chairman of the all-party group on credit unions, I am keen for them to play a central role in the delivery of help to save.

As a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I cannot say much about the parts of the Queen’s Speech on education, but I look forward to working on their implementation. All I would say is that, having spoken about the need for a national funding formula in every year of the last Parliament, I would be delighted to meet Ministers from other Departments to educate them about how that could be applied, particularly in health and social care.

It is, of course, good news that the Gracious Speech refers to a seven-day NHS. It is very good news from my perspective, having spoken to concerned constituents and junior doctors, that an agreement has been reached. I hope that the agreement holds and that, as happens so often in this place, through talking we can take relations to a better place.

I was interested to note the focus in the Gracious Speech on “mental health provision for individuals in the criminal justice system.”

We have discussed in this House over the past few years how there needs to be a greater focus on mental health across the whole NHS and beyond. I hope we can continue that progress in the years to come.

One thing that I would have liked to have seen in the Queen’s Speech—I have asked for this to be included in previous Queen’s Speeches, but I am afraid that we have not seen it yet—is delivery on the Dilnot reforms. I recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Health about a tragic case from my constituency in which somebody lost all their family assets as a result of an elderly relative needing care. That is unfinished business, frankly, and I will push for greater delivery on that front, as well as on the Government’s response to the Choice review on end-of-life care.

Like other Members, including the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds), who spoke for the Democratic Unionists, I welcome the decision to invest in our armed forces to honour the military covenant and meet the NATO commitment to spend 2% on defence. I welcome the fact that we balance that with our investment in the wider world through the development budget. It is vital that that money is spent well and that we have the right goals when investing in international security, and in economic and humanitarian challenges.

I am pleased that the Gracious Speech spoke about bringing peace to Syria and a lasting political settlement. I hope that we can also make progress, although much of this it is not within our power in this House, on the other great issues of contention in the middle east. In this anniversary year of the Balfour declaration, I hope that we can meet all its obligations, including those to the Palestinian people.

I welcome the upcoming visit of the President of Colombia. Having chaired the British Argentine all-party group in the last Parliament and having been involved in Latin American affairs, I think that our country neglects its Latin American relationships at its peril. There is much that we need to do to build them up and to engage with everyone in Latin America. We must build on the amazing legacy of Canning and of our being the first country to recognise and support the Latin American republics. There is huge good will towards this country across Latin America, particularly among business people.

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend is making a fine speech, but he tempts me in a way that I cannot resist. He will know that a senior politician in Mexico, which has a population of 120 million, said recently that it would be
Mr Walker: I am delighted to have that reassurance from my hon. Friend. I just hope that he could offer the same reassurance in respect of the President of the United States and the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I fear that some of those people value us more as a member of the European Union that can get them access to a market of 500 million people than they would if we were outside it. I think we ought to be friendly with all our friends around the world. I respect the arguments that are made about the European Union by my hon. Friends who want to come out, but I have concluded that it is in the interests of my constituents for Britain to remain in and to continue to fight our corner.

Hywel Williams: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the renewed and extended contacts between Wales and Patagonia in the southern part of Argentina, where there is a Welsh settlement. Those contacts have been strengthened immeasurably this year, which is the 150th anniversary of the sailing of the Mimosa to Porth Madryn, as we call it in Welsh, or Puerto Madryn, as it is called in Argentina. I just say to him that this has nothing to do with the European Union at all.

Mr Walker: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. In my role with the all-party group and my all-too-brief role on the Welsh Affairs Committee, I was involved in some of the discussions on setting up that visit, so I am delighted about the progress that has been made. There really is a strong bond between Patagonia and Wales, not least through their language which, until a certain Walker made Welsh language education compulsory, was dwindling rather faster in Wales than in Patagonia. I am pleased to see that connection being built on and strengthened. It is just one example of Britain’s, and indeed Wales’s, soft power around the world, which we should celebrate.

I particularly welcome the measures in the Queen’s Speech to “uphold the sovereignty of Parliament and the primacy of the House of Commons.”

As someone who spoke out to get a European referendum, I am delighted that we are delivering it and that all my constituents will have their say on the issue. We in the House are big enough and grown-up enough to have our disagreements about it and then to come back and work together in the interests of our country.

On the British Bill of Rights, I echo some of the comments of the right hon. Member for Belfast North in saying that Britain gave the world the concept of a Bill of Rights. In fact, the former MP for my constituency, John Somers, drafted the original 1689 British Bill of Rights, and I am proud of that fact. As we walk into Parliament through the Lower Waiting Hall, we pass his statue opposite that of Robert Walpole. I only recently discovered his deep connection with Worcester. It is disappointing to hear the Liberal Democrats, who are the heirs to the Whig tradition, arguing against the concept of a British Bill of Rights. John Somers was one of the founders of the Whig party, and he drafted the first British Bill of Rights, which is still iconic for the whole world and which we can learn from. The SNP and Plaid Cymru will be less happy to hear that he went on to be one of the drafters of the 1707 Act of Union, another great piece of legislation that we should all celebrate.

As the Member for the faithful city, it is always a pleasure to be able to respond to the Gracious Speech. We have had an interesting and positive debate today, with a lot of engagement from Members of all parties, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take part.

8.22 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I hope that I will not be put in the category of “extremist” when I say, as I have in many years, that I believe we could somehow reduce the ceremonial aspects of the state opening of Parliament. Indeed, I find it difficult to understand why we need a state opening except after a general election. I hope that my remarks will in no way be interpreted as any form of disrespect to the Queen—they are not meant to be, as I am sure hon. Members will recognise. If I may say so, too much spit and polish and not enough essential work is undertaken in the House, and in the building as a whole, on a daily basis. I will leave it at that—it will be clear that my views have not changed.

The Queen’s Speech mentions improving life chances. One of the best things to have happened in recent months was the way in which opposition in the House from Labour Members and other Opposition Members—and, let it be said, to some extent from a few Conservative Members—prevented the Government from going ahead with the reduction of the personal independence payment for a number of disabled people. The row we had in the House at Question Time on 14 March led, within a few days, to the resignation of the Secretary of State.

Michael Meacher has rightly been praised today. He served for 45 years and is a good example to those who say, “A few years in the House of Commons and you soon change.” There was no change. Michael Meacher remained as committed and dedicated to the people he represented and the causes he believed in as when he first came to the House in 1970. Had Michael been here on 14 March, he would have been in the forefront of the opposition to what the Government intended to do. Let me make it quite clear that if Ministers propose further actions against disabled people and the most vulnerable, Labour Members—and other Opposition Members, I am sure—will be as strenuously opposed as they were in March. Let there be no misunderstanding about that.

It is hardly likely that there will be improvements in the life chances of my constituents, who have faced a number of cuts as a result of the substantial reduction in revenue support from central Government to local government. There has been a cut of over 40% since 2010, and that money is the mainstay of local government funding, not council tax or other revenues raised locally. Such a cut, which I am sure is the same as those up and down the country—except in a few Tory-controlled local authorities that seem to have been compensated in some way—has undoubtedly caused a great deal of difficulties, particularly for those who are in need of help from the council and social workers.
One of the cuts in my borough has been the closure of a unit dealing with domestic violence, which had been established in my constituency for some time. It gave an excellent service that was recognised nationally as well as locally, and I well remember making representations over the years about funding for it, to central Government and locally. I regret the fact that it has now closed its doors.

The Queen’s Speech refers to bringing communities together. That is an excellent objective, and I am all for it. No one could be more in favour of bringing communities together. However—I know this has been said before, but I should nevertheless make the point—the campaign that the Tories waged for their candidate to become London Mayor hardly brought communities together. It was a disgraceful campaign, which I am sure many Conservative Members deplored. Indeed, one or two have already made that clear. The campaign even involved trying to encourage people of Asian origin who happen to be Hindus or Sikhs to be rather suspicious of what the Labour candidate, a Muslim, intended to do about jewellery and such matters. It was so silly, and it was unfortunate. It is not the way to achieve community cohesion. I hope that that will not be repeated. It reminded me of the respects of the by-election campaign at the beginning of 1983, which the Liberal party waged before they were Liberal Democrats.

There has been a good deal of comment about anti-Semitism. Obviously, I oppose all forms of racism. I oppose anti-Semitism no less than I oppose prejudice against anyone else—Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians; I make no difference. To the extent that a few people with such poisonous views have come into my party, I welcome the fact that they have mainly been turfed out. I also welcome the committee that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has set up to look into anti-Semitism in the party. That is the right position to take. I should state, in case Members do not know—there is no particular reason why they should know what goes on in Select Committees if they are not members—that the Home Affairs Committee will conduct an inquiry into anti-Semitism.

We should not forget for one moment the millions of lives that were destroyed—those who were murdered—in the last war for no other reason than they happened to be of Jewish origin. They were not Zionists. Most of them would not have had the slightest understanding of Zionism. Mr Livingstone’s remarks were certainly inappropriate, but—I may be wrong—I do not consider him to be an anti-Semite in any normal sense. However, he seems to have, shall we say an unhealthy obsession about Jews.

If it is right to condemn anti-Semitism, as I hope we all do, it is no less right to condemn prejudice against other groups. I come back to the campaign that the Tory party waged that seemed to arise because Sadiq Khan happened to be a Muslim. I do not accuse the Conservative party of being anti-Muslim—there is no justification for that—but there was a tendency in that campaign to emphasise his original and Jewish background. My hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party tweeted Sadiq Khan, asking, “Could you remind me again? What did your father do?” I think we all know what his father did.

Let me consider the sovereignty of Parliament. I do not understand how it is achieved by reducing the Commons from 650 to 600 Members. At the same time as the House of Commons is to be reduced, if the Government can get the legislation through, the House of Lords will reach a total far in excess of the membership of the House of Commons. How can the Government justify reducing the elected House of Commons while at the same time increasing the membership of the House next door, which is not elected in any way, shape of form, and is subject to patronage?

There is another aspect of the reduction to 600, which is not always mentioned. The governing party, whichever it happens to be, will have fewer members. When one considers Ministers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries, those who aim, as they do in all political parties, to climb the political ladder, far fewer Members will be left on the Back Benches. Far fewer Members will be in a position to oppose or criticise their own Government. That does not fit the Government’s aim to uphold the sovereignty of Parliament. I hope that Conservative Members here and there might have the courage—I see the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) nodding—to oppose the proposal.

Mr Jackson: I warmly endorse the hon. Gentleman’s comments, particularly given that, in our system, the Executive are recruited from the legislature. If the number of people in the legislature in the lower House—the elected Chamber—is reduced, the pool from which talent can be taken is reduced. That has an impact when there is also such a large unelected Chamber.

Mr Winnick: It is likely that the hon. Gentleman and I hardly agree on a single thing, but we believe in Parliament and in respecting Parliament. The remarks that he just made are appropriate and I hope that other Conservative Members share those views.

Politically, the Speech overall was predictable and against the interests of many of my constituents. It is a reactionary Speech, which outlines policies that in my view—and I am sure in that of my hon. Friends—will not advance the interests of ordinary people. I look forward to opposing it at the appropriate time.

8.34 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who was elected to this House for the first time on 31 March 1966, when I was one year old—I am sorry about his blushes. He has served with distinction since then, with a slight interruption in 1970. It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate, and to make observations about the legislation proposed in the Gracious Speech. It would, however, be remiss of me not to mention that overshadowing the Government’s programme is the momentous decision that 44 million
electors in the United Kingdom will make about our relationship with the European Union. The referendum was a manifesto commitment, and while other parties such as the Liberal Democrats systematically reneged on that solemn undertaking to the British people, the Conservative party put it in its manifesto with the important caveat that the plebiscite would be brought forward before the end of 2017, on the basis of a fundamental renegotiation of our relationship with the European Union. That clearly has not taken place in many respects, whether welfare reform, the accrual of more powers to the European Commission and Council of Ministers vis-à-vis this Parliament, immigration and border control, or a wide range of other areas that the Government, and particularly the Prime Minister, enunciated as his objective, especially in his 2013 Bloomberg speech.

I am usually predisposed to be a loyal but perhaps candid friend to the Government, but I feel disappointed that the Prime Minister has not been good to his words in the 2013 Bloomberg speech. We went to the electorate on the basis that the Conservative party had a settled consensus in the run-up to the general election and the Government’s renegotiation, and I say gently to the Prime Minister that we all have to live with each other after 23 June. In one of my more mischievous social media interventions yesterday, I suggested that he was in danger of becoming like Colonel Nicholson at the conclusion of “The Bridge on the River Kwai”, with the Conservative party as the bridge that ends up getting blown up. Colonel Nicholson asks, “What have I done?”, and I say to the Prime Minister that we must unite as a party and a country, and that the schisms that have occurred as a result of the debate on the European Union may take some time to heal.

Ultimately, however, I trust the good judgment of the British people to make the right decision, albeit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) said, that the cards have been heavily stacked with public money and propaganda from the Government and the civil service. I urge Labour voters to think carefully about their vote on 23 June. The International Monetary Fund, multinationals, and big investment banks are supporting the remain campaign with lots of cash because a remain vote suits their narrow interest, with unlimited immigration, low wages, and squashing down the conditions of working people. Labour voters should think about that when they go to vote.

I have overstayed my welcome on the primrose path of the European Union, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I shall return to the Gracious Speech. I welcome parts of the Speech, although it missed opportunities to include legislation that would have been apposite at this juncture.

I respectfully disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), as does my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker). It was a manifesto commitment that we fundamentally reorder our human rights legislation. We should not forget that the European convention on human rights, which was created by British jurists and of which we can be proud, in the wake of the second world war in reaction to the despotism of the Nazi regime and the holocaust was incorporated into UK legislation only as a result of the sanction of this House. It therefore follows that it must lie within the purview and bailiwick of this House to make a decision.

John Hirst, the axe murderer—he was convicted of manslaughter—brought the test case way back in 2005 that he should have the right to vote, and that the Forfeiture Act 1870 should effectively be updated. As the House will know, the Act precludes convicted felons, meaning those not on bail, from being able to exercise the franchise. The ability to vote in an election is not a human right but a civil right. That is a fundamental difference, although I accept that some would disagree. A much more fundamental point is that the House, having reflected on the fact that the Forfeiture Act was many years out of date, came to a settled position in October 2011 that we should not give the vote to convicted felons. Supranational bodies such as the European Court of Human rights should take due cognisance of that decision. It is a difficult balance—I do not advocate our setting our face against international treaty obligations—but we must strike a proper balance between the will of the people elected to represent their constituents in this House and an unaccountable, supranational body which, incidentally, does not have the standard of legal expertise and jurists that we have in this country.

I regret that there is no Bill for House of Lords reform. The hon. Member for Walsall North and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), made a fair point, although the latter over-egg the pudding. Proper reform could have won a consensus in the House in the previous Parliament had there been a sensible proposal. However, the proposal for a one-off, 15-year term, with competing primacy, autonomy and authority with Members of the House of Commons, was clearly unacceptable to a majority of MPs. It was incumbent on the Liberals—they had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—to propose something that could win the support of a majority of Members of this House, and they failed to do so.

I have been mildly disobliging about the House of Lords in the past few months—I called them unelected panjandrums. I have had a volte face on their role. It is unacceptable and indefensible that the upper House is unelected. It is the second-largest unelected legislative body in the world after the National People’s Congress of China, and that is unacceptable in a modern, mature democracy. Conservatives who set their face against any discussion of reform do a disservice to their constituents. We need a proper debate and, by the end of this Parliament, we need workable proposals. I await the Strathclyde report and proposals for legislation for the Lords. At the very least, the Lords offends the spirit of the post-war Salisbury convention, and of the Parliament Act 1911, which circumscribed precisely the role of the House of Lords in relation to the House of Commons in the wake of the debacle over the people’s Budget of 1909.

A sovereignty Bill should have been brought forward in greater detail to defend the role of this House. Politics is always in a state of change and right now it is a state of flux. We have seen the Trump phenomenon, and uprisings of the left and right across Europe. The House of Commons and the Palace of Westminster is a symbol of stability. It has survived over so many years because it has been able to change, but we need to protect and nourish this House in its role as the fulcrum of national political debate.
If I may say so, I think we missed a trick by not bringing forward a corruption Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) was appointed anti-corruption tsar by the Prime Minister last year in the wake of the general election. I am interested to see the work he brings forward when it is published. I am still very concerned—I have raised my concerns with the Electoral Commission over a number of years—about the misuse of postal votes, in particular the coercion of women behind closed doors in some minority ethnic communities. Those votes are effectively stolen. Because it happens in Birmingham, Peterborough, Oldham and Blackburn, people seem to turn a blind eye. If it was happening in Tunbridge Wells, Leatherhead, Andover or Exeter, they would not be doing so. I do not think any malfians, malpractice or illegality in postal votes is acceptable. This issue needs to be taken much more seriously. If I am fortunate enough to win a prominent place in the private Member’s Bill ballot, I will put forward a Bill to return to the previous regime of postal votes for people who are away working, or who are ill and have a doctor’s certificate. The essential premise of the liberalisation of postal votes in 2001 was that it would drive up turnout. That has not happened and the system is still open to too many abuses. That was not in the speech.

I am pleased the Government have backtracked on compulsory academisation. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester skated gracefully over the issue, but it is fair to say that the Secretary of State listened to the misgivings of many Members, in particular those representing rural areas with primary schools that are maintained. My views are well known: ideologically, I am not against academies, but I believed the compulsory element was fundamentally un-Conservative. I did not like effectively giving carte blanche to academy chains to throw off parent governors. I did not like the idea that academy chains were the panacea of provision, when we know there is not the capacity for those academy chains to deliver educational improvements, particularly in failing schools, some of which are in my constituency. I applaud the Government for their pragmatism and their practical approach.

Another issue that I have to say will probably hit the buffers in the not-too-distant future is East Anglian devolution. For those who are particularly interested in this somewhat niche subject, I have a remarkably concise and readable article in The House magazine this week on why it is a complete dog’s breakfast. I will not say any more than that, but it has the fingerprints of a well-known, prominent and recently quite noisy former Deputy Prime Minister all over it. I do not think it will work. I support the northern powerhouse and devolution for Greater Birmingham and Greater Manchester, but it just does not stack up for East Anglia. It is not wanted. It is unpopular, expensive and uncusted, and the Government should drop the plans.

I warmly welcome the prison reform proposals. I have always been interested in prisons, not least because I have an almost-unique prison in my constituency. It is effectively two co-located prisons—a women’s prison and a men’s prison—built and opened under the auspices of the Labour Government in 2005. Jack Straw said that if only one prison was to be built in England, it would be the one at Peterborough. It is a private prison, of course, and pretty successful. I have no problem with private prisons, but the Government need to build on the experience across the world of tackling recidivism and rehabilitation in particular. The key area is prisoners on that conveyor belt of crime serving very short sentences.

Mention has been made of women, people with mental health problems and drugs, but we have to get it right on education and work in prisons. Our prison system is greatly criticised, but, compared with some of the prisons I have been invited to and visited in central America, ours are like holiday camps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) already thinks. I once visited San Miguel prison in Santiago, Chile, where 81 prisoners had been killed in a riot after a fire. The experience has never left me. It was like something from a Dickens novel. On a recent trip to Honduras, we were taken to a high-security prison so dangerous they would not even let us in, because they could not guarantee that the inmates did not have revolvers or other weapons with which to murder us. So we could not offer tea and sympathy at that high-security prison. We are doing absolutely the right thing, therefore, in trying to tackle the endemic issues of poor education and the lack of life skills and, in particular, a sense of civic obligation. Given that nothing else has solved the enduring problem of persistent crime, it is worth our giving these new plans an opportunity.

Along with prison reform and in line with the life chances strategy, I strongly welcome the focus on children in care and leaving care. We have failed so many of those children over the years and treated them, shamefully, as second-class citizens, yet they desire the love, kindness and warmth of a decent family life, like all other children. They have just been unlucky. As corporate parents, even good local authorities, such as mine, Peterborough City Council, have stood by and, through omission rather than commission, let those children down very badly. It is time we had a revolution to focus on those children and young people. It is wrong that, having left care, they have been thrown out on the streets, ignored and pushed on to the conveyor belt of crime or poorly paid jobs, without a family to care for them, nurture them and look out for them. So I welcome that focus too.

On the soft drinks industry levy, I say again that I am not a liberal: I am not a social or an economic liberal; I am a social conservative. I think that we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that within our borders, with legislative power—almost, and, at the same time, sometimes challenges vested commercial interests. We are facing a diabetes time bomb. In the absence of any other solutions to this societal problem, we have to look at the soft drinks sugar levy. Last October, I went to Mexico, which, as some will know, is attempting to use its tax system to tackle its very serious and worsening childhood and adulthood obesity issue. I will not take too much longer, because I know that others want to speak. Let me end on two other issues, one of which is the Land Registry. I have a Land Registry office in Peterborough. In 2010, I led a campaign to save the office, which was then subject to an arbitrary decision by the then Labour Government to close it that seemed to have little or no business case. We saved it, but technological and other changes have come along in the intervening six years. My view is simply this: if I can protect the work opportunities, employment conditions and quality of life of some or a majority of the people who work in that and other Land Registry offices through a different governance model, I will do that, rather than opposing privatisation of the Land Registry on ideological grounds. That may not be a welcome
message to the unions that represent the workforce there, but it is the most practical and sensible way forward if it saves those jobs.

Finally, many hon. Members will have visited National Citizen Service schemes. I am delighted that they are now being put on a statutory footing and that schools will have a duty to promote the National Citizen Service. Many of the children and young people involved, teenagers in particular, come from quite difficult and dysfunctional families, where work is itinerant, people are low paid and there is not really a tradition of involvement in community activities, altruistic work, charity work and that kind of thing. To see the faces of some of the young boys and girls who come along and are treated as equals—as decent and articulate human beings who can contribute something to help other people, whether it is litter picking or work with older people—is absolutely fantastic. It is elevating, uplifting and great for the local community, so I pay tribute to the Government for bringing forward those proposals.

To be fair, this is a holding Queen’s Speech. It is not one of the finest reforming Queen’s Speeches we have ever seen, but it consolidates some of the excellent work that the Government have done on housingbuilding, apprentices, phonics and wider education issues, reforms in the health service and other key areas. I have to say, without being too unkind, that although he started well, the Leader of the Opposition somewhat queered the pitch with a 25-minute rant, which failed, really, to put forward a coherent and comprehensive alternative programme from the Labour party, as charming, witty, engaging and emollient as he was in the first 10 minutes of his speech.

It has been a pleasure—for me, maybe not for everyone else—to have the opportunity to speak in this debate on the Queen’s Speech. I finish by paying tribute to Her Majesty the Queen—what grace, what dedication and what hard work she has shown over all these years—and of course to the Duke of Edinburgh. Long may they go on. Thank you for this opportunity, Madam Deputy Speaker; I will continue to be a candid friend to this Government.

8.58 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): This has been a very interesting debate. It has been quite lengthy, but some interesting points have been made. It has almost been cuddly at times and quite consensual, but I am afraid to say that I will not be so consensual in my speech. It is the duty of those of us on the SNP Benches to make points where we see them that need to be raised.

The longer I spend in this Chamber looking at the Conservative party, which pretends to be a Government, and at many in the Labour party, on the Benches to my right, which pretends to be the official Opposition, the more I deeply regret our failure to take Scotland out of this Union in 2014 and the more I worry about the kind of shambles we might be tossed into if we are ripped out of the European Union in June.

We heard today a Gracious Speech focused on driving Conservative prejudices down the throats of English voters, ploughing ahead with privatising school education, turning five-year-olds into commodities. That is not something we have to care about very much if tuition fees for private schooling are paid out of daddy’s offshore accounts, but it is something we have to be concerned about if we want our local community to carry on having schools for children whose parents do not have offshore trusts or family companies that do not pay tax.

Prisons are getting the same privatisation treatment as those schools, too. It is as if the private sector has fairy dust to sprinkle everywhere and there is no record of failure in private enterprise. That is not true. It cannot be denied that many private enterprises get ahead by saying, “Devil take the hindmost”, or that many private enterprises fail. That is a process of attrition that I think is singularly unsuited to public services—and I know that that view is shared by my hon. Friends. It winnows itself down by allowing the less successful to die, and no one should ever be doing that with schools and prisons—not if we want to protect society. We cannot just close a school because it is struggling, and we cannot just close a prison because it is not an income generator—not that that is a consideration of this Government.

The move to abolish the Human Rights Act suggests a Government intent on delivering an ideological change, rather than making for a better country. I know that the intention is to have a British Bill of Rights, but I have found myself scrolling back and forwards through the Human Rights Act, trying to see which bits are not British, and which bits most upset the stiff upper lips. Is it the right to life; the right to a fair trial; the right not to be tortured; the prohibition of slavery and forced labour? Would it be the improvements to the treatments of the disabled while in police custody that upset them?

A leader in Scotland, who won an election a couple of weeks ago, puts human rights at the centre of her politics. I would like to quote from a speech Nicola Sturgeon gave in September last year:

“Human rights aren’t always convenient for Governments—but they’re not meant to be. Their purpose is to protect the powerless, not to strengthen those in power. That’s why if you weaken human rights protections—and this is contrary to how things are sometimes portrayed—you’re not striking a blow at judges in Strasbourg, lawyers in London or politicians in Scotland. You’re striking instead at the poor, the vulnerable, and the dispossessed.”

She was right then, and she is right now: the protection of human rights is vital.

Deidre Brock: I know that some Members think that the human rights of criminals or suspected terrorists are far too often protected when they should not be. Those Members are wrong, and I will tell them why. Unless the human rights of criminals and terrorists are protected, and unless the human rights of the weak are protected, along with those of the infirm, the different, the odd, the outsider, the radical, the truth is that no one’s human rights are protected. If the human rights of, say, Abu Hamza are not protected, neither are mine, neither are yours and neither are those of people calling for his protection to be withdrawn.

Human rights are not divisible; they are not negotiable, and they cannot be given to one human and not to another. Any human being has those human rights. That same consideration should be extended to the refugees fleeing Syria—they are human beings and they
have human rights. We should treat them with respect and reach out to help them. We should greet them with blankets and food, not with the cold stare of a bureaucrat dehumanising them to see passports and to take fingerprints. We should be sending aid to Greece, treating the flood of refugees as the humanitarian disaster that it is. If the much-vaunted role of the UK as a world leader is to mean anything, it should surely mean compassion, humanity and respect. Unfortunately, these do not seem to be the driving impulses of this Government. There does not, in fact, seem to be much driving this Government.

The high-speed rail Bill appears to have returned for an encore in this Session. If the speed of that Bill is an indication of the speed of the trains, I think the Bill is badly named—it is more Thomas the Tank Engine than the Flying Scotsman! On that note, I see that high-speed rail, if such it is, will not reach Scotland. Perhaps it would be better to start building it where it is actually wanted—in Scotland.

On the digital economy Bill, there is the fantastic news that every household will have a legal right to a fast broadband connection, with the kicker that anyone living in a remote area will have to pay a chunk of it themselves. There is great news from the UK Government: “You have a legal right to things that you can afford to pay for.” Broadband is just another addition to a long list that includes access to justice, access to medicines when people are ill, and, of course, access to higher education. Tuition fees will rise again while the higher education sector is deregulated. Some would say, “Get a degree from the university of Starbucks, and pay through the nose for the privilege. No taxes involved.” Some Conservative Members seem to believe that they have to think in this way because they are Tories, but that plan suggests that they are sending England’s universities down the same paths that the banks took before the 2008 crash.

I am sure that there will be some degree of welcome for the turning of the screw on visitors who come here on holiday and have the cheek to get ill and need treatment. Charging more for treating them, cutting out some visitors from the European economic area and recovering the full cost of treatment is a wizard wheeze which I am sure was expected to be very popular—except among constituents who discover that the arrangements are reciprocal, and find themselves abroad in need of medical treatment but without the means to fund it.

As has already been pointed out, the move towards driverless cars in the transport Bill may come to be seen as a metaphor for a driverless Government, transfixed by the oncoming headlights of the EU referendum. Never let it be said, however, that a nationalist would come here armed only with criticism and with no suggestions. I would never do such a thing. Indeed, my party has already presented an excellent alternative Queen’s Speech, which, as was pointed out earlier by the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), focuses a little more closely on the needs of Scotland than the original.

Let me offer the Government some small ideas for improving their programme: some pointers with which to up their game. Instead of focusing on their small and meagre proposals, let us focus on what will really matter to the people whom they are supposed to be governing. Let us think about reforming welfare so that the poorest, most vulnerable, weakest members of society do not have to rely on food banks to feed their children—and, while we are there, let us go the whole hog, and provide a bit of support for disabled people instead of a cold heart.

The Government could listen to the Black Triangle campaigners in my constituency while there is still time. Those campaigners have noted that it is an offence under Scots law for a holder of public office to neglect his or her duty, and have reported the right hon. Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) to the police for actions that they took when they were Work and Pensions Secretary and Employment Minister respectively. I understand that Police Scotland is considering the evidence with which it has been presented, and will form a view in due course. It could be that the actions of Black Triangle will commend the ingredients of the Government’s poisoned chalice to their own lips; that would be even-handed justice.

The Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, listens week after week as the incompetences of the Government are laid bare before us. Week in week out, we hear about the most appalling failures to control Government spending—not on social security or welfare benefits, but on the pet projects that Governments and Ministers pursue. The electronic system for controlling the UK’s borders, which began under the Blair Government, has cost tens of millions of pounds, and still does not work. The costs of Trident are spiralling out of control, this time into the billions, and the renewal has not even been agreed upon.

The Home Office told the Committee that it had reviewed the details of the highly paid consultants and temporary specialist staff on its books, and found that it was buying in skills that its permanent staff already had. Other Departments did not bother to check. The estimate of the cost of electrifying the great western railway main line tripled to £2.8 billion, a cost overrun that puts other rail projects in doubt. HMRC indicated that tax fraud was costing about £16 billion a year. It also indicated that there was a gap of about £13 billion between the VAT that should be collected and what it was actually collecting, and a tax gap of £34 billion a year.

I believe that the Government’s efforts should be directed towards putting their own house in order and collecting the moneys that are due, rather than squandering billions on in-house incompetence. It is not the poorly paid, the disabled or the unemployed who are causing the problems; it is the Government. As has already been said many times today, austerity is not a necessity; it is a choice, a preference, of this Government.

The UK is being failed by this Government and failed badly. This Queen’s Speech is merely the latest example and it is time the record was changed. Stop what you are doing and do something else instead. Develop a vision for the UK, at least. Make it, though, a vision where the weakest are protected, where children can go to school and learn about evolution, science and religion without someone else’s prejudices being the guiding factor. Do not sell the education of those children—invest in it instead. Make decent people proud of what the Government are doing. How about a Bill to formalise good treatment of refugees, of asylum seekers, of human beings fleeing here in fear of their lives? How about a human rights Act that says that we recognise...
that human rights are universal? UK foreign policy should include provisions to promote human rights, to stand against violence against women and girls and work towards equality?

There could be so much more than this small and narrow vision of what the UK is and can be. I urge the Government to lift up their eyes, set their sights higher, inspire the next generation—inspire this generation—and work towards a better world. It does not have to be delivered this week—God knows, we will be debating this fairly poor example of a Queen's Speech for the foreseeable future so it will take a while—but surely we can start now.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Today has been an important day in our country’s democracy. A woman who commands great respect across the political spectrum fulfilled her constitutional duty to allow the process of government to begin—Nicola Sturgeon was sworn in as First Minister of Scotland. She went on to appoint her Cabinet. I extend my congratulations, and I am sure those of my colleagues, to all the new ministerial team up the road, particularly to my good friend Derek Mackay, the new Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Constitution, Fergus Ewing, the first politician I campaigned and voted for, who is the new Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, and my old employers Jamie Hepburn and Aileen Campbell, who have been reappointed as junior Ministers in Nicola Sturgeon’s Government.

But it is true that there was another woman who had an important constitutional role to play today that we all respect because, in Wales, Leanne Wood became the Leader of the Opposition in the Welsh Assembly and, in consenting to Carwyn Jones leading a minority Government in Wales, achieved agreement on a number of key points from the Plaid Cymru manifesto that will now be taken forward for the benefit of the people of Wales. Although I sit in this House as a Scottish National party member, I am a proud card-carrying member of Plaid Cymru, too, so I am delighted by the progress that my old employers Jamie Hepburn and Aileen Campbell, who have been reappointed as junior Ministers in Nicola Sturgeon’s Government.

A major theme that has come out in most of the speeches today has been human rights. Earlier this evening, Cardinal Bo, Burma’s first Catholic Cardinal, celebrated mass in the crypt. He is a staunch defender of human rights and religious liberty. Rightly, we welcome such champions regularly to this place and give them a platform to speak up for human rights and against human rights abuses throughout the world, but we then have to live up to those standards. We diminish ourselves, and this Government diminish this country, by undermining human rights here. How can we preach human rights elsewhere in the world if we are seeking to undermine well-established human rights in the UK?

More broadly, the Queen’s Speech represents a failed opportunity on many levels, as has been observed by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) and others. It will definitely be badged as “not for viewers in Scotland”. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) observed that the Bills set out today represented English devolution by default. So much of what has been debated today is of absolutely no relevance to us. On the high-level issues, no amount of the kind of social reform that simply tinkers around the edges will undo the damage of the Government’s austerity programme or the desperation, if not the destitution, that thousands of people who are already the poorest and most vulnerable in our society are being forced into. That is the reality of the Government’s programme that has been outlined in the Queen’s Speech and that has been implemented since the election last year.

We on the Scottish National party Benches have provided an alternative vision in the alternative Queen’s Speech outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). That is underpinned by the straightforward proposal in our manifesto for a modest increase in public spending of 0.5% a year to release more than £150 billion-worth of investment, while continuing to pay down the debt and bring the books back into balance. No one is questioning that that should be done, but it should not be done on the backs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Of course, this is not just a vision, because we are delivering in Scotland. That was why we were re-elected for a third consecutive term with the highest number of votes ever received by party in Scotland and the biggest electoral mandate of any Government in western Europe. The SNP manifesto proposed to protect the poorest and most vulnerable, to protect benefits for the elderly, such as free transport and personal care, and to abolish the pernicious bedroom tax in Scotland. It also proposed the progressive reform of council tax to increase resources for councils while minimising the impact on the least well-off. So an alternative vision not only exists, but has been demonstrated to be possible. That applies equally to the role that we can play in the world.

The European debate has dominated today’s discussions and continues to dominate political debate across the country as a whole. Of course, much of this is to do with the internal politics of the Conservative party, but our plea from these Benches is that we drag the European debate up to the level that is needed: the gold standard of political debate and engagement that we experienced during the Scottish independence referendum. It is time to ditch the “Project Fear” rhetoric and to focus on the positive. It is time to make the social and historical case for a European Union that has protected the rights of workers and citizens for 70 years and that has established peace on the continent of Europe for that length of time. Those are the arguments that we need to continue to hear.
Next week, there will be a full day of debate on our role in the world and on creating a safer world, and of course the SNP fully supports that. Our nationalism and our vision of Scotland are defined by our internationalism and by the kind of relationship that we want to build with our fellow nations around the world. That has always been based on an approach that involves peace and diplomatic solutions, which could not be in greater contrast to the policies of this Government, who are bombing the people of Syria and steadfastly continuing to take forward their proposals for Trident.

This is also an important year for international development. We heard in the Queen’s Speech that the President of Colombia is to visit us, and we look forward to the opportunities that his visit will provide to discuss the peace process in his country. At the end of this month, there will be a global humanitarian summit to discuss how the world community can come together to address the serious humanitarian crises around the world, and I hope that the Government will consider inviting the new Europe and International Development Minister in the Scottish Government, Alasdair Allan, to be part of the UK delegation to that summit. I also pay tribute to his predecessor, Humza Yousaf, who has moved on to the transport remit. The UK Government will be asked to commit to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and it will be interesting to hear their plans for a sensible commitment that will enable them to live up to their ambitions and promises. The same applies to their commitments on the sustainable development goals.

Much has been made by the Prime Minister and others of the Government’s commitment to meeting a target of 0.7% of GNI to be spent on overseas development assistance and a target of 2% of GNI to be spent on achieving the military spending levels set out by NATO. What Ministers do not boast quite so much about from the Dispatch Box is the amount of double-counting that takes place in regard to both those targets. While that might be within the OECD rules, it is not what people expect when they hear the Government say that they are meeting those targets. They really should commit to meeting both those targets through completely independent, not overlapping, budgets.

Of course, the biggest decision that we expect to come our way will be on Trident. As I said in my maiden speech—many of us were making our maiden speeches this time last year—Trident is symbolic of so much. At a time when the austerity agenda continues and when we are told that there is no money for the WASPI women pensioners, there nevertheless remain the funds for military adventurism in foreign policy and the waste of millions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction. When will that vote finally take place? Will the Government commit, as proposed in the SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech, to give the Scottish Parliament a say and to listen to the voice of Scotland’s elected representatives in Holyrood? Trident is symbolic of the squandering of money, the undermining of public services and the projection of military power, and it is an example of how Scotland’s voice needs to be heard on these matters.

That is why the Government should urgently re-examine the procedures for English votes for English laws that they introduced in this House. If observers were scratching their heads watching the pomp and ceremony in the House of Lords earlier today, how much more must they be bemused by the procedures that take place in this House when EVEL kicks in, with the hokey cokey of a process outside the English Legislative Grand Committee, which is effectively an English Parliament by any other name, except for the fact that not once has there been any kind of serious debate or Division as a result of that procedure. It is simply a waste of parliamentary time.

More importantly in terms of the way that EVEL has been introduced, we were given clear assurances about the opportunities that would remain for Scottish Members to scrutinise Government legislation, and they have not stood up. We were told that the estimates process was how we would make sure that our constituents’ voices could be heard, and that we would vote on the consequences of Government legislation that had an impact on Scotland. Last week, Professor David Heald of the University of Glasgow told the Procedure Committee that the estimates process was completely “irrelevant” to the operation of the Barnett formula, so what we said at the time when EVEL was introduced has come to pass.

It is interesting to note that EVEL was introduced under Standing Orders, yet reform of the House of Lords apparently needs legislation. Again, there is a double standard when it comes to constitutional reform and the opportunities afforded to us as Scottish Members of Parliament.

The Procedure Committee has also been looking at the operation of private Members’ Bills which, for the past 12 months, has been a complete and utter farce for those of us who are new Members and had to sit through those procedures. I hope the Government will make time early in the new Session to allow a full debate and vote on the Procedure Committee’s report. If they do not, they are living on borrowed time. If the Government do allow private Members’ Bills the time and scrutiny that they deserve, perhaps there will be an opportunity to debate some of the other constitutional issues that have been raised in the debate, not least on extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds.

On so many issues, true and further reform is needed. That is why, in the SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech, we have proposals for a genuine home rule Bill for Scotland. It would devolve employment law, broadcasting, and the comprehensive ability to tax not only income, but wealth and capital, including corporation tax—in essence, what was promised in the vow and has not been delivered.

Today a young friend of mine, David Patrick Donald Mackay, the son of Craig Mackay and Jennifer Dunn, who came so close to beating the Tories in Ayr a couple of weeks ago, celebrates his fourth birthday. He is a big fan of electric cars, at least as they are immortalised in a song of that name by They Might Be Giants. I hope that by the time he is old enough to vote, or perhaps would have been old enough to drive if we were not all going to be in electric driverless cars, Gracious Speeches from the Throne will have even less relevance to his life than much of what we have heard today.

I hope that Scotland will one day soon be independent, because independence remains the biggest and best idea in Scottish politics, described by our current First Minister as a “beautiful dream,” and by our former First Minister as a dream that will never die.
9.23 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I know that the hour is late, but the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), brought more energy into the debate. I agree with very little of what he said, but I want to start in the same vein as he did, by welcoming the election of the First Minister in Northern Ireland, who also happens to be a woman—it seems that women are taking over that position in the devolved Administrations—although she is very different from the two women to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, in the sense that she wants to strengthen the Union, not break it, and to take back powers from Europe, not hand more over. That is the kind of woman I want to see leading Northern Ireland.

One significant point about this Queen’s Speech is that it contained no reference to preparing for terrorist outrages, economic meltdown, firms fleeing the United Kingdom, mass unemployment, huge movements in our export trade, or even world war three. I think that is an indication that the Prime Minister, despite the hysterical rhetoric we have heard from him, knows that after 23 June none of those things will happen, even though the people of the United Kingdom seem to be moving towards deciding that that will be the day on which we regain our independence. There were no such preparations in the Queen’s Speech, so those who listened to it today ought to take some comfort from the fact that even the Government do not believe their own rhetoric on the consequences of the UK voting to leave the European Union.

The Scottish nationalists have talked about this almost being a Queen’s Speech for English devolution. It contained a lot of Bills that do not apply to Scotland or Northern Ireland, but the reason—I would have thought that the Scottish nationalists rejoiced about this—is that the powers have been devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Many Bills applying to Scotland and Northern Ireland, on which we would have had a direct input here, are no longer going through this place, and some of the legislation applies only to England and Wales. That should be a cause for rejoicing by those who believe in devolution and want to see more of it, not a cause for further complaint. At the same time, of course, the Scottish nationalists are arguing that they want to see more of these things done not in Scotland, but in Europe. I am confused. They want to see more Bills about Scotland here, but they also want more devolution. They want more devolution for Scotland, but they also want to give powers to Europe. Where indeed do they stand on the issue of where sovereignty should rest?

It has been reported that one of the measures that will not apply to Northern Ireland is the one on driverless cars. We seem to be the only part of the United Kingdom that will not have legislation for driverless cars, so we will not be able to make telephone calls or read our newspapers while driving—well, not without getting penalty points, as I have found out on occasion. We will not be able to be backseat drivers; we will have to drive our own cars. That is no bad thing, as far as I am concerned, so I am not particularly worried about whether or not Northern Ireland will have legislation on driverless cars.

Some Government Members have been honest that this is probably a holding Queen’s Speech, because the Government’s attention is taken up with other issues. However, I think that there are big issues that needed to be addressed in this Queen’s Speech but have not been—at least, no serious attempt has been made to do so. One of the issues that I would like to have seen addressed is: what do the Government intend to do to ensure that there is more even economic growth, activity and development across the United Kingdom? Yes, of course we have devolved some of the economic powers to the Assembly in Northern Ireland and the Parliament in Scotland, but the fact remains that even with those powers being devolved many of the macroeconomic decisions that are made here then have an impact on the regions of the United Kingdom.

There needs to be a greater recognition by the Government that far too much economic activity is concentrated in one area. That is to the detriment of the country as a whole. It wastes resources. It means that infrastructure is left working to less than full capacity. It means that there have to be movements of people from Northern Ireland and the north-east and north-west of England to the south-east of England, causing the kinds of pressures that we discuss in this House almost every week—house prices and so on—and money needing to be spent on infrastructure to facilitate all this. Serious consideration needs to be given to how we spread economic growth more evenly. As other Members have pointed out, some of the policies that the Government are following exacerbate the problem by concentrating some public services here in the south-east of England and taking them away from places like Northern Ireland, to the extent that that sometimes conflicts with other Government objectives. For example, the closure of tax offices in Northern Ireland means that criminals will be able to get away with more tax fraud. Something needs to be done about that.

The second big issue that is not dealt with is energy policy. The better markets Bill will enable people, through competition, to lower their energy bills. However, the whole issue of energy costs is caused not just by the lack of competition but by the Government’s bigger policy of decarbonising energy and greater use of renewables, and the cost that that imposes on industry. I sympathise with many of the points that Labour Members have made about the decline of the steel industry and many of the other high-energy industries that have been lost in Labour heartlands, but this is partly due to an energy policy that is designed to chase those very industries out of the United Kingdom and towards places where the same policies are not in place. That is another area where I would like to see more imagination and the Government doing more.

On infrastructure, we still have no indication from this Queen’s Speech of when we are going to know the future of air transport and the air hub for the United Kingdom. That holds up many of our exporters and affects our trade.

I welcome the commitment to improving broadband provision. I represent an area that is 40% rural, and almost every week I have people with me who want to operate businesses from home in rural areas who are now required, if they are farmers, to submit many of the forms that are required by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs using the internet, and cannot get a signal. Despite the massive amounts of money that have already been put into improving broadband and the vast sums given to BT, which have
not always been used well—in fact, one sometimes wonders whether they have been used at all for that purpose—we are still struggling. We are not scrutinising these proposals in detail this evening, but I want to see a timescale for this commitment and an indication of how the Government intend to meet it. Is the commitment to 10 megabytes sufficient?

What help will be given to those who cannot access fibre-optic broadband? What contribution will they be expected to make? Will they be penalised for living in rural areas? Are the Government prepared to find ways of introducing new competition and new technologies? Many technologies are being held up by the existing provider simply because it does not want that degree of competition. This is about having a dynamic economy. It is not just about people having the internet in their houses so that they can download music; this is vital for small businesses across the whole of the United Kingdom. Not all the businesses in question are in rural areas. My constituency has two industrial parks in the middle of urban areas that do not have the access to fast-speed broadband that businesses depend on.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) has already mentioned counter-extremism. In Northern Ireland we understand the way in which terrorism works. It is not just about physically stopping people with guns and bombs; it is also about ensuring that a community does not have a mentality that encourages people to give them cover, protect them, hide them, lie for them and provide them with the kind of community support they require.

We fully understand the need for an approach that changes people’s minds and ensures that they are not poisoned by those who wish to engage in terror. We must also acknowledge, however, that such legislation can have unintended consequences. We will look very closely at any proposals relating to how authorities deal with unregulated education settings. They should not include the work that goes on in churches, as suggested by the head of Ofsted. If people are unable to express and teach the tenets of their faith because of interference by the authorities, we will move away from counter-terrorism to a society in which political correctness stifles people’s real religious beliefs and their faith.

It is good that the Government are considering how those on low incomes can be encouraged to save. Nevertheless, it is one thing to encourage and give people incentives to save, but if other economic actions are making it impossible for them to do so, the proposed legislation will not have the desired effect. That is one of the failings of this Queen’s Speech: how do we ensure that the economic growth we are experiencing is spread not just across regions, but across different income bands? Many actions are hitting the poorest.

The Government’s objective of prison reform is commendable. No one wants to see people who leave prison recommitting crimes and going back again. We have to give consideration to the impact of that not just on the individuals, but on society. However, I do not think that the proposed reforms will be possible without considerable expenditure. When people commit horrendous crimes, society expects them to be punished properly. The balance between trying to rehabilitate those who have committed crimes and ensuring that they are punished properly is a delicate one, and the Government must tread carefully.

There are many things in the Queen’s Speech, such as looking after and providing for children in care, prison reform, the digital economy, the infrastructure developments and creating better markets, that will cost money at a time when the Government are trying to find ways of saving money. I make one suggestion to Members of the House who are sceptical about how they should vote on 23 June. On 23 June, there is an opportunity to release to the public purse in the UK £10 billion that could be used to deliver those kinds of reforms and to destroy the influence of Europe on our affairs. If the Government are serious about defending the sovereignty of Parliament and the primacy of the House of Commons, the way to do it is to encourage people to vote leave on 23 June. It will release money for the reforms contained in the Queen’s Speech and deliver sovereignty back to Parliament.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Simon Kirby.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.
Aviation Noise

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Simon Kirby.)

9.41 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): This is a debate about noise, but it will not be a noisy debate, going by the number of Members left on the Benches.

On 25 June 2015, Edinburgh airport commenced the trial of a new flightpath. It was the first flightpath trial that had taken place in Scotland for nearly 40 years. The impact on my local community and the challenges that Edinburgh airport faced as a result of an outdated structure for implementing flightpath trials have shone a light on the issue of aviation noise and airport expansion that has led to this evening’s debate. I am grateful to have secured this Adjournment debate on the establishment of what I will call IANA—an independent aviation noise association—not only for my constituents in Livingston, particularly those in the communities of Broxburn and Uphall, who have been affected recently, but for the constituents of many colleagues across the House who are affected by aviation noise and for airports that are trying to navigate their way through the myriad regulations.

When I entered Parliament last year, I had my own ideas about the issues on which I wanted to campaign on behalf of my constituents and the people of Scotland. I did not imagine for a moment that aviation noise would be one of them. However, as an MP with a constituency in close proximity to Edinburgh airport, I have become increasingly interested in the matter of aviation, its contribution to the economy and the impact of the additional flightpath, as have my constituents.

I thank the Minister for staying so late this evening to respond to the debate. I look forward to working closely with him and colleagues across the House on this issue. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who is the SNP transport spokesman, and other colleagues for staying late this evening to take part.

It is important to recognise the members of the Environmental Audit Committee and its former Chair, the former Member for Ogmore, for their work on “The Airports Commission Report: Carbon Emissions, Air Quality and Noise”, which was published in December last year. It is an excellent holiday read if anybody is interested in the specifics of what I will call IANA—an independent aviation noise association. It reinforces the need for an independent aviation noise association—not only in Scotland but in Northern Ireland?

Lady for giving way—I asked her before the debate.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way—I asked her before the debate whether it would be okay for me to intervene.

Does the hon. Lady agree that Heathrow’s announcement that it would go above and beyond the conditions set by the independent Airports Commission for reducing noise levels and the number of flights coming in is an example of the potential for independent agencies and airports to work positively together so that we can have connectivity not only in Scotland but in Northern Ireland?

Hannah Bardell: I could not agree more, and that reinforces the need for an independent aviation noise association.

Before the flightpath trial started, I saw occasional stories in the press about the fact that it would take place, but there was not a great deal of information about what that meant for folk on the ground. I should declare an interest: I grew up living under one of Edinburgh airport’s current flightpaths, and I use and enjoy aircraft travel for both work and pleasure.

Almost immediately after the trial started, the local MSPs and my neighbouring MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk, started to receive complaints from constituents about the noise
levels. The airport had stated that Civil Aviation Authority guidelines said that until the trial was live and aircraft started using the route, it would be unable to record the noise levels. It was suggested that noise monitors would be placed at various points along the new route to capture data and information.

One example of the complaints that were made was from my constituent David Jenkins, who wrote:

“This change to the flight paths has turned our outdoor garden experience into an incessant noisy environment and recently they have been passing every few minutes and their elevation is much lower and therefore much louder, than we have experienced in the past 32 years.”

Another was from Andy Marshall, who wrote:

“Very disappointed to be advised by the CAA aircraft noise is not covered by the environmental protection act nor the noise act. It seems the airport themselves deem what level of aircraft noise is acceptable!”

By mid-September, Edinburgh airport had said that it was gathering all feedback and concerns, which the CAA would review as part of the trial. However, it is fair to say that the airport was overwhelmed with communications from constituents and simply could not cope. In my view, that was largely because the CAA guidelines and its engagement structure are not set up for modern communications or the community engagement that people expect.

As you can imagine, Mr Speaker, significant attention was given to the issue, and there was significant action. The trial was due to last six months, but it ended in December as a result of numerous complaints and direct intervention from the then Transport Minister, Derek Mackay. It is therefore clear to me that the current system of managing and mitigating aviation noise is outdated, unsuitable for modern times and in urgent need of reform. Furthermore, as recent airspace trials in Edinburgh and Gatwick have shown, there is a troubling disconnect between airports and local residents when it comes to aviation noise.

The balance at the core of today’s debate is how we turn an outdated, complex, often little understood system for managing the noise impact of aviation into an opportunity for better engagement between our vital international transport businesses and local communities.

My overall goal in highlighting this issue is to draw together our collective experience and learnings so that we can prevent future communities and airports from having the challenging and difficult experience that mine have had. I think that Edinburgh airport was doing its best to work within the CAA’s “Guidance on the Application of the Airspace Change Process”—CAP725—with which I have become increasingly familiar.

It is specific published guidance on changing airspace.

Essentially, the guidance requires that any intention to make a new route permanent requires a full community consultation only when and if an airport trial is found to be a success following its completion. It is not until that point that constituents affected by the trial are entitled to take part in a consultation process. To me, the guidance and processes are more than a little out of date. In Scotland, and I am sure across wider parts of the UK, people expect and indeed welcome proper public consultation and engagement.

I know from several meetings that I have had with Edinburgh airport that it understands and accepts that there should have been greater engagement, and it is my observation that it was caught between balancing the rules and regulations of the CAA and what the local public need and want. To that end, I am pleased to say that Edinburgh airport has confirmed to me earlier today that it plans to set up its own local noise board, which will have members of the local community involved. While all the details are not yet in place, it advises me that it absolutely sees the value in doing this and will actively work with the CAA on its recent experiences and plans.

I appreciate that more passengers travel through our airports, and as a result, airports have to increase airspace capacity to cater for this growth. I care deeply about Scotland’s connectivity to other parts of the UK and the world for the growth of business and trade, as well as the huge number of people who benefit from the 8,000 jobs at Edinburgh airport. I am also mindful of the fact that air travel is generally on the increase and, to that end, I think that it would be best for business and local communities to engage positively and see this debate as an opportunity to begin that discussion.

The “Policy for the Conduct of Operational Airspace Trials” on “Consultation” states:

“Due to the short term nature of temporary airspace changes and airspace trials, it will usually not be necessary or appropriate for the airspace change sponsor to consult on their proposals or to undertake the airspace change approval process.”

It goes on to say:

“Whilst consultation may not be required the Guidance places an onus on both the sponsor and the CAA to consider the environmental impact of an operational trial and establish the level of consultation/engagement required... The CAA will confirm to the sponsor the level of engagement/consultation considered appropriate in the circumstances.”

With regard to impact studies, the policy states:

“It is accepted that some trials will have an unavoidable environmental impact; however the CAA will require trial sponsors to mitigate that impact as far as practicable and limit the scope of the trial to that which is strictly necessary commensurate with its aims”.

It means mibbes aye, mibbes naw will we have proper guidelines.

Apart from the policy’s requiring neither consultation nor an impact study up front, that raises the question of whether the CAA can be truly independent in looking at noise complaints. The CAA’s functions are wide ranging. No one suggests that it does not do a good job in many areas, but its functions include: regulating civil aviation safety; advising and assisting the Secretary of State on all civil aviation matters; determining policy for the use of the UK airspace to meet the needs of all users; economic regulation of the designated airports, and licensing of air travel organisers.

As that list suggests, the CAA’s remit is vast. I find it difficult to see how the CAA can effectively manage noise issues and maintain neutrality when balancing its other functions. In January 2013, the CAA published a literature review on aircraft noise, sleep disturbance and health impacts. It concluded that findings were "not conclusive and are often contradictory, highlighting the practical difficulties in designing studies of this nature". That highlights how conflicting the information is.

Furthermore, the Airports Commission’s final report stated:

“The CAA carries out a number of functions targeted at ensuring aircraft noise is taken into account, not only within the airspace change process, but also within planning applications,
and aims to improve the transparency associated with monitoring and reporting aircraft noise. However, as the *Interim Report* highlighted, there are still real issues to resolve around the manner in which communities are engaged in processes which impact aircraft noise (most notably the airspace change process), and in holding those involved in these processes to proper account."

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making excellent points. On holding people to account for noise, does she agree that one benefit of being in the European Union is that we have two directives, the rather cumbersomely named D2002/30 (European Parliament, 2002a), which is devoted to air traffic noise and inspired by the “balanced approach” concept, and D2002/49 (European Parliament, 2002b), which is on environmental noise and specifying noise metrics? Is there a benefit to having European standards to which people must adhere?

Hannah Bardell: My hon. Friend is a great expert in this area, and I could not agree with him more. That is why we need a unified approach across the UK, and local consultative bodies.

A further interesting point—well, interesting to me and my constituents—is that flightpaths in the UK are designed and drawn up in consultation with the local airport, the CAA, and predominantly the National Air Traffic Services. As I understand—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—NATS manages airspace above 3,000 feet, and under a previous Government it was part privatised. NATS is a public-private partnership between the Airline Group, which holds 42%, NATS staff who own 5%, UK airport operator LHR Airports Limited with 4%, and the Government who hold 49%. The Airline Group comprises a number of private companies, including leading companies and airlines, and its website is open and informative. I will not list all those private companies, but some are airlines. Call me a conspiracy theorist, Mr Speaker, but I cannot help finding it a little odd first that our airspace is part privately owned, and secondly that that part privately owned company has a significant hand in designing our flightpaths. I would be interested in the Minister’s views on whether NATS will remain part public, and on whether data on the design of flightpaths and future flightpaths could be made public. Indeed, if the new noise association is set up, it will have a key role in future designs.

The Edinburgh trial last year was merely the latest in a number of instances in which local residents have felt helpless in the face of airspace change and general airport operations that have had a severe and detrimental impact on their quality of life. The Airports Commission’s July 2013 aviation noise discussion paper stated that in terms of health effects from aviation noise, the link between noise and hypertension is “fairly well” established.

Except for airports where there is direct regulation from the Secretary of State for Transport—Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted—it is for airports to decide whether and how best to control noise impacts from their operations. I do not believe that that is in keeping with the spirit of public engagement, and it could be detrimental to our other airports and their business. At the UK’s major airports the Secretary of State may prescribe “noise preferential routes” to minimise noise disturbance, but

it is the responsibility of airport operators to ensure that those routes are used, and there are no statutory powers to penalise poor track-keeping. I think that people across the UK will find that unsatisfactory, and it is imperative that the UK Government, their agencies and our airports, are more open, transparent and consultative.

I am not alone in that opinion. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), who sadly could not be with us this evening, is a passionate and determined advocate for his constituents, and he represents a large number of people who live under the flight path to Glasgow airport. He has been contacted by a large number of residents, many of whom have been fighting for years to get support to install sound proofing in those houses that are adversely affected, to counter the impact of noise. He advises me that those calls have not been met with the most positive of responses, and he argues that a misconception and lack of understanding lies at the heart of the matter, and that if we are fully to combat the effects of aircraft noise, the establishment of an independent aviation noise association will be an important step.

In recent years the independent Airports Commission, chaired ably by Sir Howard Davies, the Environmental Audit Committee, and others, have called on the Government to create a new independent aviation noise authority as part of their recommendations, including a levy that could be used by local households—such as those in the constituency of my hon. Friend—to spend on noise protections such as sound proofing.

The Airports Commission said:

“An independent aviation noise authority should be established with a statutory right to be consulted on flight paths and other operating procedures. The authority should be given statutory consultee status and a formal role in monitoring and quality assuring all processes and functions which have an impact on aircraft noise, and in advising central and local Government and the CAA on such issues.”

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Simon Kirby.)

Hannah Bardell: The Environmental Audit Committee reiterated the call from Sir Howard and urged the Government to establish IANA in the next year, “whether or not it proceeds with expansion at Heathrow.”

Indeed, in the Committee’s view, there is no reason why the two recommendations—the establishment of IANA and Heathrow expansion—cannot be mutually exclusive.

We do not know the Government’s thinking on IANA. The Secretary of State said in 2014 that the Government would need to wait on the commission’s report before considering IANA. However, in the light of the report, and despite being asked—including in a letter I wrote in October last year, he has not subsequently addressed the matter even though it has cross-party backing.

Like all hon. Members, I accept the need for co-ordinated, UK-wide policy making on broad aviation strategy, but an independent aviation noise authority could put certainty and accountability closer to my constituents in Livingston and others around the UK. What are the Minister’s views on supporting regional noise committees either
We know from bodies such as the Aviation Environment Federation that many communities report diminishing levels of trust with their airport operators and with airspace change sponsors, which impedes progress on reducing the health burden of aircraft noise on communities. It is clear from the recent trial at Edinburgh that the Civil Aviation Authority and NATS neither have nor foster direct access for local residents, which is required when it comes to informing residents and resolving issues about noise controls. The work of the Airports Commission showed that an independent noise authority would not only forge new relationships between local residents and airports over noise disputes, but could play a vital role in noise monitoring and management, which the CAA and NATS currently lack. Finally, it is my firm belief that establishing an independent aviation noise authority sooner rather than later would benefit the whole UK and all our constituents, and would help to establish confidence in local communities between airports and local residents.

I have asked a lot of the Minister this evening, but he is more than equal to the task of answering those questions, of being bold, and of bringing forward the proposals into statute. I hope he can answer my various questions, but also that he will meet me and some of my local representatives and the airport to understand how we can make a noise association work for business and communities such as mine in Livingston and those around the UK. We have an opportunity to do the right thing for business and our communities. Let’s get on and do it.

Mr Speaker: To reply to the debate, I call the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Mr Andrew Hanson Jones.

10.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is not very often that my middle name gets a mention—good research.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) on securing this debate on an independent aviation noise body, and on the work that has clearly been going on locally by so many different people and bodies involved in the process. She will have noticed that I am not the Minister with responsibility for aviation—the Minister of State, Department for Transport, the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), is away representing the Government at an international aviation conference—but she has asked to meet him and, on his behalf, I am quite sure I can guarantee to put that in his diary. While he is away representing our UK, I am happy to fill his diary.

The hon. Lady has asked many detailed questions, and the answers to some of them will be clear from my speech this evening. If there are other questions, I will ensure they are picked up from Hansard, and the Department will write to her so that she can have detailed answers.

The Government are acutely aware that noise is a major environmental concern around airports. We also understand that aviation noise is an issue of trust between communities and the aviation industry. As a result, we are considering policies very carefully. We acknowledge that there is growing evidence that exposure to aircraft noise can adversely affect people’s health. We closely monitor research in this field and relevant robust evidence is incorporated into the policy appraisal process. As set out in the aviation policy framework published in 2013, our overall policy is:

“to limit and, where possible, reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise.”

The creation of an independent aviation noise body was recommended by the Airports Commission in its report on new airport capacity in the south-east of England. The commission made this recommendation in its interim report and then reaffirmed it in its final report published in July last year. It recommended that the noise body should provide statutory advice to the Secretary of State considering: proposed changes to noise preferential routes, the proper structure for noise compensation schemes, and that it should work with communities affected by development to create a balance between aviation growth and noise control.

I will make this point regarding balance now and then come back to it later. The Government are committed to ensuring that a proper balance is struck between the development of the aviation industry, the legitimate and valid concerns of the communities who are affected, and the environmental concerns that arise from a growing and strengthening industry. I understand, and the Government recognise, that the levels of trust from communities in industry bodies such as airports and NATS differs considerably across the country. It is important that any proposed noise body focuses on enhancing and bolstering those relationships, but does not introduce any unnecessary bureaucracy. It is clear to me that a noise body, as proposed by the Airports Commission, could indeed help to facilitate the strengthening of relationships between communities and industry. However, a noise body should not attempt to interfere where strong and trusting relationships between communities and industry already exist. It would need to make sure that it struck the right balance between community concerns and the legitimate needs of industry.

As hon. Members will be aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement to the House on 14 December last year on airport policy and the Government’s response to the commission’s report. In the statement, he set out the Government’s acceptance of the need for additional runway capacity in the south-east. However, before making a decision on the preferred option at either Heathrow or Gatwick, he made it clear that a package of further work is required. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, we have been considering our policies in the area of noise and airspace more generally. My Department plans to publish a consultation on national airspace and noise policy, which will include the potential role of a noise body. Department for Transport officials have engaged with stakeholders and are working through the details of the functions envisaged for a noise body. It is expected that this will be consulted on by the end of this year. The creation of a noise body is among one of the most important things that needs to be considered. The Government are fully aware of calls from MPs, the public and aviation stakeholders on the establishment of such a noise body. We will consider carefully the arguments put forward before making a final decision.
The use of UK airspace is not a devolved matter and the Civil Aviation Authority is the UK’s aviation independent regulator. However, we will continue to engage fully with the Scottish Government in developing proposals on national noise and airspace matters, and a possible noise body. The use of airspace is a UK matter, but environmental issues, including noise, are devolved matters. Edinburgh airport’s noise plan, required under European Commission legislation that sets how the airport will minimise the impact of noise, is required to be adopted by Scottish Ministers. The hon. Lady’s constituency, Livingston, lies approximately seven miles west of Edinburgh airport and will be impacted mainly by departure noise. As she is well aware and made clear in her speech, the airport, in conjunction with NATS, carried out a departure trial last year at Edinburgh airport. The trial was one of a series that airports, with the support of the CAA, have been undertaking to assess the practicable implications of the use of the primarily satellite-based navigation, known as performance based navigation. PBN has been mandated for use across the EU by 2024 because it offers significant benefits, including reduced emissions and delays compared to conventional ground-based navigation.

The trials were important to understanding the typical level of track-keeping accuracy and how different aircraft types and operators react to the use of new procedures. I understand that the trial involved a new standard instrument departure route to allow the airport to encourage and maintain safe and sustainable growth, while ensuring that punctuality was unaffected. I also understand that it ended early, on 29 October last year, as the hon. Lady detailed, following complaints from the public and local representatives.

The routes used by aircraft and the heights at which they fly are two significant factors that affect noise experienced by people on the ground. The departure trials in 2014 at Heathrow, Gatwick and Edinburgh airports and the public response, indicated by the number of complaints received, showed that very clearly. Trials are important, however, because the information gained from them is vital to gaining the knowledge necessary for future airspace change, as driven by the CAA’s future airspace strategy.

Change is required. The basic structure of UK airspace was developed more than 40 years ago, and since then there has been a dramatic increase in demand for flights. The future airspace strategy is the plan to modernise UK airspace to take account of the European Commission’s single European sky strategy and modern technology with more precision based navigation, as well as the increase in the number of flights. The environmental aims will be savings in fuel, which will cut carbon emissions, and a reduction in noise impacts, with considerations to share the benefits of noise reductions more widely.

Edinburgh airport is now considering the data from the trial, with a view to updating its plans, and I understand that the results of the trial are to be published later this year. Once the airport has revised its plans, we expect it to present the CAA with an airspace change application. The airport, now the fifth-busiest in the UK, proposes to update its airspace to cater for the increasing demand and to enable aircraft operators to benefit from PBN. It is important that all trials be publicised and communicated beforehand and that local politicians and local authorities in the vicinity of the airport be alerted so that the public are aware of them. I reassure the House that any permanent change to airspace in the vicinity of an airport will require public and transparent consultation. That was an important point the hon. Lady made, and I am happy to provide that reassurance.

Put simply, the Government want to see growth in aviation. It is good for the economy, bringing investment and employment to the UK and wider benefits to society and individuals, including around travel for leisure and visiting friends and family. It is imperative, however, that this be balanced against the costs to the local environment that more flights bring, noise being the prime example. It is vital that those affected by the changes can trust the information provided by those wanting the changes and making the decisions. The Airports Commission’s proposal for a new noise body might well help with that.

In concluding, I reiterate to the hon. Lady and the House that the Government will carefully consider the need for setting up an independent aviation noise body and its proposed role and functions. The message that has come across loudly from local campaigners, not just in her constituency but around the country, indicates how important the matter is and how seriously the Government will therefore take it.

Question put and agreed to.

10.13 pm

House adjourned.
The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Mr Speaker, you will notice a degree of commonality in the business for next week:

Monday 23 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on defending public services.

Tuesday 24 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad.

Wednesday 25 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on education, skills and training.

Thursday 26 May—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on economy and work.

Friday 27 May—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

Monday 6 June—Remaining stages of a Bill. It will be one of the two main carry-over Bills, and we will confirm which one early next week.

I should also inform the House that the statement on Syria, which we unfortunately had to move at the last moment, just before Prorogation, will take place alongside the foreign affairs debate next Tuesday.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 June will be:

Monday 6 June—Debate on an e-petition relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

Business of the House

Mr Speaker, you will notice a degree of commonality in the business for next week:

Monday 23 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on defending public services.

Tuesday 24 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad.

Wednesday 25 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on education, skills and training.

Thursday 26 May—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on economy and work.

Friday 27 May—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

Monday 6 June—Remaining stages of a Bill. It will be one of the two main carry-over Bills, and we will confirm which one early next week.

I should also inform the House that the statement on Syria, which we unfortunately had to move at the last moment, just before Prorogation, will take place alongside the foreign affairs debate next Tuesday.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 June will be:

Monday 6 June—Debate on an e-petition relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

Mr Speaker, you will notice a degree of commonality in the business for next week:

Monday 23 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on defending public services.

Tuesday 24 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad.

Wednesday 25 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on education, skills and training.

Thursday 26 May—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on economy and work.

Friday 27 May—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

Monday 6 June—Remaining stages of a Bill. It will be one of the two main carry-over Bills, and we will confirm which one early next week.

I should also inform the House that the statement on Syria, which we unfortunately had to move at the last moment, just before Prorogation, will take place alongside the foreign affairs debate next Tuesday.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 June will be:

Monday 6 June—Debate on an e-petition relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

Mr Speaker, you will notice a degree of commonality in the business for next week:

Monday 23 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on defending public services.

Tuesday 24 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad.

Wednesday 25 May—Continuation of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on education, skills and training.

Thursday 26 May—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen’s Speech on economy and work.

Friday 27 May—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

Monday 6 June—Remaining stages of a Bill. It will be one of the two main carry-over Bills, and we will confirm which one early next week.

I should also inform the House that the statement on Syria, which we unfortunately had to move at the last moment, just before Prorogation, will take place alongside the foreign affairs debate next Tuesday.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 June will be:

Monday 6 June—Debate on an e-petition relating to restricting the use of fireworks.
meant that he could get away with saying anything he wanted. Where on earth do I start? The former Mayor has a habit of making up so-called historical facts. My favourite was his assertion that King Edward II enjoyed a reign of dissolution with his catamite, Piers Gaveston, at Edward’s recently discovered 14th century palace. I do not doubt that Gaveston liked a bit of royal rumpypump, but since he was beheaded fully 12 years before the palace was built, it is pretty unlikely that he did so there. My only explanation for that so-called fact from the former Mayor of London is that he was a member of the Piers Gaveston society at Oxford with the Prime Minister, where they got used to porkies.

Mr Speaker: Order. The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that if the Leader of the House was doing his business on the “Today” programme between 6 and 7 am, I was almost certainly in the swimming pool at the time. Talking of beheading, the hon. Gentleman is in some danger of beheading himself, because he has already had five minutes. I think he is in his last sentence.

Chris Bryant: I am certainly in my last paragraph, Mr Speaker.

Finally, I gather that the Leader of the House is off to the United States of America next week. He is such a close friend and ally of Mr Trump that I am sure Trump tower is preparing the ticker-tape reception for him now. They have a habit in the United States of America of playing appropriate music when important politicians and international statesmen, such as the Leader of the House, appear on stage. The President always gets “Hail to the Chief”. I have had a word with the American ambassador, and I gather that they have got Yakety Sax from “The Benny Hill Show” ready for the Leader of the House.

Chris Grayling: First of all, on a very serious point, all our good wishes and sympathies go to the families of the passengers on the EgyptAir plane, who must be beside themselves with worry about what has happened. It is a deeply worrying situation. Clearly, if it turns out to be something more than an accident, we will want to discuss the matter in the House, but it is important that we await the outcome of the initial investigations and the search for the plane. All our hearts go out to everyone involved.

On the Syria statement, I reiterate that it will be a separate statement, but we have put it alongside the foreign affairs debate to ensure that those who are most concerned about the issue are likely to be present.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is such an old misery. Yesterday was Britain at its finest: strong institutions, great tradition—things that make this great city one of the finest, if not the finest, in the world—a monarch we should be proud of and a programme for government that fulfils the commitments we made to the electorate at last year’s election which, I remind Labour Members, they lost and we won. We set out 21 new Government Bills. The programme for government completes most of the manifesto on which we won the election. It helps us to achieve our financial targets to balance our nation’s books and complete the sorting out of the mess that we inherited from Labour. It includes measures on children in care and on prisons. It helps to boost our digital economy. It helps to strengthen our ability to combat terrorism.

The hon. Gentleman talks about compassionate conservatism. Let me remind him of three things. First, in the past 12 months we have introduced the national living wage. Secondly, in the past 12 months claimant count unemployment has been at its lowest level since the 1970s. Thirdly, there has been a fall of more than 750,000 in the number of workless households—a change that will make a transformational difference to many of our most deprived communities. Those achievements were made under a Conservative Government, sorting out the mess that we inherited.

The hon. Gentleman started by talking about taking interventions, and here I have some sympathy with him. He did better this morning than the leader of the Labour party did yesterday. I noticed that the shadow Leader of the House yesterday spent 41 minutes trying to look at the shoes of Conservative Members rather than looking at the leader of his party making such an awful speech.

I am not sure whether the shadow Leader of the House raised any other questions. I was grappling with trying to understand what on earth he was going on about in the middle of his contribution. Let me be clear that we are at the start of a Session in which we will deliver before the House measures that will make a transformational difference to this country; measures that will make a difference to our most deprived communities; and measures that will make this country more secure economically and more secure against the national threats that we face.

In the week that the YMCA has named its latest building the Chris Bryant centre—after the famous Chris Bryant, not this one—we should pause for a moment to praise the shadow Leader of the House. He is a great champion of equalities in this place, and he and I share the ambition of wanting more women to be elected to office. I am delighted to see that his constituency has done its bit by electing a woman to represent it in Cardiff, and who knows whether we will see a further step in that direction in this House in 2020. While we are on the subject of the shadow Leader of the House, may I congratulate him on stepping in to save the local calendar competition in Rhondda following the defeat of its founder, Leighton Andrews, in the Welsh elections? Who knows, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman will have his very own calendar girl for the month of May 2020 in the Rhondda—Leanne Wood.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The controversial HS2 project has again been in the media, with talk of further cost overruns and potential cuts to the scope of the project. The announcement of the finalised route for phase 2 will not be made until at least this September—a year late—exacerbating the blight on my constituents. May we have a statement to update the House on the progress of HS2 so that we can know exactly how big the white elephant has grown?

Chris Grayling: I do understand my hon. Friend’s concerns. His constituency is one of those that faces challenges from HS2, but also, in my view benefits from it in the way it will open up parts of our economy, improve infrastructure and make a difference to jobs and business prospects. I understand the concerns he
has raised. We have a debate on transport today, but I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Transport is aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. We, too, pass on our best wishes to all those caught up in the Egyptian airline event. Let us hope that there can be some sort of positive resolution to it all.

What a few weeks we are going to have. We will have to spend most of our time discussing the anaemic, tortured stuff in the Queen’s Speech, when all Government Members want to do is knock lumps out of each other over the EU referendum. The debate in the Tory party is hardly reaching Churchillian standards of discourse. According to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on the radio this morning, it is apparently all about insults, personal attacks and tabloid smears.

My hon. Friends are already considering our amendments to the driverless cars Bill. Most of them involve locking this Tory Government into the said vehicle and heading it towards the nearest cliff edge.

The Scotland bit in the Queen’s Speech yesterday got 22 words, which is actually quite good given what we usually get when we are included in all this. It may be a one nation Queen’s Speech, but one of those nations certainly is not Scotland.

We still have not secured from this Government a statement on all the now quite explosive evidence in the Conservative party submission to the Electoral Commission about the conflict between national and local spending during the last election campaign. Fourteen police forces are now investigating this alleged electoral fraud, yet we have not heard one peep from the Government. They know what they were up to, because a book has been serialised in The Daily Telegraph called, “Why the Tories Won: The Inside Story of the 2015 Election”, which says:

“The buses were critical to moving party troops from where they lived to where the swing voters could be found. The central party paid for all the buses and trains, as well as hotels and hostels.”

We must now have an urgent statement from the Government on what they will actually do about this.

Lastly, may we have a debate on world war two? It would allow senior Labour and Conservative Members to indulge their new passion of talking about Hitler. We could hear about all the dodgy histories and spurious examples, and it might take minds off the raging civil wars within the Labour party and within the Conservative party, which we are intensely enjoying.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments about the EgyptAir plane. We are all waiting with hope, but also with trepidation, to hear what has happened.

I am really not sure that this is the week for Scottish National party Members to talk about stories in the tabloids. I have read the news, and I have to say that there must be something in the water in Scotland. As you will remember, Mr Speaker, I told the House a few months ago that the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) had written to me about recess dates because he wanted to put the ram in with the ewes. At that time, I thought he was talking about sheep.

The Queen’s Speech was a powerful package for this country. It will deliver change for Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom. It included important measures for our economy and our security. The SNP cannot have it both ways. It cannot, on the one hand, demand and secure far greater powers for the Government in Edinburgh and the nation of Scotland, and then turn around and complain that it has not got a huge range of measures in the Queen’s Speech. We will look at how the SNP uses those powers. Yesterday, its leader in Westminster said yet again that the SNP wanted more powers for Scotland. Perhaps it might like to use the powers it has in the first place.

On the subject of the Scottish Parliament and Administration, I congratulate the First Minister on her re-election. I also congratulate Ruth Davidson, our Scottish leader, on depriving the Scottish National party of its majority in the Scottish Parliament. We will be an effective Unionist opposition to the SNP, and we will hold it to account to use the powers it has been given wisely in the interests of Scotland. If it does not do so, we will then defeat it.

The hon. Gentleman raised election issues. Those are matters for the appropriate authorities: they are not matters for the Government.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the BBC and its relationship with the European Union, especially in relation to its coverage of the EU? It was revealed in Heat Street magazine this week that the BBC received £2.1 million from the European Union between April 2013 and September 2015. That is on top of at least £141 million in soft loans from the European Investment Bank.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House explain the difference—perhaps we could have a statement—between the 1975 referendum, during which Ministers disagreed without bitterness, important arguments were made and personal attacks were not made, and the present campaign, in which Cabinet and other members of the Government and their supporters have such bitterness, strife and rancour between them over the question of remain or leave? It is not very civilised and totally unlike 1975.

Chris Grayling: Ironically, I wrote a short piece for City A.M. this morning about social reform, alongside my deputy from a different side of the argument. I
assure the hon. Gentleman that we are still best friends, unlike most people in the Labour party, who appear to be preparing to knife their leader in the back.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a debate on the important report on antimicrobial resistance that came out this morning? It was initiated by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, and it is vital. I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) have spoken eloquently on the subject, but we need an opportunity to discuss the terrifying prospect of increasing antimicrobial resistance as soon as possible.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a very important point indeed. We spar on political matters, but this issue affects all of us and should be of great concern to our country and to the world as whole. It is a serious issue. Of course, we will have a debate on Monday on public services and that might be an opportunity for my hon. Friend to discuss the matter in the House with the Secretary of State. If not, it is an issue that we should certainly look to return to.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): In the past month, there have been 11 serious stabbings involving young people in my borough. There have been 114 incidents of serious youth violence in Lambeth and more than 2,300 across London. This is a crisis situation and it is nationwide. It has been occurring for several months now, yet it did not merit a single mention by the Prime Minister in his remarks in this House yesterday on the forthcoming agenda of this Government. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on whether the Government will agree to what I and many Members of this House, on both sides, have been calling for—a proper, independent, cross-party commission on this issue—because right now, to many of my constituents, it does not look like this Government care about what is happening on our streets?

Chris Grayling: First, I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the seriousness of the issue. I disagree with him that we have not taken it seriously. We have sought both to tighten the law—I did some of that when I was Justice Secretary—and to engage young people. Yesterday’s Queen’s Speech included our plans to address the recommendations in these reports?

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Last Thursday, after Parliament had been prorogued, the Government published the peer review reports on the deaths of 49 social security claimants who had died between 2012 and 2014—this was after Ministers had denied that they had any records on people whose deaths had been linked to the social security system. Given the gravity of this matter and given that this is the second time data have been released on the deaths of social security claimants while Parliament has been in recess, will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to this House on what action has been taken to address the recommendations in these reports?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady will have the opportunity to raise this issue next Thursday, when there will be a debate on work and welfare matters in this House. I am sure she will take the opportunity to do that.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I was pleased to see a higher education Bill announced in yesterday’s Gracious Speech. It will enable more universities to be built, increase the participation of those from deprived families, and increase diversity reporting. Can my right hon. Friend update the House as to when the technical consultation on the teaching excellence framework will be announced, particularly for the universities sector? What will be the timescales for the debate, aside from on Wednesday of next week?

Chris Grayling: I do not know the dates of the technical consultation, but I can tell my hon. Friend that the higher education Bill will be brought before this House very shortly. It will be one of the earliest Bills to be debated in this Session, and I have no doubt that he will want to make his points in that discussion.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): May we have a statement from the Home Secretary next week on the plight of the Brain family from Dingwall, who are ably represented in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and who are threatened with deportation? This young family came to Scotland five years ago under the fresh talent initiative. They have contributed massively, of their money and their efforts, to the community. They are self-supporting and contribute to community efforts—I include in that their young, seven-year-old son Lachlan, who has known no other home but Dingwall and whose first language is Scots Gaelic. Does the Leader of the House feel no shame at all that his party’s narrow obsession with south-west Members of Parliament can make sure that the Department for Transport understands exactly what we want in the south-west?

Chris Grayling: Obviously, I am well aware of the challenge we face with rail in the south-west. We had the difficult experience a couple of years ago of the line being washed away and having an extended period when it was closed. I know that the Department for Transport takes this enormously seriously, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing to make sure it is kept firmly on the desks of Ministers. I remind him that after this morning’s statement there will be an opportunity for him to raise the issue in the debate on transport, and I advise him to do just that.
immigration statistics could result in a huge injustice being perpetrated against this young family and a huge disservice being committed against the people of Scotland?

Chris Grayling: First, I do not know the circumstance of the case, but I will draw the right hon. Gentleman’s comments to the attention of the Home Secretary this morning, after the end of this session. However, it is important to remember that, if people come here for a temporary period, it does not automatically mean that they will have the right to stay here at the end of that period. That is important to remember when we are dealing with these cases.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I wish urgently to raise the case of Gloria Calib, a 38-year-old student from Lahore, who proposes to leave her family to do her viva and complete her PhD at the London School of Theology. Her visa has been turned down despite the backing of a former bishop in this country. Will the Leader of the House make time for a statement on visa processes for genuine academic candidates, so that these issues can be resolved? There seems to be a pattern of middle east Christians being put into bad circumstances and not evaluated very well.

Chris Grayling: Again, I cannot comment on the individual case because I do not know the circumstance. What I can say is that we do not have Home Office questions for a little while yet, because we had them relatively recently, so the best thing for me to do is to draw the attention of the Home Secretary to the case that my hon. Friend has raised and ask the Home Office to deal with him directly on it.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): The Leader of the House has said that the Government’s intention is to make the UK more economically secure. In the light of that, can we have a debate in this House on farm-gate prices, particularly in relation to the regional differentials between farm-gate prices in Northern Ireland and those in Britain, because farmers in Northern Ireland are being placed at a severe financial disadvantage?

Chris Grayling: Again, I do not know enough about the detail of the case. Perhaps the hon. Lady could write to me, and I will ensure that she gets a proper response, but I do not have detailed knowledge of the farm-gate price situation in Northern Ireland.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): On the frontline of the security of this nation are our armed police officers, who are often put in very dangerous circumstances and have to make a decision in a split second. If they are forced to make that decision, they then face months of scrutiny over whether that decision, taken in a split second, was right or wrong. Can we have a debate on the process of analysing those decisions and the scrutiny under which those officers are put?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are in the process of recruiting more than 1,000 new armed officers as an essential part of the strategy that we now have to combat the risk of terrorism in this country. If an incident does take place involving an armed officer, it is important to ensure that, for the protection of that officer as much as anything else, it is properly checked and investigated. We must not get ourselves into a position where people do not want to be armed officers and are not willing to act because they are concerned about the consequences for themselves.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The Department of Health is due to publish soon the NHS health action plan on hearing loss. Does the Leader of the House know whether there is a date for when that might happen, and whether it will be in the form of a written or an oral statement? A number of us will be bidding for Adjournment debate time to discuss the matter. It is a good news story for the 3 million hard of hearing and deaf people in the UK. A lot of great work is being done in the Department and by the NHS, and it would be really good to see the Government leading from the front on this.

Chris Grayling: I know that the Government are working on that. I do not have an exact date yet, but I am sure that they will want to update the House fully. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that there will be an oral statement, but I suspect that, when it happens, there will be a desire by the Department of Health to inform the House as widely as possible. I am sure that it is the kind of issue that may well end up being debated either in an Adjournment debate or in a Backbench Business Committee debate once the new Chair is elected. Let me pass on my commiserations to the former—and potentially future—Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for the events of the past couple of weeks. Who knows, he might bounce back quickly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The humanitarian crisis in north-east Syria is becoming worse, with international aid unable to reach the region. Food prices have increased severalfold. A kilo of tomatoes is 800 Syrian pounds and a kilo of sugar is 1,000 Syrian pounds. The average wage is a 10th of what is needed to buy food for a family of five people. Although ISIS, or Daesh, is on the back foot, it still controls the only road access to the region. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate or a statement on this vital issue?

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House responds, may I say to the former Chair of the Backbench Business Committee that I was cheering for Newcastle on Sunday, and how magnificent it was to see them beat Tottenham 5-1, therefore ensuring that Arsenal finished above Tottenham on the last day of the season.

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker, I think you have just made yourself enormously popular with a large part of north London and enormously unpopular with another part of north London, but I suspect you knew that anyway.

We will have a statement on the situation in Syria on Tuesday. If in the eyes of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) certain issues have not been covered satisfactorily, he will be able to raise them in the foreign affairs debate that follows. There will be an opportunity for him to raise these immensely serious issues. They are often difficult for us to address from here, but I remind him that we are the second largest international
donor to the different groups that are trying to provide humanitarian and other support to those who have been affected by the Syrian war.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): As football seems to be the theme, I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to congratulate Partick Thistle on its 140th anniversary, as noted in early-day motion 001 of this Session.

[That this House congratulates Partick Thistle Football Club on its 140th anniversary; notes that the team’s first recorded match was played at Overnewton Park, Partick, on 19 February 1876, and that since 1909 the club has been based at Firhill Stadium in the Maryhill area of Glasgow; welcomes the economic, social and cultural contribution the club has made to the city throughout its history; further notes, in particular, its commitment to promoting a family-friendly atmosphere at its games and its outreach work to develop new generations of players and fans; commends the team for securing a fourth successive year in the top flight of Scottish football; notes the popularity of the team’s distinctive mascot Kingley; designed by Turner Prize-nominated artist David Shrigley; recognises that 2016 also marks 95 years since the team won the Scottish Cup in 1921, and 45 years since the club’s famous League Cup victory in 1971; and is nevertheless confident that the mighty Jags will not keep its supporters waiting too much longer for more silverware.]

When will the Government publish their response to the Procedure Committee’s report on private Members’ Bills, and when will we have a debate and a vote on the recommendations in that report?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to congratulate Partick Thistle on their anniversary. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is looking forward to a successful season next season, and will probably be in the stands on many Saturdays.

We will respond to the Procedure Committee’s report on private Members’ Bills in the appropriate timeframe, which I think is by 12 June.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): According to the Samaritans, 4,722 people took their life in England in 2015. While this trend is in a 30-year decline, in recent years it has worryingly been rising again to the highest level since 2004. May we have a debate on the implementation of the Government’s suicide prevention strategy for England and how the Government might assist further the prevention of suicides?

Chris Grayling: This is, of course, a serious issue. We have seen an upward trend in recent times, particularly among young men. Suicide prevention is a focus for the Government. It is one reason why we are trying to put more resource into providing proper mental health support. Mental health is a crucial area of our health service, and something that we must do as well as we can. The Health Secretary will be here on Monday for the public services debate, and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to bring up the subject of mental health then so that it remains very much in the sights of the Department of Health.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman here at the start of business questions?

Bob Blackman: I was, shall we say, answering a call of nature, Mr Speaker. Forgive me, but I was not here. I am tempted to rise because I was at St James Park on Sunday for the calamity.

Mr Speaker: I will give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt.

Bob Blackman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can we find time for a debate about garden waste collection? In the borough of Harrow, the council has decided to charge residents £40 for six months of collections, and the collections are not even being made. I am receiving complaints on a daily basis about this, and it is time that we raised the issue in the House so that hon. Members on both sides can comment on the calamity of some of the rubbish collections across this country.

Chris Grayling: I can well understand how frustrating it is for my hon. Friend and his constituents, but with his experience as deputy Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, he is better placed than almost anyone to introduce such a debate, and I am sure that he will do so.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): British soldiers are concerned about the safety of the new Virtus body armour they have been issued with. If they fall to the ground, they cannot get up, and they cannot get their armour on in the dark. This is incredibly dangerous. The Ministry of Defence says that it is working with the supplier to make improvements, but why issue kit in the first place that puts soldiers’ safety in jeopardy? May we have a statement on how MOD systems have failed and, more important, how the procurement systems can be changed to stop this happening again?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady raises an obviously serious matter. As I said earlier, apart from the Syria statement, there will be a debate on defence matters on Tuesday afternoon and she may wish to bring the issue to the attention of Ministers then.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I find myself in the curious position of echoing the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but I assure the House that it is entirely coincidental. May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate in Government time on the BBC White Paper? The urgent question and the statement took place before publication last week and there remains considerable public disquiet about the Government’s ideological motives, as well as the Government’s ability to pack the unitary board with friends and placemen who could have a direct influence on the editorial policy of the BBC.

Chris Grayling: Let us be clear: the proposed unitary board of the BBC is not responsible for editorial policy; the director-general remains responsible for editorial policy. The influence of the board is after broadcast, not before it, which is the way it has been in the past with the BBC Trust and the way it should continue. The elements of the White Paper that require legislation will
be debated in this House and there will be plenty of opportunities to question the Secretary of State before we get anywhere near the formal charter renewal.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, with Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire East Council, is locked in talks with the Department for Communities and Local Government about a devolution deal for the area. I welcome devolution in principle, but there seems to be a strange insistence on elected mayors. The area I am talking about is so broad and large, bordered by north Wales on one side and Greater Manchester on the other, that I question the suitability of an elected mayor. May we have a debate on the necessity of elected mayors in areas outside city regions?

Chris Grayling: The whole point of the devolution package is that we are offering additional powers to local communities, but we need them to come to use with a credible governance structure for managing those additional powers. A variety of deals are being done across the country. Not all are identical and not all involve the same structures for local government; the one thing they have in common is that to go ahead, we have to have confidence that they can deliver what is necessary. I am sure that is no different in Cheshire.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent, Elaine, who has an hereditary muscle-wasting paraplegia condition. Despite being on disability living allowance since she was five years old, Elaine, now in her early 20s, did not qualify for a personal independence payment. That in itself is outrageous, but on looking into the wider issue we find that half of all PIP awards are for three years or less, meaning that people with degenerative muscle diseases undergo continual reassessments, which is not only cruel but a waste of money. Can we have a proper debate on the impact of PIP and the medical assessments in the roll-out of the system?

Chris Grayling: Clearly cases involving such diseases are immensely serious and immensely problematic for those affected, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that in Scotland these are devolved matters, so perhaps this is the wrong forum for such a debate.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, with Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire East Council, is locked in talks with the Department for Communities and Local Government about a devolution deal for the area. I welcome devolution in principle, but there seems to be a strange insistence on elected mayors. The area I am talking about is so broad and large, bordered by north Wales on one side and Greater Manchester on the other, that I question the suitability of an elected mayor. May we have a debate on the necessity of elected mayors in areas outside city regions?

Chris Grayling: The whole point of the devolution package is that we are offering additional powers to local communities, but we need them to come to use with a credible governance structure for managing those additional powers. A variety of deals are being done across the country. Not all are identical and not all involve the same structures for local government; the one thing they have in common is that to go ahead, we have to have confidence that they can deliver what is necessary. I am sure that is no different in Cheshire.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent, Elaine, who has an hereditary muscle-wasting paraplegia condition. Despite being on disability living allowance since she was five years old, Elaine, now in her early 20s, did not qualify for a personal independence payment. That in itself is outrageous, but on looking into the wider issue we find that half of all PIP awards are for three years or less, meaning that people with degenerative muscle diseases undergo continual reassessments, which is not only cruel but a waste of money. Can we have a proper debate on the impact of PIP and the medical assessments in the roll-out of the system?

Chris Grayling: Clearly cases involving such diseases are immensely serious and immensely problematic for those affected, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that in Scotland these are devolved matters, so perhaps this is the wrong forum for such a debate.

Term-time Holidays

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the recent decision by the High Court on the right of parents to take their children on holiday during term time.

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): The High Court oral judgment represents a significant threat to one of the Government’s most important achievements in education in the past six years: improving school attendance. For this reason, the Government will do everything in their power to ensure that headteachers are able to keep children in school.

There is abundant academic evidence showing that time spent in school is one of the single strongest determinants of a pupil’s academic success. At secondary school, even a week off can have a significant impact on a pupil’s GCSE grades. This is unfair to children and potentially damaging to their life chances. That is why we have unashamedly pursued a zero-tolerance policy on unauthorised absence. We have increased the fines issued to parents of pupils with persistent unauthorised absence, placed greater emphasis on school attendance levels in inspection outcomes and, crucially, we have clamped down on the practice of taking term-time holidays. Those measures have been strikingly successful: the number of persistent absentees in this country’s schools has dropped by over 40%, from 433,000 in 2010 to 246,000 in 2015, and some 4 million fewer days are lost due to unauthorised absence compared with 2012-2013. Overall absence rates have followed a significant downward trend from 6.5% in the academic year ending in 2007 to 4.6% in the academic year ending in 2015.

These are not just statistics. They mean that pupils are spending many more hours in school, being taught the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. It is for this reason that we amended the 2006 attendance regulations in 2013. Previously headteachers were permitted to grant a family holiday during term time for “special circumstances” of up to 10 days per school year. Of course, the need to take time off school in exceptional circumstances is important, but there are no special circumstances where a 10-day family holiday to Disney World should be allowed to trump the importance of school. The rules must apply to everyone as a matter of social justice. When parents with the income available to take their children out of school go to Florida, it sends a message to everyone that school attendance is not important.

The measure has been welcomed by teachers and schools. Unauthorised absences do not affect just the child who is absent; they damage everyone’s education as teachers find themselves having to play catch-up. Because learning is cumulative, pupils cannot understand the division of fractions if they have not first understood their multiplication. Pupils cannot understand why world war one ended if they do not know why it started, and they cannot enjoy the second half of a novel if they have not read the first half. If a vital block of prerequisite knowledge is missed in April, a pupil’s understanding of the subject will be harmed in May.
Mr Speaker: Has the Minister concluded?

Mr Gibb: I am about to conclude, Mr Speaker.

We are awaiting the written judgment from the High Court and will outline our next steps in due course. The House should be assured that we will seek to take whatever measures are necessary to give schools and local authorities the power and clarity to ensure that children attend school when they should.

Steve Double: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, there is another aspect to the policy which, sadly, has been ignored up till now—the economic impact of the policy on tourist areas, particularly in Cornwall. In 2014 a published report indicated that the tourist industry in Cornwall had lost £50 million as a result.

With respect to the Minister, there is no prospect of social mobility for a family if the parents lose their job or have their hours cut because of the downturn in the tourism industry and the way that that affects their job. Is it not the case that only 8% of school absenteeism is a result of family holidays? There is no drop-off in the attainment of those children. Family holidays are good for children. They widen their knowledge of the world and expose them to new experiences, and children whose parents take them on a holiday often perform better as a direct result.

Will the Minister please look at the matter again? If he is going to bring forward measures to tighten the rules or strengthen them, can he assure the House that there will be a full debate in this Chamber, that the changes to the rules will not be made through secondary legislation, that this time a full impact assessment will be carried out that includes the economic impact on tourism-related industries, that the family test will be applied to the measures, and that a full public consultation will take place that considers the impact on all stakeholders—not just education, but the wider society and families especially?

Mr Gibb: Before 2013 authorised family holidays made up between 5% and 6% of pupil absences. That figure dropped to 2.3% in 2013-14 and to 1.2% in 2014-15. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend, I do not believe that we should be returning to the Dickensian world where the needs of industry and commerce take precedence over the education of children.

His constituency of St Austell and Newquay, in the beautiful county of Cornwall, has a hugely successful and thriving tourism industry that generates about £2 billion of income for the UK economy. I doubt that the Cornish tourism industry will be best pleased by his assertion that tourism in Cornwall is dependent on truanting children for its survival.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Another week, another crisis for the Department for Education: Ministers really do need to get a grip. Their obsession with school structures means that they focus on the wrong issues and fail to deal with the bread-and-butter issues that matter to parents.

All the evidence shows that regular attendance at school is crucial to ensuring that children fulfil their potential, and 100% attendance records should be the ambition of all children in all schools. However, this problem is of the Government’s own making. When changing the guidance to headteachers back in 2013, they should have carried out a full impact assessment much earlier and acted to address concerns. Back in the autumn, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) led a Westminster Hall debate on the 50,000-strong petition on this subject. The Government said then that they would look at the concerns raised, so they have known that this ruling was coming for a long time—they could have clarified the law and they have not.

This ruling is the worst of both worlds. It puts parents and headteachers in a very difficult position and is not in the best interests of children. By and large, the system up to 2012, with heads having a small amount of discretion, was working well. Parents and headteachers had a clear signal that children should be in school. It is right that headteachers who know their parents and school community well, and are accountable for their children and school, should have appropriate discretion. Will the Minister pledge to work with all interested parties across this House and outside this House to clarify the law in the interests of pupils, schools and parents? We pledge to work with him on that.

The reality is that Ministers have been asleep at the wheel, focusing on the wrong issues when we have teacher shortages and problems in primary assessment. It is time for them to take their head out of the sand and deal with these fundamental issues rather than fixating on school types at the expense of raising school standards. Will the Minister do that now?

Mr Gibb: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I do feel that he is not on the same side as us with regard to raising school standards. Improving school attendance is absolutely key to raising academic standards. Under the previous Labour Government, it became accepted wisdom that parents could take their children out of school for term-time holidays for up to 10 days a year. Those numbers were causing an issue for us. We had to address the problem that we inherited from the previous Labour Government—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister of State is going about his duty in the conscientious way that we have come to expect. A significant number of young children are observing our proceedings this morning, and I
rather doubt they will be greatly impressed by the Front-Bench deputys on each side of the House conducting a kind of verbal tug of war from which each of them should desist, partly in consideration of the children and partly out of respect for the Minister of State, from whom we should hear.

**Mr Gibb:** I am most grateful to you, Mr Speaker.

Under the previous Labour Government it had become accepted wisdom that parents could take their children out of school for term-time holidays for up to 10 days a year. We had to address that popular perception, and that is why the regulations were changed in 2013. In 2012, 32.7 million pupil days were lost owing to authorised absences. That figure has fallen to 28.6 million in 2014–15—that is, some 4 million fewer pupil school days lost as a consequence of the changes to the 2013 regulations. That is a huge success, and I wish that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) would support the change.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that taking children out of school to come to the mother of all Parliaments to learn about our democracy is one thing, but taking them to Orlando, Florida is another? I welcome the rigour that the hon. Gentleman, Mr Scunthorpe, would bring to the change.

**Mr Gibb:** My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. This is about social justice. When parents with needs to take education seriously?

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But let us look at the issue in a more fundamental way. That is why we have given academies the freedom to set their term dates and the curriculum, but there are rules that apply to individuals. There is no freedom for an individual not to educate their children: they either have to attend school or obtain education otherwise. That is the law. I have constituents who face great pressure from the Muslim community, especially from Pakistan, to take their children out, and they are the very children who this particular issue, or have the schools asked him to relieve them of them? Whatever the rights and wrongs of the particular issue, it is clearly inconsistent with the Government’s belief in giving school’s greater freedoms.

**Mr Gibb:** The schools themselves will have increased freedoms if they adopt academy status, including over term dates and the curriculum, but there are rules that apply to individuals. There is no freedom for an individual not to educate their children: they either have to attend school or obtain education otherwise. That is the law. This is about the law that applies to parents. We want a society where education is compulsory for all children in our country.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But the Minister must acknowledge the limbo that schools now find themselves in. Headteachers know precisely what the regulations say, but they also know what the High Court ruling was. Will he clarify for the benefit of the headteachers who might be listening what he thinks should take precedence—the High Court judgment or the regulations as they stand? If it is the High Court ruling, how quickly will the Government come back to the House to assert what they want to happen? Mr Gibb: We are still waiting to receive the written judgment of the High Court, and as soon as we do we will revert to the hon. Gentleman and the House.

**William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is irrefutable that good school attendance is essential for both progress and achievement. Does my hon. Friend share my concern...
that the High Court judgment used a 90% attendance threshold, whereas Ofsted criticises and penalises schools with attendance below 95%?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point. A 10% absence rate equates to one day off a fortnight, and I do not think we should encourage that type of attendance record in our schools.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We have heard a lot from the Minister about tackling the symptoms of the problem, but I do not believe enough is being done to tackle the cause, which is companies getting away with charging astronomical prices in holiday time and ordinary prices in term time. When will the Government do something to tackle the rip-off culture that pervades our society?

Mr Gibb: That issue was examined some years ago, and it was determined that it is not a case of the holiday companies ripping off their consumers. Hotels around the world and in this country simply charge higher rates during the summer months and the peak seasons than they do out of peak, which is a matter of market economics.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Mr Platt is a resident of my island, and it is Isle of Wight Council’s unfathomable decision to take him to court that has brought about the current situation. It seems to me that the legislation is quite clear: it is for the headteacher to decide what constitutes exceptional circumstances. The head is undoubtedly in the best position to take account of the full picture of any request for absence. It is hard to envisage legislation, or even guidance, devised here and in Whitehall, that could properly take account of all possible exceptional circumstances. Do the Government intend to take the decision away from the person who is ultimately responsible for the performance of their school?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend explains the situation accurately. It is for the headteacher to determine whether there are exceptional circumstances so that they can grant authorised absences.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The situation obviously lacks clarity after this judgment, and I was concerned that there was a lack of clarity even before the judgment, which I hoped the Minister might turn his attention to. I had a constituency case in which children were denied the opportunity to go to Spain for the funeral of their Spanish grandmother. Will he consider providing headteachers with greater clarity to ensure that such travel is considered an exceptional circumstance?

Mr Gibb: I think the situation before the High Court judgment was clear—the headteacher has discretion on whether to grant authorised absence, and can do so only in exceptional circumstances. The National Association of Head Teachers has helpfully produced a two-page guidance note setting out what it believes its members should consider when determining whether an absence should be authorised. It makes it clear that funerals should be regarded as an exceptional circumstance.

Dr Andrew Morrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): People in land-based employment feel frustrated by term times and holidays based in an agrarian past. Does my hon. Friend agree that communities in rural locations often have small village schools that stand to suffer disproportionately in the event of disruption in the classroom due to absences such as he has described?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. This is about not just pupils’ education but the challenge presented to teachers as they seek to deliver catch-up lessons for pupils who have been absent. In a small school with small class sizes, that is doubly difficult for teachers.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): What assistance and education can the Minister give parents who are deciding whether to take their children out of school? It seems that a minority of parents are making the wrong decision, so can he supply them with any more information on the impact of removing those children from school at the time they choose?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and we must emphasise evidence that suggests that even small absences from school will have a long-term impact on a child’s education. As I set out in my opening remarks, a lot of education is linear, and children must learn one thing before they learn another. If a teacher is not able to provide a catch-up lesson for that child, they will permanently miss out on a crucial part of their education.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have taken positive steps to reduce the cost of family holidays, and therefore the financial incentive to take term-time absence? By reducing air passenger duty for children’s tickets to zero, last year 4.5 million children under 12 flew tax free, and this year more than 7.5 million of those under 16 will fly tax free.

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend made that point better than I could have done.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Although I agree with the thrust of the Government’s response and their determination to raise standards, I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). When a number of schools have a high concentration of parents who work in the tourism industry and on relatively low pay, and when there has not been a significant enough change in the cost of holidays and there is no momentum around changes to term times, a number of factors come together. I urge the Minister to enter into more constructive dialogue about what can be done for regional economies where this issue will have a significant effect.

Mr Gibb: I am happy to enter into a constructive dialogue with my hon. Friend, and with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). We have given academies discretion to set their own term dates, and I urge all hon. Members who represent areas with high levels of tourism to work with their
schools, the local authority, and other local authorities, to find a way to set term dates that reflect the needs of their local communities.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend will know that when children are absent from school, it is disruptive to the child who misses school but also to the class when they try to catch up. One experiment currently being tried is to extend the school day by 30 minutes, and extend half term from one week to two weeks in certain areas, to allow parents to take their children on holiday for two weeks. What does the Minister think of that idea?

Mr Gibb: That is precisely the kind of idea that we hope and expect will come from the discretion that we have granted academies in this country, and many schools are taking advantage of that freedom.

Junior Doctors Contract

10.38 am

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the junior doctors contract.

For the last three years there have been repeated attempts to reform the junior doctors contract to support better patient care seven days a week, culminating in a damaging industrial relations dispute that lasted for more than 10 months. I am pleased to inform the House that after 10 days of intensive discussion under the auspices of ACAS, the dispute was resolved yesterday with a historic agreement between the Government, NHS Employers—acting on behalf of the employers of junior doctors—and the British Medical Association that will modernise the contract by making it better for both doctors and patients. The new contract meets all the Government’s red lines for delivering a seven-day NHS, and remains within the existing pay envelope. We will publish an equalities analysis of the new terms alongside a revised contract at the end of the month, and it will be put to a ballot of the BMA membership next month, with the support of its leader, the chair of the junior doctors committee of the BMA, Johann Malawana.

I express my thanks to the BMA for the leadership it has shown in returning to talks, negotiating in good faith, and making an agreement possible. I also put on record my thanks to Sir Brendan Barber, the chair of ACAS, for his excellent stewardship of the process, and to Sir David Dalton for his wisdom and insight in conducting discussions on behalf of employers and the Government, both this time and earlier in the year. The agreement will facilitate the biggest changes to the junior doctors contract since 1999. It will allow the Government to deliver a seven-day NHS, improve patient safety and support much needed productivity improvements, as well as strengthening the morale and quality of life of junior doctors with a modern contract fit for a modern health service.

The contract inherited by the Government had a number of features badly in need of reform, including low levels of basic pay as a proportion of total income, which made doctors rely too heavily on unpredictable unsocial hours supplements to boost their income; automatic annual pay rises even when people took prolonged periods of leave from the NHS; an unfair banding system that triggered payment of premium rates to every team member even if only one person had worked extra hours; high premium rates payable for weekend work that made it difficult to roster staff in line with patient need; and risks to patient safety, with doctors sometimes required to work seven full days or seven full nights in a row without proper rest periods.

The Government have always been determined that our NHS should offer the safest, highest quality of care possible, which means a consistent standard of care for patients admitted across all seven days of the week. The new contract agreed yesterday makes the biggest set of changes to the junior doctors contract for 17 years, including by establishing the principle that any doctor who works less than an average of one weekend day a month—Saturday or Sunday—should receive no additional premium pay, compensated for by an increase in basic
pay of between 10% and 11%; by reducing the marginal cost of employing additional doctors at the weekend by about a third; by supporting all hospitals to meet the four clinical standards most important for reducing mortality rates for weekend admissions by establishing a new role for experienced junior doctors as senior clinical decision makers able to make expert assessments of vulnerable patients admitted to or staying in hospital over weekends; and by removing the disincentive to roster enough doctors at weekends by replacing an inflexible banding system with a fairer system that values weekend work by paying people for actual unsocial hours worked, with more pay for those who work the most.

The Government also recognise that safer care for patients is more likely to be provided by well-motivated doctors who have sufficient rest between shifts and work in a family-friendly system. The new contract and ACAS agreement will improve the wellbeing of our critical junior doctor workforce by reducing the maximum hours a doctor can be asked to work in any one week from 91 to 72; reducing the number of nights a doctor can be asked to work consecutively to four, and the number of long days a doctor can be asked to work to five; introducing a new post, a guardian of safe working, in every trust to guard against doctors being asked to work excessive hours; introducing a new catch-up programme for doctors who take maternity leave or time off for other caring responsibilities; establishing a review by Health Education England to consider how best to allow couples to apply to train in the same area and to offer training placements for those with caring responsibilities close to their home; giving pay protection to doctors who switch specialties because of caring responsibilities; and establishing a review to inform a new requirement for trusts to consider caring and other family responsibilities when designing rotas.

Taken together, these changes show both the Government’s commitment to safe care for patients and the value we attach to the role of junior doctors. While they do not remove every bugbear or frustration, they will significantly improve flexibility and work-life balance for doctors, leading, we hope, to improved retention rates, higher morale and better care for patients.

Whatever the progress made with today’s landmark changes, however, it will always be a matter of great regret that it was necessary to go through such disruptive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, destructive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, destructive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, destructive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, destructive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, destructive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey.

I have not been shy in telling the Health Secretary what I think about his handling of this dispute, but today is not the day to repeat those criticisms. I am pleased and relieved that an agreement has been reached, but I am sad that it took an all-out strike of junior doctors to get the Government back to the table. What is now clear, if it was not already, is that a negotiated agreement was possible all along. I have to ask the Health Secretary why this deal could not have been struck in February. Why did he allow his pride back then to come before sensible compromise and constructive talks?

When he stands up to reply, he may try to blame the BMA for the breakdown in the negotiations, but he failed to say what options he was prepared to consider in order to ensure that the junior doctors who work the most unsocial hours are fairly rewarded. It was a “computer says no” attitude, and that is no way to run the NHS.

Why did the Health Secretary ignore my letter to him of 7 February, in which I asked him to make an explicit and public commitment to further concessions on the issue of unsociable hours? I was clear that if he had done that then, I would have encouraged the BMA to return to talks. Why did he insist instead on trying to bulldoze an imposed contract through, when virtually everyone told him not to, and the consequences of doing so were obvious for all to see—protracted industrial action, destroyed morale and a complete breakdown in trust?

On the detail of the new contract, will the Health Secretary say a little more about the agreed changes that will undo the discriminatory effect on women of the last contract he published? Does he now accept that the previous contract discriminated against women? Will he be clear for the record that he now understands this was never “just about pay”? Can he confirm that concessions have been made not only in respect of the mechanism for enforcing hours worked and breaks taken, but in ensuring that the specialties with the biggest recruitment problems have decent incentives built into the contract?

Moving on to what happens next, can the Health Secretary tell us what he will do if junior doctors vote against this offer? Will he still impose a contract, and which version of the contract will he impose—his preferred version or this compromised one? Can he say whether the possibility of losing a case in the High Court about his power to impose a contract had anything to do with his recently discovered eagerness to return to talks? We all know that the High Court told him he had acted
above the law when he tried to take the axe to my local hospital, so I can understand why he does not want that embarrassment again.

Finally, let me caution the Health Secretary on his use of language both in this Chamber and in the media. His loose words and implied criticism of junior doctors is partly the reason why this has ended up being such an almighty mess. May I suggest that a degree of humility on the part of the Secretary of State would not go amiss? May I recommend a period of radio silence from him to allow junior doctors to consider the new contract with clear minds, and without his spin echoing in their ears? I remind him that he still needs to persuade a majority of junior doctors to vote in favour of the contract for the dispute to be finally over.

I hope with all my heart that yesterday’s agreement may offer a way forward. Junior doctors will want to consider it; trust needs to be repaired, and that will take time. I hope for the sake of everyone, patients and doctors, that we may now see an end to this very sorry episode in NHS history.

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is wrong today, as she has been wrong throughout this dispute. In the last 10 months, she has spent a great deal of time criticising the way in which the Government have sought to change the contract. What she has not dwelt on, however, is the reason it needed to be changed in the first place, namely the flawed contract for junior doctors that was introduced in 1999.

We have many disagreements with the BMA, but we agree on one thing: Labour’s contract was not fit for purpose. Criticising the Government for trying to put that contract right is like criticising a mechanic for mending the car that you just crashed. It is time that the hon. Lady acknowledged that those contract changes 17 years ago have led to a number of the five-day care problems that we are now trying to sort out.

The hon. Lady was wrong to say that an all-out strike was necessary to resolve the dispute. The meaningful talks that we have had have worked in the last 10 days because the BMA bravely changed its position, and agreed to negotiate on weekend pay. The hon. Lady told the House four times before that change of heart that that contract right is like criticising a mechanic for mending the car that you just crashed. It is time that the hon. Lady acknowledged that those contract changes 17 years ago have led to a number of the five-day care problems that we are now trying to sort out.

The hon. Lady was wrong to say that the previous contract discriminated against women. In fact, it removed discrimination. Does that mean that there are not more things that we can do to support women who work as junior doctors? No, it does not. The new deal that was announced yesterday provides for an important new catch-up clause for women who take maternity leave, which means that they can return to the position in which they would have been if they had not had to take time off to have children.

The hon. Lady asked what would happen if the ballot went the wrong way. What she failed to say was whether she was encouraging junior doctors to vote for the deal. Let me remind her that on 28 October, she told the House that she supported the principle of seven-day services. As Tony Blair once said, however, one cannot will the end without willing the means. The hon. Lady has refused to say whether she supported the withdrawal of emergency care, she has refused to say whether she supports contentious changes to reform premium pay, and now she will not even say whether doctors should vote for the new agreement.

Leadership means facing up to difficult decisions, not ducking them. I say to the hon. Lady that this Government are prepared to make difficult decisions and fight battles that improve the quality and safety of care in the NHS. If she is not willing to fight those battles, that is fine, but she should not stand at the Dispatch Box and claim that Labour stands up for NHS patients. If she does not want to listen to me, perhaps she should listen to former Labour Minister Tom Harris, who said:

“Strategically Labour should be on the side of the patients and we aren’t.”

Well, if Labour is not, the Conservatives are.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate both sides on returning to constructive negotiations and on reaching an agreement. I pay particular tribute to Professor Sue Bailey and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges for their role in bringing both sides together. I welcome the particular focus, alongside the negotiations around weekend pay, on all the other aspects that are blighting the lives of junior doctors. I welcome the recognition that we need to focus on those specialties that it is hard to recruit to and on those junior doctors who are working the longest hours, as well as the focus on patient safety.

However, we are not out of the woods yet. We need junior doctors across the country to vote for this agreement in a referendum. May I add my voice to that of the Opposition spokesman on health to say that what is needed now is a period of calm reflection? We need to build relationships with junior doctors into the future. Will the Secretary of State comment on his plans for building those relationships with our core workforce?

**Mr Hunt:** First, I very much agree with my hon. Friend in her thanks to Professor Dame Sue Bailey for the leadership that the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges has shown in the initiative that, in the end, made these talks and this agreement possible. I know it has been a very difficult and challenging time for the royal colleges, but Professor Bailey has shown real leadership in her initiative.

I also very much agree with my hon. Friend about the need to sort out some of the issues that have been frustrations for junior doctors—not just in the last few years, but going back decades—in terms of the way their training works and the flexibility of the system of six-month rotations that they work in. This is an opportunity to look at those wider issues. We started to look at some of them yesterday. I think there is more that we can do.

It is important that this is seen not as one side winning and the other side losing, but as a win-win. What the last 10 days show is that if we sit round the
table, we can make real progress, with a better deal for patients and a better deal for doctors. That is the spirit we want to go forward in.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I absolutely welcome this agreement, and I pay tribute to the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges for bringing it about. I do wish there had been some response to the letter that I and other Members sent before the all-out strike, because it was a genuine attempt to create a space that both sides could step into. However, I am glad that we have got to that stage now.

I welcome the recognition of the equality issues, which, to us and to many junior doctors, appeared to have been dismissed in the impact assessment. On the idea of flexible training champions in each trust, I myself was a flexible training senior surgeon—and the first one in Scotland—and the idea of accelerated training is important. However, one concern I have is about childcare. If women junior doctors are going to be working longer, more antisocial shifts—I remember what I had to fork out for childcare—I would like to know whether the NHS will respond to that. Will that be in the form of crèche hours or support?

I welcome the fact that the hours guardian will be linked to the director of medical education and that there will be an elected junior doctors forum. One concern of junior doctors was that they would have no voice in relation to the guardian.

I also welcome the idea of using modern technology in rota-ing. At the moment, rota sheets are sheets of paper, and often no one looks at the shoulder from one rota to the next, so people can end up with the very long periods on call. However, one concern that remains is rota gaps. We do not have enough junior doctors, and we do not have enough junior doctors in the most acute specialties. How is the Secretary of State planning to re-establish a relationship? How is he going to recruit people to fill that gap? That was the core fear of junior doctors: a lack of doctors, with doctors simply being spread further. How are we going to recruit and retain doctors after the painful clash that has been going on for the last year?

Mr Hunt: I welcome the tone of the hon. Lady’s comments; we might have wished for a similar tone from the shadow Health Secretary. Let me address the comments of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) as constructively as she made them to me. She is right about flexible training. We have to recognise that the junior doctor workforce is now majority female, and that a number of family and caring pressures need to be taken account of. We need to do that for the NHS not only because it is the right thing to do, but because we will lose people if we do not. Those people will simply leave medicine, even though they have been through very extensive and expensive training.

We have to look particularly at the responsibilities of doctors with young children. One of the things that we announced yesterday was an obligation on trusts to take account of caring responsibilities. If, for example, a doctor wanted to work fewer hours in school holidays and more hours in term time, we cannot guarantee that a hospital would always be able meet those needs—the needs of patients always have to come first—but they could at least be taken account of, in the same way as they are in many other industries that operate 24/7. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that modern technology is key to that. An air steward or a pilot who works for British Airways can go on to an electronic system and choose the shifts and hours that they want to work. Because we have failed to modernise the NHS, we have seen a huge growth in agency and locum work, which is partly driven by the fact that it offers precisely the flexibilities that people need. These are important changes, and we intend to take them forward.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelsford) (Con): My right hon. Friend’s actions and those of the Department and the BMA in reaching an agreement will be warmly welcomed and met with a sigh of relief. Does he accept that the fact that the BMA was prepared to think again on crucial issues, such as overtime at weekends, should be seen as a sign not of weakness but of maturity, in working with the Government to ensure that we have a seven-day NHS that is for the benefit of patients and patient safety?

Mr Hunt: I absolutely agree with that wise comment, and it befits someone who is experienced in working in the Department of Health. We always get further if we sit around the table and talk about such issues. The Government are determined to improve the quality and safety of care for patients, and it is important to recognise that if the Government are successful, it will be better for the morale of doctors. The happiest, most motivated doctors work in the hospitals that are giving the best care to patients. That is why it is a win-win.

I say to Labour Members that it was the refusal of the BMA for many years to talk about the issue that my right hon. Friend referred to that meant we reached a deadlock. The fact that the Government were willing to proceed with important reforms on our own if we had to meant that, in the end, everyone came together and had a sensible negotiation. We got to the right place. I am sure everyone wishes that we had not had to go on the journey we went on to get there, but now that we have got there, I think it is the time for being constructive on all sides.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I also thank the Minister and the BMA for coming to an agreement. The Minister said that it was a win-win for everyone, and so it is. It is always good to talk, and dialogue brings results. That happened in Northern Ireland, and it has happened with the conclusion of this process as well. A good deal has been reached, and some 45,000 junior doctor BMA members will now be asked to vote on it.

We have had eight days of strikes since January, and some 40,000 planned non-urgent operations and 100,000 out-patient appointments have been cancelled. May I ask the Minister what will be done to catch those up, and what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Assembly about the agreement?

Mr Hunt: I reassure the hon. Gentleman. Gentleman that we are in constant touch with the devolved regions and countries to make sure that they know the changes that we are making, and to share any learning that we have from the processes that we have been through, so we will
certainly do that. Across the country, we are doing everything we can to catch up with the backlog of operations, procedures and out-patient appointments—all the things that have been affected by the industrial relations dispute. Trusts will always prioritise the areas where clinical need is the greatest, but I know that that work is ongoing across the country.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I very much welcome the agreement that has been reached. We know that the Secretary of State recognises the importance of having a happy and well-motivated workforce, and this contract addresses many of the causes of unhappiness for junior doctors. It is particularly good to hear the points made today about addressing the problems of couples who are both junior doctors. However, there is clearly more to do, as has been acknowledged, especially on the reasons why junior doctors feel unsupported and often not valued by their employers. My right hon. Friend commissioned Professor Sue Bailey to carry out a review of the underlying problems experienced by junior doctors during training. Will he advise us whether the review will now proceed?

Mr Hunt: The request from the BMA was to find a new way of proceeding with that very important work, and that is what we will do. We will do so with the input of Professor Bailey, because she has a very important contribution to make. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, as well as more flexible working for people with family commitments, the big issue for many junior doctors is the way in which the training process happens. In particular, the issue is about the way that continuity of training has been undermined by the new shift system—we need that system for reasons of patient safety—and that often means that someone is given advice by a different consultant on different aspects of care from one day to the next, which is frustrating. We will look at all those issues with Professor Bailey, Health Education England and the BMA to see whether we can find a better way forward.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State aware that even my constituents struggling with the possible closure of their A&E at the hospital in Huddersfield nevertheless welcome this announcement and thank anyone and everyone who has brought it about? That includes, I must say, leaders from the Opposition parties—our health spokespeople—who have done so much to help maintain a positive spirit. Will the Secretary of State just not gloat about this, but keep a period of silence? This is part of the phenomenon of people’s deep unhappiness about the NHS. Problems will arise again because so many people working in the NHS know it is being privatised by the back door and know that the clinical commissioning system is not working. Those problems will come back again and again unless he confronts that issue.

Mr Hunt: That would have been a constructive contribution to this morning’s discussion if the hon. Gentleman had not descended into totally false slurs about this Government’s commitment to our NHS. I would just say to him that if people support and are passionate about the NHS, as this Government are, then they put in the money—we are putting in £5.5 billion more than his party promised at the last election—and make the difficult reforms necessary to ensure that NHS care is as good as or better than anything that can be provided in the private sector. That is what this Government are doing: we believe in our NHS, and we are backing it to provide the best care available anywhere in the world.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I strongly welcome this important statement and the Secretary of State’s leadership, and I congratulate all those involved in the discussions. On Tuesday, I spoke at my advice surgery in Eastleigh to a constituent, a new mum who is a junior doctor and is married to a senior nurse. She is unable to fast-track into working as a GP, and part of her concerns about the negotiations involve the future childcare arrangements for her four-month-old baby. Such concerns weigh heavily on her family, particularly in relation to on-call working. May I ask that agile working and family first issues are truly taken into account for nurses and doctors who are trying to bring up families together?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend gives one example, but there are thousands of such examples. Such people are totally committed to the NHS, have a bright future in it and can make a huge contribution to its success by doing a good job in looking after patients, but they also have home responsibilities that are difficult to fulfil when there are very inflexible rostering systems. One of the big wins from yesterday’s agreement is that we will be able to look at the way the rostering system works to try to bring in such flexibility. If we do not do so, more and more doctors will want to be locums or to work for an agency and we will lose the continuity of care for patients, which is one of the best things about our GP system. That is why there is an urgent need—from the perspective of patients, as well as from that of doctors—to address that issue.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am interested in the Secretary of State’s thoughts about the serious impact on morale that the dispute has had. I was talking to a junior doctor in Sheffield the other day who said that before the dispute he had never looked at his contract, he had simply got on and done what was needed, whenever it was needed. Does the Secretary of State realise that even if the dispute is now settled, as we hope, it has had a serious impact on good will in the health service, which could affect service delivery in the future?

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the latest NHS staff survey, it shows higher staff motivation, better communication and more staff recommending their organisation as a place to work or be treated. But I accept that when big changes are made to a contract such as the junior doctors contract, they can be contentious and have a short-term impact on morale. In the long run, morale goes up when doctors are able to give better care to patients, and that is what this agreement will allow.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The Secretary of State has done a good job of explaining today, but let us look at this in the cold light of day. The BMA caused a problem that should have been resolved a long time ago. It decided it would make a political point. That is fair enough, and I know we want reflection. The Opposition should have been big
Mr Hunt: It is a great tragedy that the dispute unfolded in the way that it did, and I am sure that people with different agendas have not played constructive roles at various points. Given that we now have an agreement, I want to move forward positively and say that the lesson of the last 10 days is that when people sit down and negotiate about all the outstanding issues with a Government who are trying to make care safer and better for patients, we get a result that is good for everyone.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is not the time to claim victory: this negotiated agreement now has to be put to the members of the British Medical Association. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that his own refusal to negotiate exacerbated this crisis? Will he cease referring to the British Medical Association as a militant trade union, and will he heed the call from my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for a period of silence in order to avoid antagonising the junior doctors still further?

Mr Hunt: Let us be absolutely clear: there was never a refusal to negotiate on the Government’s side. We have now developed a lot of trust between the Government and the BMA leadership, but until that point it balloted for industrial action without even sitting down and talking to the Government, and it refused to discuss the issue of weekend pay premiums, which was the crucial change we needed for a seven-day NHS. It was when the BMA changed its position in those areas that we were able to have constructive talks, and that is why it deserves great credit for coming to the table and negotiating—something it had not wanted to do previously—and that led to the solution.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for working so hard to bring about this resolution and for always putting users of the NHS at the heart of everything he does. Will he join me in urging junior doctors to consider the new contract with an open mind when voting, and to strip out some of the politics that we have heard? Let us consider what is best for patients, what is best for the NHS and then what is best for junior doctors.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks wisely. I understand that in a contentious industrial relations dispute junior doctors will not necessarily look to me for advice on which way they should vote, but it was not just me doing the agreement. It was a negotiated agreement and the leader of the junior doctors committee says that it is a good agreement. He will encourage people to support it in the ballot and he thinks it is a good way forward for doctors as well as for patients. The people who have been closest to the detail of the negotiations think that it is the right step forward for junior doctors, and that is something that they will want to take account of.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I do not wish to invite the Secretary of State to provoke or pre-empt by presumption, but if the agreement changes the shape of services, it will have implications for other health professionals. Is he prepared to have the further conversations that will need to be had, and the wider conversations that will be needed with his ministerial counterparts across these islands on workforce planning, professional education and training?

Mr Hunt: We are, of course, willing to have those discussions with colleagues in other parts of the UK. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that having a seven-day service does not just involve junior doctors; it involves widespread changes across the service. I should say that nurses, healthcare assistants, porters, cleaners—other people who work in hospitals—already operate on 24/7 shifts, so the changes necessary to those contracts are much less profound than they are to some of the doctors contracts, which is why it is important that we change not just the junior doctors contract, but the consultants contract. The fact that we have been able to reach a negotiated agreement with the junior doctors bodes well for the consultants contract, which is the next step.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate both my right hon. Friend and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) on their hard work in dealing with this protracted dispute with the BMA. Patients up and down the country, including those in my constituency, were somewhat concerned about the cancellation of operations, and I am delighted that the Department is going to ensure that we catch up on that. One thing that came out of this dispute was that some senior consultants ended up getting on to the front line for the first time in a long time. What can be done to try to make sure that that happens on a regular basis, so that they are getting experience on the front line, too?

Mr Hunt: If I answer that question directly, I will dig myself into rather a deep hole. I echo my hon. Friend’s thanks to my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Ipswich, who has done an outstanding job by my side at every stage throughout this difficult period. I can certainly say that we would not have had yesterday’s agreement without his strong help and support at every stage. It is true that there are A&E departments across the country that, in having to plan for the two-day withdrawal of emergency care, found that having consultants more visible to patients had some positive impacts. I know that studies are going on to see what lessons can be learned from that going forward.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I, too, welcome the opportunity for a negotiated settlement, but let us take just a moment to reflect on one of the fundamental principles of our NHS—providing high-quality patient care. Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity today to offer a heartfelt and sincere apology for the significant and severe distress caused to patients as a result of this prolonged dispute?

Mr Hunt: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Lady, it was not my decision to take industrial action—to ballot for industrial action without even being prepared.
to sit around the table and talk to the Government. We are seeing dramatic improvements in patient safety under this Government, as we face up to the many problems in care that we inherited, not just at Mid Staffs, but at many other places. I know that she cares about patient safety, so she should welcome the difficult changes we have made, one of which is to have a seven-day NHS.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Like many colleagues in the House, I wrote to the Secretary of State on numerous occasions over the past six months to express the concerns of local junior doctors. May I therefore congratulate him and the BMA on reaching this deal? I hope that junior doctors in Wimbledon will wholeheartedly support it. He spoke in his statement about the role of the guardian and the ability to ensure safe working hours, on behalf of both patients and doctors. Will he give a few more details about how he expects that to work?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I am happy to do that, and I thank my hon. Friend for a lot of his correspondence. The principle here is that junior doctors want to know that there is someone independent they can appeal to if they think they are being asked to work hours that are unsafe and which mean that they cannot look after patients in the way that they would want to because they are physically or mentally too exhausted. We would all want to make that possible, but it means that they need to have someone who is not their line manager. They will go to their line manager in the first instance, but they need to have someone independent and separate. One area where we have made the most progress during the past few months, even before the past 10 days of talks, is on establishing how these guardians can work in a way that has the trust of both the hospitals and the doctors working in them.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The Secretary of State is absolutely right that we can always get further if we get round the table, so why, in response to the cross-party initiative back in February to get everybody around the table, did he not do exactly that and save us all this trouble, rather than trying to impose the contract?

Mr Hunt: The cross-party initiative was not to have a new contract, but to abandon plans for a new contract and to have pilots in a few limited places. If we had followed that advice, we would not now have agreed with the BMA the biggest changes in the junior doctors contract for 17 years. Our goal was to get the agreement that we secured yesterday—safer care for the NHS and a better deal for doctors. That was what we achieved, and we would not have got there if we had listened to that advice.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): May I join the welcome for the agreement and the persistence and patience that eventually paid off? In previous statements, I have raised with the Secretary of State the problem involving married couples who are both doctors. There are difficulties with training when they are sent to different areas and with rosters that clash. Will he say a word about the progress that has been made in this important area of making work a bit more family-friendly?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that for my hon. and learned Friend. It is not an easy problem to solve, because junior doctor training placements operate on six-month rotations, and they are a competitive process. We get many more applicants for a number of posts than there are posts available. We must find a way of balancing the need to respect family responsibilities, which is something that we all want to do, with the need to have a fair process for the most competitive positions. We do not have the balance right yet, so we have said that Health Education England, which decides where people are to go on rotations, will now have a duty to consider family responsibilities when it makes decisions about those rotations.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the potential resolution of this dispute and thank the Government for negotiating it. We should also thank junior doctors for having the courage to go on strike, which no one does lightly, to get a better deal for the NHS. I ask the Secretary of State to reflect on this breakthrough, to take further steps to build on his difficult relationship with NHS staff and, crucially, to stop presenting NHS policy as a false dichotomy between the interests of patients and the interests of NHS staff.

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to some of the things that I have said, he would have heard me say repeatedly that I do not think that that dichotomy exists. As he says, it is a false dichotomy because, in the end, what is right for patients is also right for doctors. The thing that demoralises doctors, nurses and everyone working in our hospitals in different parts of the NHS is when they are not able to give the care that they want or that they think is appropriate to the patients in front of them. That is why hospitals that have moved closest towards seven-day services are also some of the hospitals with the highest levels of morale in the NHS. He is right that it is a false dichotomy and that we need to do both together.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As the Secretary of State knows, my brother and his wife were junior doctors when they made the decision to move to New Zealand a long while ago because of the long-standing cultural problems within the NHS. They will be very pleased indeed about the announcement yesterday about couples potentially being able to work together in hospitals. I have a question for the Secretary of State from my mother. She wants to know what he can do now to encourage my brother, his wife and their friends back into the NHS.

Mr Hunt: Let me say to my hon. Friend’s mother that I hope that the message of this new agreement will go right the way around the world. Any doctors who have moved to New Zealand and Australia are always welcome to come back. The thing that must unite this Government and the good doctors who work, or have worked, in the NHS is our commitment to make NHS care the safest and the best in the world. We had a terrible shock with what happened at Mid Staffs, but we are using that as a moment of decisive change in the NHS, and we are well on our way to higher standards of care than are available in many other countries.
operating across seven days so that the junior doctor say that we will need, for example, diagnostic services contractual change, but the hon. Gentleman is right to seven-day contracts, so there will not necessarily be a Many other people working in the NHS are already on equation. We will need a new contract for consultants doctors, although they are a very important part of the NHS is not just, or not even mainly, about junior members, as well as better for patients. The lesson here is that the NHS faces huge challenges, and it can only be right to deal with them by sitting round the table and negotiating constructively.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I congratulate the Government and everyone involved on getting this deal in place. It will have a knock-on effect in my constituency in Northern Ireland. When I went around Antrim Area hospital, the concern was to do with the number of doctors, which we have heard about from other Members, and how to get seven-days-a-week cover from everything else that needs to go into the health service. Will the Secretary of State comment on how we will deal with that, and how we will work with the devolved Parliaments?

Mr Hunt: I agree. We need more doctors and we need more nurses. By the end of this Parliament, we will have over a million more over-70s in England alone, and I know that the demographic effects in Northern Ireland will be equivalent. We have a global shortage of about 7 million doctors, so we need to train more. We are training an extra 11,420 doctors over this Parliament as part of the spending review. The training is done on a UK-wide basis, so we will need to work closely with all the devolved regions on it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I warmly welcome this draft agreement, which will be met with some relief in Cheltenham. Whatever our deeply held concerns about the behaviour of the BMA in the past, does the Secretary of State agree that it should be our ambition that the agreement will mark the beginning of a more constructive future? Will he join me in congratulating BMA negotiators, including Dr Malawana, for being prepared to address constructively issues such as Saturday pay?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that. I recognise that this was not easy for those people, because it involved changing a position that they had held for more than three years. When we looked at the details, the result that we got to was not difficult for them to sign up to because they could see that it really was better for their members, as well as better for patients. The lesson here is that the NHS faces huge challenges, and it can only be right to deal with them by sitting round the table and negotiating constructively.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I, too, warmly welcome the news of the agreement, and I hope that it leads to a settlement. If it is the Secretary of State’s intention to create a seven-day NHS, that will require the participation of more than the junior doctors, so does he intend to bring forward a new contract for consultants, hospital lab workers, ambulance workers, nurses or indeed ancillary workers and catering staff?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is right. A seven-day NHS is not just, or not even mainly, about junior doctors, although they are a very important part of the equation. We will need a new contract for consultants and we are having constructive negotiations with them. Many other people working in the NHS are already on seven-day contracts, so there will not necessarily be a contractual change, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we will need, for example, diagnostic services operating across seven days so that the junior doctor who works at the weekend will be able to get the result of a test back at the weekend. Those are all part of the changes that we will introduce to make the NHS safer for patients.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I warmly congratulate both sides on reaching this agreement. Our NHS is different at weekends, and my right hon. Friend is right to inculcate Sir Bruce Keogh’s four key clinical standards on a Sunday and a Saturday. Does he agree that it is important not simply to rely on mortality data, which are often difficult to interpret, to underpin the case for a seven-day NHS? Will he look closely at other metrics based on clinical standards for things like routine lists for upper gastrointestinal endoscopy on a Saturday and Sunday? Will he also look at palliative care, which of course does not feature in any hospital mortality data?

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I welcome this settlement and thank everyone involved for securing it. However, many junior doctors remain concerned that, as the hours worked at the weekend increase, cover is inevitably reduced during the week, unless more junior doctors are employed to bridge that gap. With many rotas already left unfilled around the country during the week, how can the Secretary of State guarantee that we will not make the situation worse during the week, thereby impacting on patient safety?

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It appears that at the start of the recent negotiations the payment for Saturday working was the main sticking point for the BMA, but now the issue of weekend pay has been resolved. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, now, the doctors who work extended hours over the weekend can get extra pay, and patients can get the seven-days-a-week NHS we all want?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is not just a safer deal for patients, but a system that is much fairer for doctors than the current one. We are giving a pay rise of between 10% and 11%, for which we say that people are expected to work one weekend day a month, but doctors who work more than that get more, and it goes up, so more weekends worked means more extra pay. I think that is one of the reasons why the BMA was prepared to sign up to the agreement: it values the people who give up the most weekends.
severely cutting her face. Unfortunately, the accident happened on a Friday evening, and because insufficient doctors were working over the weekend, she could not have an operation to remove any remaining glass from the wound until Monday, by which time the wound had started to heal and was misaligned. That four-year-old girl will suffer severe facial scarring for the rest of her life. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is why we need a seven-day NHS?

**Mr Hunt:** I could not put it better myself. We all hear stories of that sort from our constituents and our families. That is why, in the end, yesterday's agreement was a very positive step forward in that seven-day agenda.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I must confess to being rather puzzled. The BMA said all along that the strike and dispute had nothing to do with weekend pay and terms, yet after negotiations limited simply to weekend pay and terms, the BMA has come to a deal and advised against strike action. Can we take it that, despite much huffing and puffing from the BMA that this was about the future of the NHS and all the rest of it, at the end of the day it was all about weekend pay and terms?

**Mr Hunt:** I think my hon. Friend is right that that was the big sticking point. It was the BMA's willingness to be flexible and negotiate on that that ultimately made an agreement possible, but it is also fair to say that the Government recognise that there are many other non-contractual issues in the way that junior doctors are trained and treated by the NHS, and we want to use this opportunity to put them right.

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on putting patients first, but does he recognise that there are still people out there whose operations were cancelled due to industrial action? Will he look to the future and consider whether front-line medical staff should have the right to strike and so put people's health on the backburner or postpone their medical care?

**Mr Hunt:** I know that that is a view that some colleagues share. Doctors have obligations even now under the Medical Act 1983 not to take action that would harm patients, and under their responsibilities to the General Medical Council; they have to be aware of those. What I hope is that that question simply does not arise again. We are now having constructive discussions with the BMA; I think that is the way forward and I hope that neither I nor any future Health Secretary has to go through what has happened in the past 10 months.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I applaud the tone and content of the Secretary of State's remarks. I think this agreement will go down as a breakthrough in the NHS. It has been very uncomfortable to engage in dialogue with constituents who are junior doctors, who have felt aggrieved, so I particularly welcome the way my right hon. Friend has been able to look at non-contractual issues. I urge him to give serious consideration to the outcome of the Bailey review so that progress can be made on morale and the wider issues that have been raised.

**Mr Hunt:** I finish by saying that I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It has been a very sad dispute for all of us, because we all recognise that junior doctors are the backbone of the NHS; they work extremely hard and they often work the most weekends already. That we now have an agreement is a brilliant step forward. We all have constituents who work hard for the NHS. They are people we value, so dialogue, negotiation and constructive discussion must always be the way forward.
Speaker’s Statement

11.34 am

Mr Speaker: In accordance with Standing Order No. 122D, I must announce the arrangements for the election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee for the new Session. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will be held in Committee Room 16 from 11 am to 1.30 pm on Wednesday 25 May. Nominations must be submitted in the Table Office between 10 am and 5 pm on the day before the ballot, Tuesday 24 May. In accordance with the Standing Order, only Members who do not belong to a party represented in Her Majesty’s Government may be candidates in this election. A briefing note with more details about the election will be made available to Members and published on the intranet.

BILLs PRESENTED

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation and First Reading</th>
<th>Standing Order No. 57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary Sajid Javid, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Theresa May, Secretary Nicky Morgan, Secretary Greg Clark, Matthew Hancock and Joseph Johnson, presented a Bill to make provision about higher education and research; and to make provision about alternative payments to students in higher or further education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINANCE BILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation and resumption of proceedings</th>
<th>Standing Order No. 80B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sajid Javid, Secretary Nicky Morgan, Secretary Greg Clark, Greg Hands, Mr David Gauke, Damian Hinds and Harriett Baldwin, presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill read the First and Second time without Question put, and stood committed to a Committee of the whole House in respect of clauses 7 to 18, 41 to 44, 65 to 81, 129, 132 to 136 and 144 to 154 and schedules 2, 3, 11 to 14 and 18 to 22, and to a Public Bill Committee in respect of the remainder (Standing Order No. 80B and Order, 11 April); to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INVESTIGATORY POWERS BILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation and resumption of proceedings</th>
<th>Standing Order No. 80A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary Theresa May, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Philip Hammond, Secretary Michael Fallon, Secretary David Mundell, Secretary Theresa Villiers, the Attorney General, Robert Buckland and Mr John Hayes, presented a Bill to make provision about the interception of communications, equipment interference and the acquisition and retention of communications data, bulk personal datasets and other information; to make provision about the treatment of material held as a result of such interception, equipment interference, acquisition or retention; to establish the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and other Judicial Commissioners and make provision about them and other oversight arrangements; to make further provision about investigatory powers and national security; to amend sections 3 and 5 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994; and for connected purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 15 March); to be considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]
Debate resumed (Order, 18 May).

Question again proposed.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Transport and Local Infrastructure

11.37 am

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): With permission, before I introduce the debate I would like to make a brief statement about the loss of EgyptAir flight MS804. The aircraft, an Airbus 320, carrying 56 passengers and 10 members of crew between Paris and Cairo, disappeared from radar at approximately 1.30 am UK time, over the waters of the eastern Mediterranean. We understand that one of the passengers on board is a UK national and that consular staff are in contact with the family and are providing support. I know that the House will want to join me in saying that our thoughts are with the family and friends of all those on board. The Government are in touch with the Egyptian and French authorities and have offered full assistance. The air accidents investigation branch has offered to assist with the investigation in any way it can.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As chairman of the all-party Egypt group, I thank my right hon. Friend for the measures that he is seeking to take and associate myself with the condolences that he has expressed. Will the Government seek to discuss with the French authorities in particular whether they are satisfied that the measures that they are taking to screen passengers and luggage at Paris meet the requirements that we in the United Kingdom feel are necessary, bearing in mind that, I believe, a number of assumptions about what has happened, but of course we will want to look at all the issues and discuss them with the French authorities and others. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will take that further forward.

It is a pleasure to open this debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. I very much welcome the opportunity to talk about our plans for transport and infrastructure. Yesterday's speech was all about building a stronger, more resilient, more modern economy that provides security for all people and opportunity at every stage of life—a country fit for the future, no matter the challenges it faces. If we have learned anything from the past decade, it is that we need to be better prepared and more responsible during the times of plenty so that we can weather the more difficult times.

In the previous Parliament, we had to take some tough economic decisions, but they were the right economic decisions. We earned a hard-fought recovery from recession and the financial crisis. In 2014, Britain was the fastest growing major advanced economy in the world. In 2015, we were the second fastest growing after the United States. In 2016, the employment rate has hit yet another record high. More families are benefiting from the security of regular wages, and unemployment has fallen once again. The deficit is down by two thirds as a share of GDP on 2010, and the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that it will be eliminated by 2019-20. That recovery is still going on today, and with the global economy slowing, it is even more vital that we stick to our long-term economic plan.

However, we do not just need a responsible fiscal strategy; we also need to invest for Britain's future to create the capacity and space we need to grow. For decades, we have been slipping down the global infrastructure league tables. To take an example from recent history, let me pluck two years out of thin air—say, between 1997 and 2010. In those 13 years that I take at random, Britain slipped from seventh to 33rd in the world infrastructure league tables. As a result, we watched our roads grow increasingly congested, our railways become overcrowded, and our town centres choke with traffic. If we cannot move people or goods efficiently from one place to another, how can we expect businesses to invest in Britain? Building the infrastructure that Britain needs to compete is one of the defining political challenges of the age, so we have spent the past six years in government turning things around.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: I could take a lesson from the Leader of the Opposition from yesterday, but I hope my speech will not be quite as bad as that, so I certainly give way to my hon. Friend.

Mark Spencer: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Does he recognise that one of the barriers to gaining employment is sometimes the infrastructure needed to get from where one lives to where one wants to work? In that vein, does he recall standing on the platform at the former Edwinstowe railway station, and will he bring forward plans to fund the extension of the Robin Hood line in the very near future?

Mr McLoughlin: I well remember visiting my hon. Friend's constituency with him just over 12 months ago, although I cannot remember what was happening at the time. I also well remember the fantastic result that he had at the subsequent general election and the way in which he has always pushed for more infrastructure in his area. I want us to work with him, the local authority and the local enterprise partnership to see what other systems of transport we can provide. I have to say that Nottingham has not done too badly in relation to infrastructure investment. We have seen a huge amount of investment in the new station and the dualling of the A457—[ Interruption. ]—and I am very grateful that the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) was able to join me for its opening. [ Interruption. ] She says, “Thanks to a Labour county council.” Actually,
those plans were progressed by a Conservative county council when it was in office and had not been progressed before at all, as she well knows.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I suspect that the Secretary of State knows exactly what I am going to raise with him. He picked the years of 1997 to 2010 at random, and I will go along the same vein. In '97, my predecessor said that the Mottram-Tintwistle bypass would definitely get built; in 2010, there was still no spade in the ground. We promised before the last election that we would build the Mottram relief road and the Glossop spur, and we are looking at extending that to deal with the Mottram and Tintwistle problem. Can he confirm to me and my residents that we are still determined to press on with that as fast as possible? We talk about growing the economy and growing jobs, and that project is vital for Glossop and the surrounding area.

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is my parliamentary neighbour: our constituencies share a border. He has made his case and I am pleased to confirm our road investment strategy, which reflects the points he has made. In fact, we want to go further. We have commissioned a report by Colin Matthews on better connectivity between Manchester and Sheffield, which would have a huge beneficial effect for my hon. Friend's constituency.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr McLoughlin: I am slightly worried about the amount of time I am going to take and the number of Members who are seeking to intervene on me, but I cannot resist the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley).

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I hope that the Secretary of State will comment on the woeful transport situation in Salford in my constituency. There are no plans to improve our key road network and the three motorways in my constituency, or for any substantial upgrades to our rail services through Eccles, Walkden and Patricroft. Our bus services are completely woeful. Traffic in Salford has increased by 3.6%—three times the Greater Manchester average. On Monday I will meet the Royal Horticultural Society to discuss the building of its fifth garden, which will bring 1 million visitors to Salford every year. How are they going to be brought in?

Mr McLoughlin: I will come on to say more about the work we are doing on road infrastructure and devolution to local authorities. Salford should be in a strong position to take advantage of some of those measures.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I also pick two years out of thin air, namely 2010 to 2020, which will mark a decade of absolutely zero investment in the M56 in Chester? The Government are refusing not only to upgrade it to a smart motorway, but to install police and Highways Agency cameras so that we may know what the problems are. What can my constituents look forward to in respect of the M56 upgrade?

Mr McLoughlin: I join the hon. Gentleman in saying that we need to spend more money on infrastructure, but we also have to make sure that we spend it properly and in a planned manner. As well as the extra investment—I will talk more about that—we will also look at those areas that we have not been able to cover, provided that we get the other sides of the economy in good order.

In the past six years, we have turned things around as far as infrastructure is concerned. We have climbed up the global infrastructure investment league table and are now in the top 10, ahead of France, Japan and Germany. Action is under way, with new wider roads, new faster trains and better urban transport. In the south-west there is the widening of the A30 and the A303, and there are brand new trains on order. In the north-west, Manchester Victoria station has been transformed, there are electric trains on the northern hub and motorways have been widened. In East Anglia, the A11 has opened and the Norwich northern distributor road is under construction. We are finally taking action on the A47, which is of great interest to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, who will wind up the debate, and on the A14. In the midlands, there has been a transformation at Birmingham New Street station, and the M1 has been partly converted to four lanes running. I could go on and mention Crossrail in London and other action right around the country, but time will not allow me to continue reciting my list of improvements.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning the south-west. The key issues for us are ensuring that we have an alternative railway line to that down to Dawlish and getting the dualling of the A303 so that we can have better transport and therefore deliver productivity, which is lamentable at present.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Labour party manifesto said that it would cancel some of our road programmes in the south-west. It mentioned them specifically and we will remind Labour of that time and again.

A Treasury report last year revealed that more than £400 billion-worth of infrastructure work is planned across the country. The biggest slice of that is for transport. Overall, transport infrastructure spending will rise by 50% during this Parliament. That means that we can invest £15 billion to maintain and improve our roads—the largest figure for a generation. There will be £6 billion for local highways maintenance, which is double the spending of the last Labour Government. We are also giving local authorities a multi-year funding settlement for the first time ever, with an additional £250 million to address local potholes.

We can contrast that with the last Labour Government’s record. Between 2001 and 2010, just 574 lane miles were added to our motorways; we are adding more than 1,300 mile miles. Labour electrified only 10 miles of railway track; we have already electrified five times that amount, and anybody who goes on the Great Western line can see that there are many more to come very soon.

We are delivering the most ambitious rail modernisation programme since the Victorian era—a £40 billion investment. We have Crossrail, Thameslink, electrification and the intercity express programme. Hitachi—a company
that has now moved its global headquarters to Britain—is building new carriages in new factories in the north-east, opened by the Prime Minister. Of course, there is High Speed 2, for which construction will start next year. This is a new start for infrastructure that will make Britain one of the leading transport investors.

The Gracious Speech also includes legislation to back the National Infrastructure Commission, whose influence is already being felt. Following its recommendations, we have invested an extra £300 million to improve northern transport connectivity, on top of the record £13 billion already committed across the north. We have given the green light to High Speed 3 between Leeds and Manchester and allocated an extra £80 million to help fund the development of Crossrail 2.

I am pleased to say that by the end of this Parliament, Crossrail 1—or, as we can now call it, the Elizabeth line—will be operating. It is the most significant investment in transport in London for many a generation, and it will make a welcome addition to the capital’s infrastructure.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am a bit worried about Sheffield’s position in that list of schemes. The Secretary of State referred to HS3 as going from Manchester to Leeds, not connecting to Sheffield. Has that connection disappeared off the Government’s radar? Will he confirm that there is no truth in the stories that consideration is being given to abandoning the HS2 station in Sheffield, and that wherever that station might be, there will be one? Are we going to get HS3 as well?

Mr McLoughlin: I am coming on to HS2, and if the hon. Gentleman does not feel that I have answered his question after that, I will give way to him a little later. I hope he will be reassured by what I am about to say.

What I have described adds up to an ambitious pipeline of schemes that will not only free up capacity, boost freight and improve travel but help us to attract jobs, rebalance the economy and make us a more prosperous country. Of course, there will be disruption and inconvenience while some of that is happening, but when the work is done we will get the benefits, as at Reading station, the new Wakefield station or Nottingham station—infrastructure that will prepare Britain for the future.

That is what is behind the modern transport Bill, which will pave the way for the technologies and transport of tomorrow. We are already developing the charging infrastructure for electric and hybrid vehicles. Driverless cars and commercial space flights may seem like science fiction to some, but the economic potential of those new technologies is vast, and we are determined that Britain will benefit by helping to lead their development. Driverless cars will come under new legislation so that they can be insured under ordinary policies. The new laws will help autonomous and driverless vehicles become a real option for private buyers and fleets. The UK is already established as one of the best places in the world to research and develop those vehicles, just as we are leading the way on real-world testing to ensure that cars meet emissions standards, to clean up the air quality in our cities. Through the Bill we will strengthen our position as a leader in the intelligent mobility sector, which is growing by an estimated 16% a year and which some experts have said could be worth up to £900 billion worldwide by 2020.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Despite the initial gloom that descended on me when I heard my right hon. Friend mention HS2, may I say how delighted I am to hear about the growth in autonomous drive technology? I congratulate him and the Government on promoting it, because there is no question but that the United Kingdom leads the way in that area, working alongside Japan. Autonomous drive will potentially increase the density of traffic on our motorways fourfold, so let us stick with it. I will resist the temptation to say that we would not need HS2 if we had autonomous drive cars—that would be the wrong thing to say, I think.

Mr McLoughlin: Whenever my hon. Friend intervenes I am never sure whether I regard it as helpful or not—I think on that one the jury is still out.

The Bill will also allow for the construction of the first commercial spaceport. A full range of viable options have been put forward, and we support those bids. The Bill will create the right framework for the market to select what the best location will be. We will legislate to encourage British entrepreneurs to make the most of the commercial opportunities of space. That will form part of the Government’s wider support for the UK space sector, and is aimed at raising revenues from almost £12 billion to £40 billion by 2030—around 10% of the global space economy.

We are also preparing for HS2, which is the biggest infrastructure scheme that this country has seen for a generation. The transformation of rail travel across Britain will free up capacity on the rest of the network, and rebalance our economy and economic geography. Before a single track has been laid, the HS2 factor is already having an impact. Blue-chip companies such as Burberry have chosen to move to Leeds, and HSBC has relocated its retail banking headquarters from London to Birmingham, citing HS2 as a significant factor in that decision. We have seen ambitious regeneration plans around places such as Curzon Street in Birmingham and Old Oak Common. Cities such as Leeds, Manchester, Crewe and Sheffield are preparing for phase 2.

Mr McLoughlin: I am coming on to HS2, and if the hon. Gentleman does not feel that I have answered his question after that, I will give way to him a little later. I hope he will be reassured by what I am about to say.

What I have described adds up to an ambitious pipeline of schemes that will not only free up capacity, boost freight and improve travel but help us to attract jobs, rebalance the economy and make us a more prosperous country. Of course, there will be disruption and inconvenience while some of that is happening, but when the work is done we will get the benefits, as at Reading station, the new Wakefield station or Nottingham station—infrastructure that will prepare Britain for the future.

That is what is behind the modern transport Bill, which will pave the way for the technologies and transport of tomorrow. We are already developing the charging infrastructure for electric and hybrid vehicles. Driverless cars and commercial space flights may seem like science fiction to some, but the economic potential of those new technologies is vast, and we are determined that Britain will benefit by helping to lead their development. Driverless cars will come under new legislation so that they can be insured under ordinary policies. The new laws will help autonomous and driverless vehicles become a real option for private buyers and fleets. The UK is already established as one of the best places in the world to research and develop those vehicles, just as we are leading the way on real-world testing to ensure that cars meet emissions standards, to clean up the air quality in our cities. Through the Bill we will strengthen our position as a leader in the intelligent mobility sector, which is growing by an estimated 16% a year and which some experts have said could be worth up to £900 billion worldwide by 2020.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Despite the initial gloom that descended on me when I heard my right hon. Friend mention HS2, may I say how delighted I am to hear about the growth in autonomous drive technology? I congratulate him and the Government on promoting it, because there is no question but that the United Kingdom leads the way in that area, working alongside Japan. Autonomous drive will potentially increase the density of traffic on our motorways fourfold, so let us stick with it. I will resist the temptation to say that we would not need HS2 if we had autonomous drive cars—that would be the wrong thing to say, I think.

Mr McLoughlin: Whenever my hon. Friend intervenes I am never sure whether I regard it as helpful or not—I think on that one the jury is still out.

The Bill will also allow for the construction of the first commercial spaceport. A full range of viable options have been put forward, and we support those bids. The Bill will create the right framework for the market to select what the best location will be. We will legislate to encourage British entrepreneurs to make the most of the commercial opportunities of space. That will form part of the Government’s wider support for the UK space sector, and is aimed at raising revenues from almost £12 billion to £40 billion by 2030—around 10% of the global space economy.

We are also preparing for HS2, which is the biggest infrastructure scheme that this country has seen for a generation. The transformation of rail travel across Britain will free up capacity on the rest of the network, and rebalance our economy and economic geography. Before a single track has been laid, the HS2 factor is already having an impact. Blue-chip companies such as Burberry have chosen to move to Leeds, and HSBC has relocated its retail banking headquarters from London to Birmingham, citing HS2 as a significant factor in that decision. We have seen ambitious regeneration plans around places such as Curzon Street in Birmingham and Old Oak Common. Cities such as Leeds, Manchester, Crewe and Sheffield are preparing for phase 2.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr McLoughlin: Will this be helpful or not?

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend mentioned Curzon Street, and given that I fear there will be HS2, may I put down a marker? He will know that there is a cross-city line from Lichfield Trent Valley to Redditch. If HS2 eventually links up directly with the continent and does not go via St Pancras, it would be hugely advantageous if there were a halt at Curzon Street on the cross-city line, because that rail line runs immediately adjacent to the HS2 terminus.

Mr McLoughlin: Although my hon. Friend was against HS2, I am pleased that he is already thinking about how it can benefit his area and region. I join him in his partial conversion, and I will take that as a helpful intervention.
HS2 means that businesses will be able to access new markets, drawing their employees from much wider catchment areas, and perhaps for the first time they will consider moving offices away from London. When HS2 construction begins next year, we will be building something much bigger than a new railway; we will be investing in the economic prosperity of the next half-century or more, training a new generation of engineers, developing new skills for a new generation of apprentices, and rebalancing growth that for far too long has been concentrated in London and the south-east.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I am delighted to hear the right hon. Gentleman speak of such great plans for England, but what progress has he made with electrification to my constituency of Swansea East?

Mr McLoughlin: I am glad to say that I have made a lot more progress than was made in 13 years of the last Labour Government. To get to Swansea we must first get to Cardiff. We will get to Cardiff, and then we will get to Swansea, as has been promised—that work is on the way. The hon. Lady will travel on the Great Western line, and she will have seen all the work that has been going on. She will be a regular traveller through Reading, and she will have seen where £800 million has been spent on that scheme. We are doing a fair job in ensuring that her constituents, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who has often made the case for electrification to Swansea, will benefit from that.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: I cannot resist.

Lilian Greenwood: Would the Transport Secretary like to confirm that electrification of the Great Western main line was set out by a former Transport Secretary in 2009, and will he also confirm exactly how delayed and over budget it is?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady says that electrification was set out in 2009. It might have been. [HON. MEMBERS: “It was!”] One has to wonder why the Labour Government waited 12 years, until they knew they were about to lose office—in 2010—before coming out with plans. We are the ones who have carried them through. Yes, the costs have gone up—I very much regret that—but overall it is a big problem.

As I said, we will be firing up the north and the midlands to take advantage of this transformational project. After overwhelming support in the House, the Bill has now moved to another place, and I look forward to the Lords Select Committee. I am a strong supporter of remaining in the EU, but I am glad that I will no longer be able to get a high-speed train only from London to Paris or Brussels but that soon they will run to Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. No matter how big the scheme, it is now vital for Britain’s national infrastructure. We will always remember that the vast majority of journeys are local, which means that local transport and infrastructure are no less crucial to preparing Britain for the future. In that regard, we back safer routes for more cycling and better buses.

We are devolving power to our cities and regions to give communities a much bigger stake in local planning. Transport is just one aspect of that. As we heard yesterday, the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will give communities a much stronger voice and make the local planning process clearer, easier and quicker so as to deliver local infrastructure and support our ambition to build 1 million new homes, while protecting the areas we value the most, such as the green belt. Our reforms have already resulted in councils granting planning applications for more than 250,000 homes in the past year.

But our plans go much further. We want to become a country where everybody who works hard can have their own home, so the Gracious Speech also featured the local jobs and growth Bill, which will allow local authorities to retain 100% of local taxes to spend on local services by the end of the Parliament. That will be worth an extra £13 billion from business rates. Councils have called for more fiscal autonomy; now they are getting it—a real commitment from central Government, real devolution and real self-sufficiency for regions across England. It is arguably the biggest change to local government finance for a generation. The Bill will give authorities the power to cut business rates, boost enterprise and grow their local economies. As announced in the Budget, we will pilot the new system in Greater Manchester and Liverpool and increase the share retained in London.

It is little wonder that Labour Members are giving up on opposition and seeking new roles in life. I offer the shadow Home Secretary my best wishes for his mayoral nomination bid. He obviously does not think he is going to be Home Secretary after the next general election, and nor do I.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I am proud of this Conservative majority Government for looking at whole issues when it comes to serving our local communities, such as on infrastructure and business rates retention. Where we have no local plans, the Government are giving communities an opportunity to intervene and draw more up. Almost 50% of commuting in my area is out of Eastleigh, and standing traffic and air pollution are a big problem.

Mr McLoughlin: I know how important transport infrastructure and connectivity are in my hon. Friend’s constituency—we have discussed them many times—and I hope that our transport policies, such as those I have set out today, will help bring about some of the changes she wants.

Yesterday illustrated just how we are devolving power for local transport services. The bus services Bill will provide new powers for local authorities to improve bus services and increase passenger numbers. It will deliver for passengers, local authorities and bus companies, all working in partnership together to improve services. We will replace the disastrous quality contract scheme pioneered when Labour was in office—a failed theory that has never been successfully applied over the past 16 years.
Stronger partnerships will allow local authorities to agree a new set of standards for bus services, including branding, ticketing and how often buses run. Passengers want to know when their next bus is going to turn up and how much it is going to cost, so the Bill will mandate the release of fares, punctuality, routes and real-time bus location information. This will help the development of more transport apps, as it has already done in London, right across the country. There will be new journey planners and other innovative products to help passengers get the most out of their buses. This is about delivering for customers and empowering local communities.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con) rose—

Mr McLoughlin: I give way, I hope for the last time.

Ben Howlett: My right hon. Friend is incredibly generous in giving way. Will he confirm that the buses Bill will enable communities in devolved areas such as mine in the west of England to integrate smartcard ticketing, which will end up encouraging more people to use buses for less?

Mr McLoughlin: I certainly want to see more use of smart ticketing, and I think the bus companies are now addressing the issue. There will be criteria on whether local authorities can apply for the franchising. We will need to see whether my hon. Friend’s area lives up to those priorities.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: Is it about a train that runs only once a week?

Andrew Gwynne: In one direction only! I would also quite like to have a train service that goes into Manchester, but my question is about smart ticketing. Will the right hon. Gentleman knock some common sense into the transport planners who are trying to reinvent the wheel? We have had a bit of a farce in Greater Manchester, where many millions of pounds have been spent on trying to develop the technology of the “get me there” where many millions of pounds have been spent on trying to develop the technology that exists?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman talks about the contactless card, and I agree with him that there are such new technologies. That is a fairly new technology, and people in London see it used regularly nowadays. These are the areas on which we should be moving further forward, and I hope we will be able to make that happen.

This is all about delivering for customers and empowering local communities. New powers to franchise services will be available to combined authorities with directly elected mayors, just as they are in London, and private operators will be able to compete through the franchising system. Together, these measures demonstrate the Government’s ambition to deliver transport that helps the public to get around and get about.

The coalition Government and this one nation Conservative Government have a record to be proud of: investment up; projects under way; journeys getting easier; backing growth, jobs and new technology; helping local people get the homes and the infrastructure they need; striking a fairer deal for local government; giving devolution to local regions; and making Britain a leader. A stronger economy is at the heart of the Gracious Speech, and transport infrastructure is playing its part.

12.8 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I echo the sentiments of the Transport Secretary on the loss of air flight MS804 to Egypt. Our thoughts are with the family and friends of the passengers and crew while we await the outcome of the investigations that are now under way.

Although we are not debating the Queen’s Speech that I would have wanted, it is fitting to start these debates on transport. The challenges facing this country’s transport networks are profound, and there are some important cross-party points of agreement for meeting them. I welcome the Transport Secretary to his place, but I must point out that his speech was a timely reminder of the need for Ministers to mind the gap between their rhetoric and reality.

The Secretary of State said that the Government were delivering investment, but let us look at the real Conservative record. We see bus and rail fares up by a quarter, billions cancelled from road investment schemes, new projects under threat, the hard shoulder stripped from the motorways, the wheels falling off the “cycling revolution”, a £12 billion maintenance backlog on our local roads, and rail punctuality at its worst for a decade—and, of course, the Government promised a northern powerhouse but inflicted a northern power cut instead.

That said, we welcome the Government’s stated intention to introduce new local transport powers, extending to the entire country the ability to introduce the successful models employed in the capital. I am sure that the whole House will want to extend its congratulations to Sadiq Khan, the former Member of Parliament for Tooting, who is now the Labour Mayor of London. It is, perhaps, a little-known fact that the new Mayor is the son of a bus driver. The proposal in the bus services Bill to extend London-style bus powers to the rest of the country is long overdue, and it is possibly no coincidence that the Transport Secretary did not even mention the tendering of bus services to reverse the disastrous consequences of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr McLoughlin: I join the hon. Lady in congratulating Sadiq Khan on his election. May I ask whether she agrees with what he said in 2009, when he was a Transport Minister? He said then:

“one reason we are able to invest record sums in our railway service is the revenues that the franchises bring in and the premiums that they pay”.—[Official Report, 1 July 2009; Vol. 495, c. 430.]

Lilian Greenwood: I was very pleased that there was record investment in our railways under the last Labour Government. There are so many things that the Transport
Secretary forgets to talk about. Every week I travel up to the midlands on the midland main line via St Pancras railway station; it has been transformed, and was transformed under a Labour Government, but he never mentions that.

I welcome the Transport Secretary’s damascene conversion to the cause of bus regulation, which might be described as a screeching U-turn. However, as always with this Government, the devil will be in the detail. We have yet to see the text of the bus services Bill, and it is a shame that it was not published in time for today’s debate. I remind Conservative Members that last year’s Queen’s Speech also promised a buses Bill. Madam Deputy Speaker, you wait five years for a Conservative Queen’s Speech that mentions buses, and then two come along at once—even if they are running late. We will subject the Bill to close scrutiny. It is vital for it to provide a legal framework that protects local authorities from eye-watering compensation claims, and to safeguard working conditions.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend has mentioned local authorities. If she listened carefully to the Queen’s Speech, she will know that Her Majesty said that the powers in the buses Bill would be extended only to parts of England with directly elected mayors. Does she think that the powers in the Bill, which we expect to be published soon, should extend to all parts of England, whether or not they have mayoral models?

Lilian Greenwood: The Bill must address the decline in rural bus services, which have suffered some of the worst cuts and highest fare rises in the country, but, as my hon. Friend says, we also need to ensure that those powers are available to any area that wants them. I welcome the concession the Transport Secretary has made. According to the Queen’s Speech briefing, which was published yesterday, the Bill will allow communities without directly elected mayors to apply for contracting powers. It is, however, unclear why those powers should remain in the gift of the Department. Both the Transport Secretary and I represent areas that have, so far, not agreed a devolution deal. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin) can explain why those powers are good enough for Manchester, but might not be good enough for Matlock.

The Queen’s Speech also contained the announcement of what the Government call their modern transport Bill, although, given that the Minister of State—who, sadly, is not present today—drives a 126-year-old car and is a noted steam engine enthusiast, perhaps we should check their definition of “modern transport”. As ever, the Government’s announcement is long on statements of intent, but short on details. The Queen’s Speech briefing said that the law on drones would be reformed, but, in answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), the Government have consistently said that the EU is leading in the area. It is unacceptable that Ministers seem to be waiting for a serious drone strike to occur before taking action; it is vital that we do not wait for an accident to happen.

Electric cars will play a crucial role in driving down emissions, but we are playing catch-up, because the Government failed to deliver their promise in the coalition agreement to establish a national charging network. We welcome the development of personal autonomous vehicles. They could prove to be a boon for our car manufacturing industry, and I know that they are eagerly anticipated by many disabled people. However, given that insurance premiums have risen by 20% over the last year, the Government’s proposal to insure driverless cars on the same basis as existing policies may not offer much reassurance to prospective buyers. That said, the focus on driverless cars is, perhaps, understandable, given the Government’s tendency to run on autopilot.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): As my hon. Friend is talking about developments in technology, may I ask whether she agrees that the bus services Bill provides an opportunity for all new buses to be made accessible to people with sight loss? Two million people would greatly appreciate talking buses, with “next stop” and “final destination” announcements.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the lack of accessibility on buses. A number of London buses provide audio-visual announcements, but there are very few examples outside London, and that should be addressed.

The Minister of State has said that the United Kingdom should adopt a “light touch” approach to driverless car development, but we need to ensure that the risks have been fully analysed. It is important that Ministers do not move—to coin a phrase—too far and too fast. It should also be said, however, that that is just about the only area in which the Government could be accused of acting too quickly.

Michael Fabricant: Does the hon. Lady not accept that Toyota, Nissan, Mercedes and BMW have all welcomed the Government’s initiatives to ensure that driverless, or autonomous, cars are tested on British roads? They see Britain as a leader.

Lilian Greenwood: As I have said, I believe that the proposal offers a great opportunity to our excellent automotive industry. However, we need to be aware of potential technological difficulties, and of the safety implications.

The Transport Secretary referred to supporting the growing space industry by constructing the UK’s first space port. I should say, in fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, that it is impressive that he can put a rocket into space, although he cannot fix our pothole-ridden roads.

We also need to consider the Bills that were not announced yesterday. The Department has had two years in which to respond to the Law Commission’s report on taxis and private hire vehicles. The rise of Uber and other app-based services makes the need for reform all the more urgent. During yesterday’s debate, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) said that personal safety on transport services was women’s highest priority, and there can be no excuse for the delay in reforming licensing and regulation in that regard.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend will know that, on 4 May, I led an Adjournment debate on precisely that issue. Is she as concerned as I am that some taxi licensing authorities are effectively handing out licences to taxi drivers throughout the country who have been legitimately refused licences by their own local authorities?
Lilian Greenwood: As my hon. Friend will know, there are real concerns about taxi licensing and regulation, which were carefully addressed in the Law Commission’s report. That is why it is so disappointing that the Government have yet to respond properly to the report, and to take action.

Ministers have also had nearly three years in which to respond to the Law Commission’s recommendations on reforming level crossings, which are the single greatest cause of risk on the railways. In the Department’s level crossing reform action plan—I will refrain from using its acronym—legislation was planned for this year, but that, too, failed to make the Queen’s Speech. It is extremely disappointing that such safety-critical legislation is not being treated as a priority by the Government.

Turning to the wider Conservative record on transport, time and time again promises are broken, investment is delayed and the interests of passengers and road users are not put first. Of course, there was a line to please the Chancellor in the Queen’s Speech, which was that the “Government will continue to support the development of a Northern Powerhouse.”

We can tell that the Chancellor is a wallpaper salesman—these days, he spends most of his time papering over the cracks.

Let us look at the Government’s real record on transport in the north. Rail spending in the north-west has fallen from £97 to £93 per head. In the north-east, it has fallen from £59 to £52 per head—less than half the national average. Funding for bus services in Yorkshire and Humber is down 31%. Traffic police numbers have fallen by over 10% across the north. Shamefully, Ministers hiked rail fares on northern commuter routes by up to 162%. They also allowed modern trans-Pennine trains to be transferred from the north to the south, costing taxpayers £20 million.

The Transport Secretary initially wanted to call his railway pledges the “rail investment plan”, until a civil servant pointed out that that would be shortened to RIP. Delays to electrification were shamefully covered up before the election and confessed to only once the ballot boxes had closed.

There are real concerns that promised road investment could suffer the same fate. Highways England has publicly discussed

“Challenges on the current RIS”—the road investment strategy—

“construction programme, including the level of uncertainty about projects due to begin in the final year and the potential knock on effect on funding for RIS2”.

Those plans include the trans-Pennine road tunnel and spending on the existing A66 and A69 trans-Pennine links and the M60. It is clear that we cannot trust the Tories on roads, rail or local transport.

Northern cities are succeeding under Labour leadership despite the Government.

Mr Betts: There are 200 workers in Sheffield who will have listened with incredulity when the Transport Secretary said that HS2—he said it will benefit Sheffield, and I clearly hope it does—should be a reason for companies to look at transferring jobs out of London to northern cities. Yet, in a reversal of that process, the Business Secretary is currently transferring 200 jobs from Sheffield down to London—down the midland main line instead of back up the HS2 line. How will workers in Sheffield feel about the complete contradiction between the Transport Secretary and his colleague in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills?

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and it is no surprise that people in the city of Sheffield reject this Government completely.

The north was a powerhouse long before the Chancellor arrived, and it will be a powerhouse long after he has gone. On HS2, the Government’s delivery has been anything other than high speed. A decision on the route of phase 2 has been delayed by two years. I would like to remind Ministers of a Conservative party press release issued in Yorkshire on 21 April 2015. They should not worry—it is not about campaign bus expenses. No questions from local media were allowed, and it is not difficult to see why. The press release said:

“Phase Two of HS2 will also start construction from the northern ends, with the Leeds to Sheffield Meadowhall section made a priority to open even before the line as a whole opens.”

Those plans to build HS2 from the north have already been dropped—if they ever existed. Once again, we are faced with a Conservative election promise that has been broken.

Over the last fortnight, it has been reported that phase 2 is under review and that prominent critics of HS2 have been invited into the Treasury to set out the case against the project. Stations at Sheffield and Manchester airport could also be dropped, along with the Handsacre link—which would allow high-speed trains to run to Stoke and Stafford—even though the Secretary of State has given specific assurances in the House on the link’s future.

There are specific questions that the Government must still answer. If those reports have no basis, why did the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise say on Sunday:

“We need to...sort this out or Sheffield might miss” out on HS2? Has what the Government call the “appropriate third-party funding contribution”, which the Transport Secretary said Manchester Airport station was dependent on, been agreed?

Two months ago, the House voted overwhelmingly in favour of HS2 on a specific understanding of the project. Of course costs must be kept under control, but it would be totally unacceptable if the plans for high-speed rail in the midlands and the north were downgraded by some unaccountable and secretive review.

Let us not forget the Government’s record—if it can be called that—on aviation. In 2009 the Prime Minister famously said:

“The third runway at Heathrow is not going ahead, no ifs, no buts.”

By last July, that had morphed into:

“The guarantee that I can give...is that a decision will be made by the end of the year.”—[Official Report, 1 July 2015; Vol. 597, c. 1473.]

It is difficult to take the latest pledge to report by this summer seriously, but perhaps the Government will surprise us.

While Ministers are failing to deliver on national transport schemes, local services are being severely squeezed. More than 2,400 bus routes have been downgraded or cut altogether. The Rail Minister said at Christmas:

“Our plan for passengers is improving journeys for everyone”,

Debate on the Address
Debate on the Address
but the reality is that commuters are being priced off buses and trains, and some season tickets cost £2,000 more than in 2010. Punctuality is at its worst in a decade—worse than when the network was still recovering from the Hatfield disaster. Ministers are considering further cuts to Network Rail’s maintenance plans.

The pothole crisis on local roads gets worse by the day, after local upkeep budgets fell by 27% in real terms. Even on walking and cycling—an area where the Prime Minister has a personal interest—I am worried that Ministers might have misinterpreted their brief. That can be the only explanation for publishing a cycling and walking investment strategy that is so utterly pedestrian. Targets for increasing walking journeys have been inexplicably dropped. I hope the Secretary of State will take advantage of national walking month to reverse that decision.

A year ago the Prime Minister said it was his “aim to increase spending” on cycling further, to £10 a head. However, analysis of spending figures obtained by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) shows that Government funding for cycling is due to fall to just 72p per head outside London. It is clear that the Government have produced a cycling and walking investment strategy with no investment, and the promise to raise spending on cycling has been broken.

Mr McLoughlin: One of the problems of going first and not being able to follow is that the hon. Lady is asking a number of questions that I am unable to answer. However, I find it rather odd that she talks about capital investment, when David Miliband said in answer. However, I find it rather odd that she talks about capital investment, when David Miliband said in answer.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Why is the Minister so keen on camping and not keen on cycling?

Mr McLoughlin: We are keen on both, but competing demands have to be balanced.

**Lilian Greenwood:** In the Prime Minister’s education strategy, he promised an injection of £2 billion to the capital spending—

Mr McLoughlin: His education strategy was about universal access to academy schools, and £2 billion was about increasing the number and quality of academy schools...
in the coming years. Importantly, however, I welcome the fact that that will no longer be done on a compulsory basis, as was proposed previously, following a re-think from the Government. I extend my thanks to the Secretary of State for Education for taking the time to listen to my genuine concerns, and those of other colleagues, about the academies programme, and for that important change of tack. I look forward to working with her and others to progress the Bill. It also includes the vital new national funding formula for schools, which will end the entrenched disparities in school funding and bring about fairness for all pupils.

On a related note, I was pleased to hear that measures will be introduced to strengthen social services for children in care, and to increase the number and speed of adoptions. I say gently that in desiring greater speed, we should be careful not to sacrifice the suitability of placements. As the intention of adoptions is to find permanent, stable and loving homes for children, a rushed process could lead to harm in the long term if the system becomes overly streamlined.

The children and social work Bill will improve social work provision through better training and standards for social workers. It will mean that children leaving care will be made aware of the ongoing services that they are entitled to, which include access to a personal adviser until the age of 25. That is particularly welcome, only weeks after a striking report by the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change on the stark disparities in mental healthcare provision for looked-after children.

Mental health problems are also particularly prevalent among the prison population, and mental health care and services for prisoners are not up to the standard they should be. I hope that the Government will put a particular focus on improving that as they work to build new reforming prisons.

The Queen’s Speech contained welcome plans to introduce the NHS overseas visitors charging Bill, under which overseas visitors and migrants will be charged for using NHS services to which they are not entitled. Tighter residency rules will mean that fewer visitors from the EU and the EEA will be able to access free healthcare. In the NHS, we have one of the greatest and most envied healthcare systems in the world, but that envy has led to the NHS becoming a victim of its own success. We have the charade of health tourism, where overseas visitors come to the UK to benefit from our excellent NHS services without making a contribution and the British taxpayer picks up the bill.

Health tourism has been particularly prevalent among migrants and visitors from the EU, who have abused the European healthcare insurance scheme for far too long. The hundreds of thousands of overseas migrants and visitors treated in Britain each year have put a strain on our health service. Although many Britons receive treatment overseas, they are far fewer in number than those who come here. Health tourism accounts for a net drain on our NHS, and I am pleased that a new Bill will allow us to recover the cost of treating overseas visitors and re-invest it in the NHS.

Of course, another way in which we could provide a huge boost to our NHS would be to stop sending £350 million every week to the EU—I fear I may be in some disagreement with my right hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), and perhaps with quite a number of my colleagues. Our EU contributions are enough to build a new, fully-staffed NHS hospital every week.

That is not the only way in which the EU is threatening our NHS. This is something that, unfortunately, the Gracious Speech did not address. Under the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which the EU is determined to pass, the UK Government and the NHS may face legal challenge from foreign corporations if we refuse to put some of our public services, including the NHS, out to tender for privatisation. TTIP could, in effect, force the partial privatisation of the NHS, and there would be nothing the UK Government or the British people could do about it if we remained a member of the European Union. Conservative Members must not be blind to that issue or leave it to other parties to make the case. The simplest and surest way to protect the NHS from the unbearable strain of visitor cost and forced privatisation, and to save enough money to provide a new hospital every week, would be for Britain to vote to leave and take back control on 23 June.

Mr Betts: Has the hon. Gentleman thought about the fact that there will be, presumably, at some stage a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States, and that if we want to protect ourselves from unintended consequences such as those that he mentions, it is best to argue the case as part of the negotiations, rather than having to stay on the outside and accept the agreement, whatever it contains, at the end of the negotiations?

William Wragg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I gently say to him that if such an agreement brought with it the risk of sacrificing our sovereignty and the Government’s ability to determine public policy in the process of international tribunals determining matters between Governments and companies, I would, quite frankly, accept President Obama’s offer to be at the back of the queue.

I was delighted to hear in the Queen’s Speech that the Government will continue to strengthen our national security through investment in our armed forces, a commitment to the armed forces covenant and, vitally, a promise to fulfil our NATO commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence. Let us not forget that it is, first and foremost, our work and friendship with allies through NATO, not through the European Union, which maintains our security on the international stage. The world is a turbulent place, but our security and defence forces keep us safe and strong, and it is right that the Queen’s Speech recognises and protects that.

Now is not just the time for strengthening our national defences. The British people will soon need to show the strength of their convictions and not blink in the face of fear. I hope that they will do the right thing for Britain and vote next month to leave the European Union, and thereby free us to take control of our own country and to forge new and prosperous relationships with partners all around the world, not just those on our doorstep.

However, I am heartened by Her Majesty’s most Gracious Speech, because it lays out a positive programme for government for the next year. It means that after the referendum vote on 23 June, I am confident that on
24 June we will have a strong Conservative majority Government who will lead us, united, to a Britain brighter and better, both at home and abroad.

12.39 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): May I associate the SNP group with the comments made by Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State about the EgyptAir incident?

I will focus on three themes in my speech: first, the measures that we in the SNP welcome, at least in their outline descriptions; secondly, the areas in which we think that other options and measures could have been and, indeed, should be incorporated—it is never too late for Ministers to pay heed to and take forward such ideas, so I hope they are listening carefully—and, thirdly, the actions, examples and lessons to be learned if we are to take the steps required to deliver for the people of the nations of the UK.

First, I am sure the Secretary of State will join me in welcoming Fergus Ewing MSP to his new position as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, and Humza Yousaf MSP to his new position as Minister for Transport and the Islands. I want to put on record my thanks to the former Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown MSP and the former Minister Derek Mackay for their work, some of which I will mention. They are both now performing new roles in the Scottish Government Cabinet, and I am sure that UK Government Ministers agree that they worked positively with them during their time in office.

Mr McLoughlin: May I echo what the hon. Gentleman has said? I heard about the new appointments just before I came into the Chamber. I very much hope that we can work together positively on a number of issues that affect both Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Drew Hendry: I am sure that where there is a progressive movement, that will be the case.

I want to start with those areas on which there is common purpose, and there are some innovative transport measures—or at least promises of them. That said, if such measures are to gain support, the rhetoric will need to be followed by an inclusive vision that benefits all the nations of the UK. An area where that is not yet clear is investment in further research on autonomous vehicles. Obviously, safety implications and their deployment will need to be considered.

Such investment is welcome, but it will be meaningless to most of the UK nations if it is not supported by the necessary investment and innovation to deliver a truly universal mobile communications network. Let us not yet again take an approach through which benefits are seen only in some urban areas of the UK. Future network licensing deals should include a requirement, in the conditions of the contracts, for rural areas to be prioritised. These areas all across the nations of the UK have suffered for decades because of ill-thought strategy and, indeed, ignorance about the needs of those outside the largest cities.

Linked closely to that is the need for broadband infrastructure. The SNP has campaigned for a universal service obligation for broadband, so we are pleased that that will be included in the digital economy Bill. The Scottish Government are committed to extending superfast broadband to 100% of premises—all businesses and homes. When I recently asked the Leader of the House in the Chamber to match that ambition, he said that he did not know how it could be done. I hope that the UK Government have, in the past few weeks, figured this out and that they will roll out action to match their words. If they do, it will indeed be positive news.

Putting the UK National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory basis is also welcome, but only if it looks beyond the old horizons and priorities infrastructure for all the nations of the UK. To achieve that, we need more ambition on the development and deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure, so I agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) about that. That and investment in autonomous vehicles must go hand in hand. It will be good if that happens, but let us see the detail because, once again, the Government should demonstrate that that matches the ambition of what they are saying.

We are entering a point in our development where, counter-intuitively, roads might actually provide another vision for the future of green transport, and I would like such an opportunity to be explored further by the UK Government. On green travel—indeed, on greener travel measures in general—we are seeking more ambition from the UK Government.

On active travel, we welcome the fact that the recent Budget did not remove salary sacrifice schemes—that will aid the promotion of cycling—but there is a huge opportunity for further investment in cycling, which would lead to healthier outcomes for people and healthy economic benefits. I urge Ministers to reconsider the lack of a strategic UK Government commitment to accelerating cycling infrastructure. Where is the promised five-year strategy and why, given the stated objectives in the cycling and walking investment strategy, is that not a headline at this time? We need greater vision, greater urgency and proof that words are equal to a true commitment.

The SNP Scottish Government are investing £1 billion annually in public transport and other sustainable transport options to encourage people to get out of their cars. Since 2011, Scotland has built 190 km of cycling and walking paths to match the commitment to healthier lives for the people of Scotland, where the number of people cycling has increased by about a third since 2003.

When the Secretary of State mentioned HS2, he said, if I am quoting him correctly, that he looks forward to it going to Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester. Ominously, however, he omitted Scotland from that list. The Scottish Government have committed to working in partnership with the UK Government on HS2, but the UK Government must demonstrate their commitment. Will he now confirm that that is correct and commit to the line going to Scotland, with the full investment needed?

HS2 is not the only possibility for cross-border rail development. The Borders rail link—a programme delivered on time and under budget by the Scottish Government—is
now open for investigation for an extension all the way to Carlisle. The Scottish Government have said that they will support a feasibility study. Will the UK Government match that ambition by agreeing to consider whether that can be realised for the people on the borders? I hope so.

On investment in green measures, there is a future for green travel for surface users—through active travel and electric developments in relation to road and rail, especially if powered by renewable energies—but there remains a vision from the UK Government on alternative fuels for air travel. Once again, the UK is stuck in the vapour trail on this issue. Oslo has already become the world’s first airport to offer sustainable biofuels to all airlines—Lufthansa, SAS and KLM have all signed up to that—but there is no such commitment in the UK. The UK Government can change that, and I again urge Ministers to include aviation in the renewable transport fuels obligation.

We welcome the UK Government’s commitment to do more work on a UK airspace strategy. Such a commitment is overdue, and we ask that action in this area is accelerated to address the deficit of more than 40 years. If we continue to ignore that, there will be an increased risk of delays, higher carbon use and a damaging impact on commerce. Tackling this, and coming into line with the European Commission’s single European sky initiative, offers an opportunity to boost the UK economy and benefit all the UK nations.

Speaking of things up in the air, although nobody will be shocked by the lack of a commitment to deciding on airport expansion, it remains the jumbo in the room. I know that our frustration is actually shared by Government Ministers. I am certain that, freed from internal pressures, they would have made a decision by now, but they remain paralysed by orders arising from internal party politics.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you were in the Chair on the occasion when I overran the two minutes for my response to a statement on yet another delay on airport expansion, because I was trying to list the broken promises in relation to the many dates by which Ministers and, indeed, the Prime Minister had promised there would be a full and final decision. Such promises have been broken over and over, but when someone hears that long catalogue of missed opportunities for leadership, the frustration and anger caused by these delays immediately becomes understandable. You will be glad to know that, rather than repeat that exercise, I will just quote the Secretary of State’s words from way back in October 2012. He said:

“in the south east the runways are filling up. And the jets are circling in our skies. That’s hitting our prosperity. It’s bad for the environment. It’s putting off investors. It’s costing jobs. And it’s holding Britain back.”

He was right, but that was nearly five years ago. In spite of those sage words, the runways are now fuller, more jets are circling, the environment continues to be damaged and investors have indeed been put off. Who knows how many jobs that has cost?

Mr McLoughlin: Given that the hon. Gentleman has now had time to study the Davies report and that he is so clear in his own mind, will he tell us which option he prefers?

Drew Hendry: I would be delighted if the Secretary of State and the UK Government wanted to hand control of UK infrastructure development to the SNP, because as with the Borders rail link and the Queensferry crossing, we deliver things on time and under budget. By all means, give us the decision and we will make the choice.

Let me come on to why the decision is important for Scotland. More than 90% of international visitors to Scotland travel by air. More than a third use Heathrow as a hub and, if that is combined with Gatwick, I reckon that around half of our international visitors travel through the south-east. It is not just about tourism; it is the £5 billion a year whisky industry and the £500 million salmon industry, and other shellfish and exports need to get to international markets. All the time the decision is pushed out and fudged, it harms the Scottish economy.

Another opportunity is open to the UK Government to assist not just Scotland but many other parts of the UK by bringing forward a commitment for public service obligations for linking regional airports point to point with the London hubs. That straightforward measure would point to a much more enlightened and inclusive air transport strategy. Market forces alone cannot provide fairness across all the regions and nations of the UK, and a strategic choice is needed.

We also support the establishment of the UK spaceport, which is an exciting opportunity.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): On my behalf, will my hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State to clarify his comments about this issue? I wanted to intervene on him, but unfortunately he did not hear me. He said that it would be up to market forces to decide the location of the spaceport. We have had discussions in this place about awarding a single licence to a UK spaceport, but multiple licences would be needed, because every vehicle has to be licensed. I hope that the Secretary of State will clarify whether he will let the market make the decision and if it will be possible to have multiple spaceports?

Drew Hendry: That is a very important point, and I am delighted to underline it and to ask the Secretary of State to respond. We see this development as having great possibilities and we would anticipate that, when making their decision, the UK Government will fully appreciate the excellent potential sites in Scotland. We encourage the UK Government to work with the Scottish Government, Scottish local authorities and our public agencies to realise this potential in Scotland.

We would also welcome more detail on developing a genuine aerospace strategy, which must include supporting the industry to address the skills gap in the engineering sector. I urge Ministers to consider some of the work on gender-balance issues. Not long ago in the Chamber I quoted Bridget Day, the deputy director of the national aerospace programme with more than 40 years’ experience. She has highlighted her struggles as a woman in the industry. Only 11% of engineers are women, even though more than 20% of graduates are women. That is the lowest percentage of female employment in the sector across Europe.

There are also apprentice opportunities in shipping—transport should include references to shipping. The Scottish Government worked tirelessly, as they did on the Scottish steel issue, to save the iconic Ferguson
shipyard, which is vital to providing vessels and employment for the future. Of course, this place has decided to delay the BAE order for the Govan and Scotstoun yards with the review of shipbuilding. That delay threatens jobs in Scotland and I hope that Ministers will take that message back to the Cabinet and get the Treasury to release the brakes on that development.

On the subject of shipping, we also have an opportunity to put right the dangerous deficit that has been allowed to continue around the seas of the UK, nowhere more strikingly than on the west coast of Scotland. My right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has highlighted on many occasions the dangers and folly of removing maritime patrol aircraft from Scotland, but when the removal of one of Scotland’s two emergency towing vessels and the ongoing uncertainty over the remaining tug are added to that, it is easy to see why Ministers are facing calls from every quarter to commit to permanently securing the remaining vessel and reinstating the second. Those vessels, if deployed sensibly, can assist drifting ships, therefore preventing them from running aground, and head off disaster, protecting human lives and fragile environments. They are called emergency towing vessels for a simple reason: they are available for emergencies, such as when they were called in to rescue one of the UK’s nuclear submarines that had run aground off Skye. Their retention and reinstatement has been strongly urged by everyone who understands the risks from the seas around Scotland—the marine industry, marine unions, including Nautilus, every highlands and islands MP and MSP, local authorities and agencies. They have all pointed out that we cannot wait for a disaster to happen before there is a reaction, so protection is needed so that a disaster can be prevented.

The nations of the UK need not just warm words of support for good ideas, but a connectivity strategy: a plan for air; a plan for technology; a plan for sustainable fuels; a plan for marine operations; a plan for health and wellbeing; a plan for tourism; a plan for trade and enterprise; and a plan for productivity. We must see more and better work from the UK Government on those fronts.

12.56 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am grateful to be called early in the debate. I apologise in advance for not being able to attend the wind-up speeches. I have an invitation from Her Majesty the Queen to attend a garden party at Buckingham palace this afternoon. I am sure that the Minister will understand that I am keen to do so.

I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate. Yesterday in the Gracious Speech we learned of the Government’s plans to ensure that the UK will be at the forefront of technology for new forms of transport in a modern transport Bill. This is an incredibly exciting time for the country as we push forward towards a modern transport revolution, which—most excitingly—includes the potential for the UK’s first commercial spaceport. I shall return to that point later.

The magnitude of the progress we are poised to make becomes very clear when we consider the many years of neglect our transport system has suffered, especially in Cornwall. However, at long last, we are seeing serious investment in the county’s transport infrastructure that will create the opportunities for the future. A £60 million project dualling a section of the A30—the main route linking Cornwall to the rest of the country—is well under way, and when finished will relieve massive congestion and delays. I am incredibly proud to be part of the Government who are finally delivering this project, which was cancelled by the Labour Government when they came to power in the 1990s. A further 9-mile stretch of single carriageway further west on the A30 is also due to be upgraded in the coming years. This route experiences a 25% rise in traffic flow in holiday periods, so the House will understand how important such projects are to the ongoing growth of the area.

For many years, residents of St Austell and the surrounding villages have been making impassioned calls for an upgraded link road between St Austell and the A30. Now their calls have finally been answered by the Government. This project, which will go ahead thanks to funding from the local major’s fund, will have a significant positive impact on congestion and traffic issues in my constituency, as well as unlocking future potential economic growth.

It is not just the roads that are being upgraded. The south-west is set to benefit from new trains, replacing ones some 40 years old, and an upgraded Riviera sleeper service, and reports are being commissioned to look into cutting the journey time to London by nearly half an hour and at the much needed additional route through Devon. Meanwhile, passenger numbers at the UK’s fastest growing regional airport, Cornwall-Newquay airport, continue to grow. Thanks to the Government’s backing, it has been able to fly into the jet age with its link to Gatwick, as well as seeing new routes opening up. Through all of this, Cornwall is being transformed and its potential is starting to be realised, but there is still more to do.

With our unquestionable appetite to demonstrate our aspiration for growth and better times ahead, Cornwall is now eagerly edging towards the forefront of the next generation of travel opportunities and is proving itself to be the right choice for the UK’s first spaceport. Although we still await the release of the final bid criteria, it is clear Newquay has established itself as the frontrunner in this process and is the best option of the six shortlisted. Newquay airport already has a wide and long runway, with the added bonus that it has the capacity to be extended fairly easily. The airport is already established and thriving, continuing to go from strength to strength, and I am sure it will embrace the growth and development the spaceport would bring. The proposed site is ideally located right next to the coast, another key factor in this process. It has easy access to uncongested airspace and of course it is not in a densely populated area.

Making Newquay’s bid even more attractive are the hugely beneficial links that already exist between the airport’s neighbouring Newquay Aerohub enterprise zone and Goonhilly Earth Station, after the Chancellor announced the extension of the enterprise zone to encircle Goonhilly, last autumn. This boost for Cornwall’s space ambitions works to make the area even more attractive for commercial investment. As well as enabling the possibility for space tourism or high-speed travel, the spaceport provides an opportunity to embrace the commercial satellite market even further. The UK is
already a world leader in the satellite business, but with a spaceport we could finally secure satellite launch facilities of our own.

This is, undeniably, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Cornwall and for my constituency to transform our economy. We will see job opportunities and well-paid careers in cutting-edge technologies. In one of the lowest-pay areas of the country, we will see higher-paid jobs brought about and, as well as welcoming new people to the area, the next generation of skilled Cornishmen and women will be able to stay in the county they love to call home, instead of being forced to move away for skilled jobs.

For decades, Cornish people have been unfairly torn between their love for and desire to live in their beautiful homeland or seek serious job opportunities elsewhere. I count myself incredibly lucky to have been able to make a living without having to leave Cornwall, working in a number of sectors over many years, as well as running my own business. Sadly, that has not been the case for many of my peers, who were forced to move away in search of other opportunities, and this is still happening today, with scores of talented, skilful young people leaving Cornwall behind, often never to return. This has gone on for far too long and we can stop it. Our young people deserve the chance of having a real opportunity just as much as the rest of the country does.

Clearly, the spaceport needs a home that will embrace the brand-new sector of space tourism, and Cornwall can and will pioneer this. As well as boosting visitor numbers from within the UK even further, this could be the key to finally getting a large portion of the country’s overseas visitors to the south-west; only a small percentage of overseas visitors currently venture out of London, and the benefits of this would of course be felt right across the south-west.

Furthermore, Cornwall has historically led from the front when it comes to industry. Our tin mining and china clay activities are world-renowned, and have transformed the landscape and future of Cornwall. The county is also at the forefront of inventions: the mighty Cornishman Richard Trevithick harnessed high-pressure steam and created the world’s first steam railway locomotive; Humphry Davy saved hundreds of lives with his revolutionary miners’ safety lamp; and of course the first ever radio transmission was sent across the Atlantic ocean from Cornwall, by Marconi. But despite that incredible heritage, Cornwall has been stifled, unable to build any further on those major advances. For too long, Cornwall has been unable to live up to its true potential. Often forgotten by Westminster, its ambitions have been ignored, but the tide is changing and Cornwall is on the up, under this Government. The granting of Newquay spaceport would be another major advancement for the region, and we are ready. The county, and Newquay in particular, is already a premier tourist destination, with millions of people flocking to the area to enjoy all it has to offer. Not only is Cornwall already equipped for such an influx of visitors, but we understand tourism better than anyone else—our communities thrive on it and have done so for more than a century.

The Government’s latest infrastructure commitments and achievements in Cornwall show that I outlined at the beginning show their commitment to the county, and the six Cornish Conservative MPs are unequivocally working hard within a Conservative Government to deliver for Cornwall. What better time than now to push this forward? The Government’s ongoing commitment to the county shows a belief that Cornwall holds the key to a fairer distribution of growth and is real evidence of our one nation vision. It is a belief that we can pave the way forward in this exciting new sector and a belief that Cornwall will deliver. The right choice is clear: Newquay’s bid for the spaceport holds the excitement and enthusiasm for exploration, the spirit of adventure and the capability to be the driving force in scientific and technological advances. Let us make the right choice—for Newquay, for Cornwall and for the country.

1.5 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op):

There is a great deal to welcome in this Queen’s Speech in relation to transport, and it is reassuring to see how many issues addressed in it reflect the requests that have come from the Select Committee on Transport. The real test will be whether the promised measures are implemented and do not simply remain aspirations, and of course we will have to see the important details of what is being proposed. I am pleased that the National Infrastructure Commission is to be made a statutory body charged with producing strategic vision for 2050. I just hope that we are not still discussing the issue of increasing hub capacity in the south-east when we get to that date. It is very important that a decision on aviation capacity in the south-east is made soon. Heathrow is the right location and it is important that a decision is made, in the interests of this country as a whole, and on behalf of the regions and nations of this country.

The northern powerhouse also features in the Queen’s Speech, and that is extremely important. Again, we do not need to hear more words; we need to see implementation of proposals and ideas that have been put forward. That means that Transport for the North needs to have effective powers and full accountability, but I do not see any mention of that in this Queen’s Speech. It is of course particularly important that electrification schemes that have already been proposed are properly costed and implemented. We do not want to see any more stop-start processes, where promises are made but much needed schemes are then either delayed or cancelled. When we are looking at much needed improvements across the Pennines—the trans-Pennine improvements and the so-called HS3—it is important for Ministers to remember that trans-Pennine improvements are not confined to Manchester and Leeds, but also include Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield and Hull, to name a few of these very important places.

I am very pleased that HS2 is going ahead, but I would like more clarity from the Minister on the stories now being circulated about possible changes to phase 2. To get maximum impact from that important infrastructure, HS2 needs to be linked with other rail investments, as we have been promised. For example, we need to enable a direct line to be built from Liverpool to link up with both HS2 and HS3. That is just one example of the way in which major infrastructure investments of national importance can also bring great benefits to the regions of this country.

I am pleased about the modern transport Bill, as the promises it makes for the commercial development of transport innovations are extremely important for this country, and that has too often been neglected. I also note the reference that has been made to the importance
of using new technology for road safety. It is important to realise that although the trend on road safety over a decade or so is one of improvement, there has been a change in very recent years. In the last year for which we have recorded figures, 2014, we regrettably saw an increase in road casualties: 1,775 people were killed on our roads, and 22,807 people were seriously injured. Using technology to improve road safety is important, but technology on its own cannot do the job. Education and promotional campaigns and enforcement are also important. I remind Ministers that, yes, having the latest technology matters, but we also need more people enforcing the rules of the road and looking at bad driver behaviour, and we need more road traffic officers. This year, the Transport Committee produced a report that showed the impact of reductions in road traffic officers. For improved road safety, we need to harness the technology that is there and to use new technology, and we also need education and enforcement. The three go together.

I give a special welcome to the bus services Bill, although we have yet to see the critical detail of it. For too long, buses have been treated as the Cinderella of public transport, yet more people use buses than any other form of public transport. They are a lifeline for millions of people, enabling them to get to their jobs and to access important local amenities. This Bill—I hope I can repeat this when we see the detail of it—is an attempt to put right the weaknesses of the Transport Act 1985, which left bus services at the mercy of the free market, with local authorities picking up the tab for unprofitable services. London, which was spared deregulation, has gone from success to success, with franchise services using the private sector, but the private sector being employed to implement the transport plans decided by the public sector, Transport for London.

In the rest of the country, when local government cuts started to bite and financial cuts started to be implemented, local authority support for those subsidised services inevitably fell away. Increased numbers of people in communities have found that they are left out of essential transport services, with no access to work, hospitals and shops. It is not solely rural communities that have been affected, although they have been very badly affected; significant parts of towns and cities are losing not only night-time services, but important day-time services as well.

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points. I agree with what she says. Night buses have been cut from Little Hulton in my constituency, which means that people cannot get into Manchester. Does she agree that among those who are excluded from these services are people with sight loss and that this Bill is an opportunity to make all new buses accessible for people with sight loss through next-stop and final-destination announcements?

Mrs Ellman: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments, and I certainly agree with her. A proper public transport service that includes buses has to be accessible for all people, and proper facilities should be available to enable people with sight loss and with other sorts of disabilities to use the service. This is a very important opportunity to do that. Indeed, the whole pattern that we have seen since bus deregulation is that, while services in London, where deregulation did not take place, have increased, services elsewhere in the country have reduced and bus fares have increased. That is not acceptable, and it cannot be tolerated any further. Measures to try to remedy that by having quality partnerships and quality contracts—the partnerships have been effective in some areas—have not resolved the basic question.

I look forward to the publication of the bus services Bill. Given the situation that currently operates so successfully in London, the proposal now is to enable devolved areas with an elected mayor to use franchise services. However, I would like to see the detail of how that can be extended to other sorts of authorities as well and to see what financial support goes with that. The power to make bus services accessible, accountable and effective is extremely important, but the finance to make that a real possibility must be there to go with it, so I look forward to seeing that.

In summary, I welcome some very important measures in the Bill. We need them to be enacted and not just to remain aspirations, and we need proper funding, too. It is vital that proper transport infrastructure is provided nationally, regionally and locally. It is also important that there are effective transport services that are accessible and passenger friendly. The test of whether this Queen’s Speech will deliver those objectives is yet to come.

1.15 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I wish to focus my remarks on neighbourhood planning and the effects on housing delivery, but first let me draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Just before the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), leaves the Chamber, may I make a very quick pitch for the A64? I welcome the £100 billion investment in infrastructure and the £13 billion investment in the northern powerhouse in this Parliament. A small part of that—£250 million—has been allocated to the A64, for the Hopgrove Lane roundabout. If that improvement does not include a dual carriageway as far as Barton Hill, it will simply kick that pinchpoint down the road. I ask him to bear that in mind and look at it in future discussions with Highways England.

I was astounded to hear the Leader of the Opposition claim in this House yesterday that “housebuilding has sunk to its lowest level since the 1920s.”—[Official Report, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 15.] According to the Office for National Statistics, quarterly housing starts, which are without doubt the most reliable guide to housing activity, have doubled from fewer than 20,000 in the first quarter of 2009 to more than 40,000 in the current quarter. For further proof, I suggest that Opposition Members visit any builder’s merchant or building site and talk to any brickie, chippie or sparky who will put them right. If they do not know any of these business people, I am happy to put them in touch with some.

I welcome the Government’s approach to local plans, which requires all local authorities to have a plan in place by 2017, and to neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans give local people and local
communities a say in what is built where, and what the building or settlement will look like. Clearly, neighbourhood planning must work with local authorities to agree the numbers allocated to a particular settlement. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) who has been generous with his time not only in his work with the Government, but in volunteering to visit my constituency to help our local communities to develop their own neighbourhood plans.

Without question, neighbourhood plans are part of the solution to the increase in housebuilding that we need. I welcome the changes contained in the Queen’s Speech to make neighbourhood planning easier and more powerful for local communities. I do not support any community right of appeal, as planning is tough enough without adding more obstacles to the planning process. However, current rules and subjective calculations of the five-year land supply can undermine the expensive and time-consuming process of neighbourhood planning. For example, Gladman, a name that strikes fear in many planning officers, has been successful twice recently at Kirbymoorside and Easingwold in my constituency.

Gladman was successful on appeal in Easingwold thanks to its ability to demonstrate that Hambleton District Council had only 4.17 years of land supply. Nine months later, after a revised analysis carried out by another expensive consultant for the local authority, Hambleton District Council now believes that it has an eight-plus year land supply. In effect, this creates two perverse outcomes. A subjective approach to the assessment of housing market needs incentivises the kite-flying carpetbaggers such as Gladman to game the system, but it also disincentivises local communities from establishing a neighbourhood plan. Even though a neighbourhood may be ahead of its own housing numbers, a shortage in the local authority overall can mean that an inappropriate development is forced on that local community.

Perhaps I can suggest two simple solutions, consistent with the recommendations of the local plans expert group, which says that there is currently no definitive guidance on the way to prepare the strategic housing market assessment. The first solution would be simple definitive and objective guidance on assessment of housing needs, revised only at specified intervals. I suggest that one might base that on a brutally simple formula. There are 26 million homes in the UK, and we need to build around 250,000 homes per annum—roughly 1%. If each local authority grew by a minimum of 1%, we would meet our national housing targets for the first time in decades.

Secondly, there should be a housing delivery test for a neighbourhood planning area so that if the neighbourhood was hitting its prescribed numbers, it could not be subject to an aggressive application based on local authority under-delivery. That would simultaneously deter the kite flyers and encourage and incentivise more communities to develop their own neighbourhood plans and schemes that communities had proposed and consented to.

Mr Betts: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman’s comments about a common basis for assessing housing need. It is something that the Communities and Local Government Committee recommended in the previous Parliament, something that the specialist group that the Minister set up has recommended, and something that Lord Taylor of Goss Moor recommended in his work on planning guidance. It would take a lot of the heat out of local controversy about how numbers were arrived at, and it would be there for local authorities to take up if they wanted to. The hon. Gentleman makes a good proposal that the Government ought to take seriously.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am very grateful. As on many occasions in the Select Committee, the hon. Gentleman and I are in full agreement.

I now move on to another important issue in my community. According to almost every business person and key business organisations such as the Institute of Directors, the No. 1 business priority in the UK and for many business people in my community is access to digital connections—superfast broadband and mobile phone networks. To give the Government credit, we have seen a step change in access to these networks since 2010. Even in rural North Yorkshire, 88% of premises are now covered by superfast broadband; 91% will be by 2017, and 95% by 2019. However, there is a growing gap between the haves and the have nots. As coverage increases, the voices of those without broadband understandably grow louder and more vociferous. For home or business, superfast broadband is no longer regarded as a luxury but as an essential fourth utility, and we must treat it as such.

I welcome the bold ambition in the Queen’s Speech for our universal service obligation—a digital imperative that the Government will deliver on. To meet this imperative and the further commitment to increase speed as demand and activity also increase, we need a new relationship between the consumer and the network operator, especially BT Openreach. I must say, I am sceptical about Ofcom’s halfway house solution—an internal separation of Openreach and BT. It is, to my mind, inconceivable that a separate board and a separation of assets will separate the vested interest of a network from the commercial opportunity of the wholesale, retail and content provider operations of BT.

I and many colleagues will hold Ofcom and BT Openreach to account for the huge improvements required, especially including fair cost for access to its ducts and poles and a clear network map of their locations. Only this and a technology-neutral approach will deliver the solutions that we need. BT Openreach has actively thus far deterred third-party operators and complementary technology solutions from reaching the parts that other technologies cannot reach, namely, point-to-point wireless, wireless DSLAM—digital subscriber line access multiplexer—units and, of course a roll-out of fibre to the premises, or FTTP, the only future-proof solution available. Our penetration for fibre to premises in the UK is 2%, compared with 60% in Spain, where competitors can access ducts and poles more cheaply and readily.

May I also suggest to the Government that we look at creative community solutions? The voucher scheme for satellite is welcome, but would Ministers consider allowing residents to combine vouchers to contribute to the cost of installing community-based fibre schemes? We also need more clarity and co-operation between backbone operator Openreach and other technologies so that solutions can be provided today. If community or commercial point-to-point wireless providers are deterred through future roll-out plans, uncertainty about those
solutions means that they are sidelined rather than rolled out to people in need.

These are real people with real businesses and real jobs. Ample Bosom in Cold Kirby in my constituency provides quality ladies’ garments for the larger lady; the Construction Equipment Association in Sproxton provides services for exhibitions around the world; the Black Swan is an award-winning hostel close to where I live in Oldstead. They are all suffering and losing business as a result of the broadband delays and deferrals.

I am very pleased with the measures in the Queen’s Speech and commend those policy initiatives to the House.

1.26 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I do not think I can follow the last points that the hon. Gentleman raised about certain garment manufacturers in his constituency, so I will rapidly move on to devolution, in which I am particularly interested. I want to talk about the proposals on business rates, buses and housing.

The words “northern powerhouse” have been mentioned again in the Queen’s Speech. We could not have them ignored by the Government. Ministers have to be aware that, while there is a welcome for the general intentions on devolution to increase the performance of our northern cities to the national average—we are unique in the European Union in that our major cities do not perform better than the national average economically—there is a great deal of scepticism in my constituency and the Sheffield city region as we see job losses. More than 600 jobs have been lost from HSBC in Sheffield and more at Tankersley. Polestar in my constituency is in administration, with 400 jobs under threat. On top of that there is uncertainty over steel plants at Stocksbridge and high-quality public transport in South Yorkshire and south of the White Rose, with 50% fall in bus trips per head of population—seen in areas such as Sheffield since deregulation came into effect in the 1980s. We proudly pioneered cheap fares and high-quality public transport in South Yorkshire back in the 1970s—even before the Greater London Council did so—but it has been downhill ever since deregulation came into effect.

Having said that, in its devolution report the Committee has already said that 100% retention of business rates should only be a first step in wider fiscal devolution. We hope the Government will engage in that debate, once the Bill has passed. There is a challenge in that we are only devolving retention of the money from business rates, with a bit of power for areas—certainly those with elected mayors—to reduce the rate or impose a small levy for infrastructure projects; what we will not have is local control over the business rates system itself. If a future Government made a significant change, like the one just made to small business rate relief, that could after 2020 significantly affect local authorities’ rate income without their having any say in the system and changes to it. There is a wider debate to be had on whether to have just retention of business rates, or wider localisation of the business rates system itself. I am sure we will return to that when we discuss the Bill.

I welcome the buses Bill. It is right that an important part of devolution deals is the ability for local mayors, if they so wish, to take up franchising arrangements similar to those found in London. Current legislation is inadequate: in the north-east, where transport authorities want to go for quality contracts, they are second-guessed by independent bodies that come to a different view on what the public interest is. I take the old-fashioned view that local elected councillors and mayors are better placed to identify the public interest than any appointed quango.

Franchising of itself is not a panacea for all ills, but it can help to drive up standards, improve ticketing arrangements and make better use of resources by ensuring that there is not overprovision of buses on some routes and none on others. It can deal better with pensioner concessions and reverse the downward trend—the 50% fall in bus trips per head of population—seen in areas such as Sheffield since deregulation came into effect in the 1980s. We proudly pioneered cheap fares and high-quality public transport in South Yorkshire back in the 1970s—before the Greater London Council did so—but it has been downhill ever since deregulation came into effect.

The buses Bill will work only if it is seen as part of a wider approach to integrated transport. I wish to put on the record my great disappointment that the tram-train project has once again been delayed. Network Rail has announced that after 10 years of thinking about it, the delay until 2017 is now unachievable, and it cannot even tell us the new delay date that it will set at some point in the future. That is a disgrace. Network Rail is bringing in a tram-train system that has been operating in Germany for 30 years. Thirty years in Germany, 10 years thinking
about it in the UK, and we do not even have a date when the trams will start running on the tram-train network. I was pleased when, in December in Sheffield, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), got on one of the trams that have been delivered, but now we have no date for when it will run on the tram-train tracks. This is complete nonsense and the Government should launch an inquiry into it.

On wider transport issues, we still want firmer assurances from the Government that the station for HS2 will be in Sheffield and that HS3 will link Sheffield and Leeds across the Pennines. We also want a commitment to the review of the Pennine tunnel, in which many of us are interested.

I am pleased to see the Minister for Housing and Planning in his place. During the general election, we had promises of 1 million homes from the Conservative party. I think that was then a target, but afterward, when I asked him about the target, the Minister said it was only an aspiration. Now that the 1 million figure has been in the Queen's Speech, I assume it is a clear and firm commitment—you do not put figures in the Queen's Speech without committing to them, do you, Madam Deputy Speaker? Of course not.

My concern arises from what the Council of Mortgage Lenders said yesterday, in a very interesting piece, about not being sure that the 200,000 starter homes and the 125,000 shared ownership properties were deliverable. The CML thought the numbers were too big and raised questions about market distortion, valuations—it had a whole load of questions about the fundamental building block of the Government's programme to get 1 million new homes. At some point, the penny will drop with Ministers that we will not achieve the 250,000 homes we need to build in this country without a substantial programme of social house building, with local councils as well as housing associations forming a key part. Without that commitment—the Government have taken all the money away from social housing; there will be no section 106 money for housing either—I simply do not believe the Government will achieve their million homes. I do not know whether the Minister for Housing and Planning will be here in four years' time to answer for that. He probably hopes he will be elsewhere and not responsible for explaining why that figure has not been reached.

Turning to something completely different, yesterday, with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and a number of other Members, I had the pleasure of accompanying members of the Somaliland community in England to Downing Street to present a letter to the Prime Minister. Somaliland achieved independence from the British empire 25 years ago yesterday. Its subsequent history has been troubled: it had a union with Somalia, which was an Italian protectorate, then a bitter civil war, fighting against a dictatorship. Through that process, Somaliland achieved de facto independence. It is now run as a democracy, having had presidential elections, having changed presidents and having had narrow election results that were accepted by the losers.

Somaliland is a democracy, but it is not recognised by the international community. I understand that it is difficult for the United Kingdom Government, as the former colonial power, to be the first country to recognise Somaliland. All I will ask, and all Somaliland's Government and the community in this country are asking for, is that the British Government will at least give an undertaking that they would accept, recognise and encourage an international commission on the status of Somaliland looking at the fact that it is de facto an independent country, but de jure it is still not recognised by the international community.

1.37 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I was extremely pleased yesterday to see infrastructure and transport feature so prominently in the Gracious Address, not just because of the impact on my constituency but because it shows how keen the Government are to deliver economic growth. Infrastructure and transport are at the heart of getting on with growing our economy in the west of England and the rest of the UK.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), who is the railways Minister, has visited my constituency many times and stood with me wearing orange overalls, looking at train lines and breathing in heavy smog. I campaigned last year to “Stop Bath Stalling” and she joined me in my pledge to do all I could to tackle our transport problems and disgusting air pollution. Many hon. Members know, from visiting the world heritage city of Bath, that it is blighted by traffic and dangerously high levels of air pollution. Plans to encourage more residents and visitors to use public transport, as well as large-scale infrastructure projects that divert traffic around the city, will be huge steps in reducing the problem.

In an example that I hope the Ministers present will pass on to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, our hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who is the roads Minister and who has been working with me, one of the key plans in Bath and north-east Somerset is our integrated transport plan. That involves the long overdue—by 30 years—A36-A46 link road. Thirty years is long enough to wait to get on with a critical transport project. For vehicles to bypass Bath and still reach their destination, it is crucial to get on and build this critical link road.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to the Minister that I wanted to raise this issue, as it is probably the only thing that I ever talk to her about, as well as the Government’s commitment to transport. The Prime Minister wrote to me recently to extend his invitation to me to work with Highways England on that crucial project. Following the changes to vehicle excise duty that were announced in the Budget, I hope funding will become available to fund our strategic highways network. If anyone is looking for an anecdote to use in the next pub quiz, here is one: the A36-A46 is the only strategic highway in the entire UK not to be connected. That will no doubt feature in many pub quizzes across the UK.

Other transport plans that will help Bath function more easily and become a much more prosperous city include a new junction 18A on the M4, which was announced by the Prime Minister just before the election. It will ensure that our science park, which is owned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, can be accessed by the University of Bath. The greatest investment in the railway since Victorian times, the electrification of the great western main line, will make
a massive impact on the regional economy in the west of England. So too will the improvements to the cycling network, and a rail link between Heathrow airport and the great western main line. Those four miles of track, which are long overdue, would make a massive difference over to the west and do not need to be put on hold until a decision is reached on Heathrow airport expansion. Some of these improvements are already in place and I look forward to working with the Government to see more of them come to fruition though Bills that were announced yesterday.

On the subject of Heathrow, I join other Members in hoping that a decision on where to build a third runway will be made this year. It has taken far too long and we need to make a decision as soon as possible to enable our country and our economy to grow. We hope, too, that the resources will be found to pay for that, and that the announcement will be made shortly.

I was pleased to hear that action will be taken that will ensure that the UK leads the way in developing the technology for driverless cars. Those cars present a unique opportunity to change transport fundamentally in this country, by cutting congestion, reducing emissions and saving lives. It is important that the Government recognise the need to accommodate technological innovation, so I am encouraged that this House will consider legislation for the insuring of driverless cars, preparing for the future. As I understand it, companies in Bath are looking at introducing this technology in order to reap the benefits that it promises to bring. I am glad there is no Whip present, as a Whip would not be pleased to hear me say that I look forward to reading the detail of the Bill to find out what the legislation will say and how that will benefit the wider sector.

I turn to the buses Bill and the reforms to public transport services that it will bring. The Minister will be pleased to hear that I promise not to bore the House by going back to my constituency. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I start with an apology. Unfortunately, I will be unable to stay for the duration of the debate and to listen to the summing-up. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I am not going to Buckingham Palace; I am going back to my constituency.

As soon as smartcard ticketing was introduced in London, passenger numbers went up and prices went down. The introduction of a similar integrated and technology-focused system will reduce congestion in Bath, Bristol and across the west of England, and confront the disgustingly high levels of air pollution. I hope the Bill will bring bus travel across the country into the 21st century.

I cannot speak in a debate on infrastructure without taking a moment to discuss the important subject of broadband, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke so eloquently. Like most Members across the House, I am inundated with complaints about the problems of accessing high speed broadband. Even in cities such as Bath and Bristol, which have the fastest-growing tech economy in the UK, people struggle to access high speed broadband, and productivity is thus thwarted. In 2016 that should not be the case. Together with colleagues across the House, I welcome the digital economy Bill, with a commitment to the broadband universal service obligation. This improvement to broadband is essential for maintaining and growing a strong economy and I look forward to supporting the Government in passing this legislation.

Finally, I cannot speak on infrastructure without drawing attention to the critical shortage of housing in the west of England. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning came to Bath a couple of months ago to lay the first bricks for new homes, but it is clear that in the Victorian, Georgian and Roman cities that many of us represent, the housing and the road networks were not built to sustain the growth that has since taken place. If as a result of the infrastructure Bill we lay better equipped roads and better railway systems to serve our housing needs first, rather than as an afterthought, we will be able to get on and deliver the new towns that we desperately need across the whole of the UK.

In conclusion, I welcome the Government’s continued commitment to supporting the economic recovery by focusing on creating jobs and apprenticeships and investing in infrastructure. Historically the UK has spent far too little on infrastructure compared with other countries. Although there is much talk about the need to get things done, the delivery of infrastructure projects entails a lengthy process and remains disappointingly slow. At both national and local level we must remember that efforts need to be made to ensure that large infrastructure projects come to fruition in a timely manner. That is the responsibility of Government, devolved Government and local councils. I hope that that is remembered as we look forward, hopefully, to building my long overdue A36-A46 link road.

1.47 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Like the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), I start with an apology. Unfortunately, I will be unable to stay for the duration of the debate and to listen to the summing-up. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I am not going to Buckingham Palace; I am going back to my constituency.
The theme of today’s debate is transport and local infrastructure, and there is no doubt that infrastructure investment drives growth and delivers both construction jobs and long-term business-related jobs. Any sensible investment in infrastructure is therefore to be welcomed, but I believe that more can be done, which is why the SNP’s proposal to release additional spending of 0.5% per year in real terms for public services over the period to 2020 should be considered. That would free up an additional £150 billion, eliminating the needless £40 billion of cuts in the Chancellor’s austerity budgets. It would allow something to be done about the transitional arrangements called for by WASPI—the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—and still leave money for long-term investment to stimulate growth. Such a proposal would lead to net debt and borrowing falling over the current Parliament.

Another way of freeing up money for sensible infrastructure investment would be to scrap the idea of Trident renewal, which has an estimated cost of £205 billion. If the SNP’s proposal for an alternative summer Budget was implemented, the majority of the Chancellor’s £32 billion giveaways through tax and other means could be reversed. We could scrap the £28 billion commitment to Hinkley Point C and the five other nuclear power stations in the pipeline, which would create a half a trillion pounds for investment in infrastructure—a truly transformational sum. That would double the current allocation within the UK’s national infrastructure delivery plan and allow for that plan to be truly national and for Scotland to get its fair share of investment.

What could we do with such additional money? We have heard a lot about roads, and additional roads investment in the rest of the UK would be welcome. However, another issue associated with roads is the shortage of heavy goods vehicle drivers. This could have an impact on us all because of the knock-on effect on the price of goods in the shops, given that within the UK 85% of consumption goods are delivered by road. It could also have knock-on impact on exports—another target that the Chancellor is currently failing on. The industry suggests that there could be a shortage of some 45,000 HGV drivers by 2020. It is well known that the cost of driver training is approximately £3,000, which prevents many individuals from being able to take it up, and the test costs a further £230. There is no way that someone who is unemployed with little income can access that, and someone who is young can forget it, because they clearly do not have that money behind them. A Government initiative in this area could create additional career opportunities for the younger generation.

When this matter has been raised in the Chamber before, the Government have said that it is the industry’s responsibility to step up. However, given that the average fleet size is just six trucks, and that 85% of haulage companies are classified as medium or small, the industry does not have the capacity to step up. In reality, the Government are missing a trick. In simple terms, covering the cost of training and testing is much cheaper than the payments associated with companies involved in the welfare programme and, of course, if people are put into employment that reduces welfare payments in general. I estimate that the payback period in Government welfare and overhead costs would be in the region of six to 12 months, depending on the age of the person on jobseeker’s allowance, for each licence that the Government paid for. While I am not asking for additional investment, this would be a spend-to-save move that could make roads into the figure of 630,000 unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds.

For many people, the most important aspect of local infrastructure is housing. We cautiously welcome the UK Government’s ambition to deliver 1 million new homes, but we do not know what mix of housing will be included in that, and so far the UK Government have had a poor record on affordable homes. I have often spoken out against the extended right to buy for social housing. It is obvious that the only way to ease the housing crisis is to build more homes—not just homes for sale, but homes for rent at affordable prices. Instead, as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said, we have a Government who are potentially crippling housing associations with enforced rent cuts as well as the sale of more attractive stock. In Scotland, after years of sell-off without replacement, the SNP has ended the right to buy for council houses. That was absolutely the right thing to do when faced with such an imbalanced and depleted stock.

The UK Government continue the myth that like-for-like replacement will be the solution, but there is no guarantee of what that really means, nor about the geographical location of the replacement houses, given that they are clearly dependent on land supply. The latest figures indicate that since the new right to buy was introduced in 2012-13, there have been over 35,000 sales, with on-site starts of just over 4,100. Clearly, at the moment, there is not realistically going to be like-for-like replacement. Indeed, a National Audit Office report in March confirmed that 8,500 homes were sold in 2014-15 and that, in order for those to be replaced in the target three-year period, on-site starts needed to rise fourfold from an average of 420 per quarter to 2,130 per quarter. It would be good to know what Ministers are going to do to achieve that.

To demonstrate that much more can be done, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has highlighted that the Scottish Government spend 85% more per head on social housing than is the case in England and Wales. The SNP Government outperform other parts of the UK in terms of social sector completions, with over 31,000 affordable homes delivered to date, two thirds of which are available for social rent. The SNP is delivering on promises, which was why we were elected for a third term.

I would like much more investment in transport infrastructure in general. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) suggested further rail investment. We could extend the Borders rail link to Carlisle. More needs to be done on the high-speed rail line, which should be extended to Scotland. At the very least, the existing network north of Crewe needs to be upgraded to allow for quicker journey times when we move to the classic-compatible trains.

We welcome the idea of a spaceport, but it is vital that the Government set out clear assessment criteria and timescales for making a decision. In general, I would support any of the Scottish airports that are shortlisted but, like many other people, I want to make a pitch for my local airport, which is Prestwick in the adjoining constituency. This would give my constituency a great boost, but it is also the most logical choice. In
terms of existing transport infrastructure, we have Ayr harbour: a railway, including a halt at Prestwick; and close links to the motorway network. There is therefore no doubt that Prestwick is the most accessible of the airports under consideration. There is already an aerospace industry located around Prestwick, and nearby Glasgow has existing space technology firms. Prestwick has one of the longest runways in the UK and does not suffer from fog problems. It really is a logical choice.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of infrastructure investment. It is something that the SNP Scottish Government have taken seriously since coming to power in 2007, with investment of over £15 billion in transport, including the largest road investment programme that Scotland has ever seen. We have heard about the new Queensferry crossing and the 31 miles of new Borders rail. Infrastructure investment drives growth, reduces congestion and increases productivity. Conservative Members and some Opposition Members are wedded to the idea of austerity and Trident at any cost. I suggest that additional investment in roads, rail, housing, broadband access for all and energy security are more likely to get Members re-elected and, importantly, to create a true legacy that would stand the test of time.

1.57 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to contribute to the debate on the Queen’s Speech and very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown).

I want to start by covering a few transport issues. It is good that the Government are taking action on drones, which are a nuisance and in danger of even becoming a menace to commercial aviation. However, the big absence in the Secretary of State’s speech was any reference to aviation expansion and the decision on the Airports Commission report which, as we all know, is long overdue. As such, it was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and the hon. Members for Bath (Ben Howlett) and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry).

It is 40 or 50 years since there has been any increase in airport capacity in the south-east. We have had the 2003 White Paper, the 2008 decision by the previous Labour Government, the withdrawal of support for the third runway at Heathrow in the 2010 Tory manifesto, the coalition decision stimulated by the Lib Dems, the U-turn in 2012, the Airports Commission in 2013, and the promise year on year that we will get a decision. We are still awaiting that decision, so we hope to see it sooner rather than later. My preference is for Heathrow, but I would not like Gatwick to be frustrated, because aviation is an important economic tool for the UK internationally, and it is important for parts of the UK that rely on international connections. It therefore would be good to see movement on this.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey also mentioned shipping, to his credit. It was disappointing that the Secretary of State did not mention shipping in any sense. It is important to the UK economy and still contributes billions of pounds. Notwithstanding the challenges to which the SNP’s spokesman referred, the Government have a fairly good record on supporting shipping, so I am surprised that they did not want to make more of that. Perhaps when the Housing and Planning Minister winds up the debate, he will say, “Shipping is important to the UK Government.”

As the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South, said, deregulation of buses outside London has not worked. The Secretary of State blamed Labour policy from 1999, which was a little time ago. Quality contracts have not worked, but privatisation and franchising have worked in London, because they have been regulated, so that should be done elsewhere. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has said that the approach should not be restricted to those local authorities that have elected mayors; it should apply to all local authorities right around the country. I am grateful to the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association for its briefing, to which several colleague have referred, on how successful the talking buses campaign has been in London and why it should be replicated across the country.

I have another two points to make about transport before I move on to housing. On road safety, in 2010 the Government eliminated targets for reducing the number of people who are killed or seriously injured on our roads, because the then Secretary of State did not support any targets that the Government might not be able to meet and failure would give others the opportunity to criticise them. There has been consensus across the House for more than 30 years about the ambition to reduce deaths and serious injury on our roads.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I would be delighted to listen further to the hon. Gentleman, but I just want to correct him on this point: targets are not the same as results. I am sure that he will celebrate with me the fact that British roads are safer than they have ever been. One death on our roads is too many, however, and we continue to work effectively to drive down both the number of road deaths and the causes of accidents.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I do not for a second underestimate the Government’s ambition to reduce deaths and serious injury; my point is that we need to demonstrate that ambition. We have had targets to reduce deaths and serious injury on our roads for more than 30 years. They started under Mrs Thatcher, when the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) was the road safety Minister, and they have been successful. Basically, such targets say to people, “This year has been unacceptable, so next year we’re going to try to do this.” For the past 35 years, the numbers have been scaled down, but for the past six years they have plateaued, and in one instance increased. That is an indictment not of the Government, but of the fact that we have lost sight of ambition, so the Government should bring that back.

I have spoken about this to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who has responsibility for road safety, and the Secretary of State, and I know that they are sympathetic. The approach is contradictory, because the British Government sign up to European Union and United Nations targets while our roads are among the safest in the world. We should be proud of that and broadcast it, but the fact is that we are in denial.
Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his earlier comments. On road safety, does he agree that if one of the driving principles behind developing driverless technology in the UK is increased safety, it should apply across the length and breadth of the nations of the UK, not just in urban areas?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Most people who listen to media reports might think, “There’s nobody in charge of driverless vehicles, so they’re more dangerous and riskier.” The reality, however, is that the technology now exists for automatic stop, electronic stability control and anti-skid brakes, which make the vehicles much safer. It is the human element—people who are on their mobile phones, who have been drinking or taking drugs, who are not wearing seatbelts, or who are speeding—that causes most crashes and deaths. If we take out the human element, we will see the number of road crashes tumble and a fall in deaths and serious injury. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the proposal should be extended right across the piece.

My only other point on transport relates to air quality. Transport contributes to more than 20% of emissions. With the advent of new technology, there is real scope to reduce that figure. I hope that the Government will work with the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, on his commitment to address the issue more seriously than it has been for years.

On housing, the biggest issue in my constituency, London and the vast majority of the country is the need to build new homes. The Housing and Planning Minister has acknowledged that I do not think that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 will help. Selling off the most expensive properties in Tower Hamlets will not help our housing crisis, because it is the bigger homes that will be sold off and that will affect larger families. The imposition of market rents in and around Canary Wharf means that local people will not be able to afford them. On the sell-off of housing association homes, we need local replacements. A percentage of all new developments need to be affordable homes.

London needs people working in the city. For example, how do we expect Palace of Westminster staff to be able to get here 24/7, from all parts of London and the south-east, whether they be security officers, police officers, cooks, cleaners or involved in other duties, if they do not have somewhere affordable to stay in London? We are pricing them out of the market and making it more difficult for them to get in. London’s economic infrastructure will be negatively affected if we do not make sure that affordable housing is available.

Finally on housing, I want to refer to the speech that the hon. Member for Worthing West made on leasehold reform yesterday, which can be found at columns 71 to 75 of Hansard. I thank the Housing and Planning Minister for his interest in the matter. We have had several meetings with him and his civil servants on leasehold reform. The hon. Member for Worthing West has also been to No. 10. I hope we can make progress on leasehold reform, including the right to buy, retirement homes and private sector sales, which represent the vast majority of new properties. The sector is raising its own standards, but most of us believe that it requires regulation and statutory reform. The Leasehold Knowledge Partnership is working very hard to help people who are in a very difficult situation.

I am disappointed that there is nothing in the Queen’s Speech on banning the use of wild animals in circuses. On Tuesday I attended a photocall at No. 10 with kids from Devonshire Road Primary School in Bolton. This is a Government commitment, and the Prime Minister has made a personal commitment, that it will be in the legislative programme by 2020. I am sure that it will come, but it is disappointing that it is not happening now. It is not a major issue in general national politics, but it affects a lot of people around the country.

Business rate retention for local authorities is great news for my constituency in Tower Hamlets. We are on the City of London fringe, and Canary Wharf is at the heart of my constituency. Holding on to those business rates will result in us moving from being one of poorest to one of the richest boroughs in the country. Obviously, the Government will have a mechanism to equalise, which has always been the case. I am not clear on how that is going to work, so I look forward to hearing the Minister explain it later, if he has time.

During business questions this morning, the shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), said that he welcomed the National Citizen Service being put on a statutory footing, but youth services have been cut right across the piece. There are some great organisations in my constituency, including 2nd East London scout group, 31 Tower Hamlets air cadet training corps, the Marine Society and Sea Cadets, and the Prince’s Trust, which has recently moved its London and south-east headquarters to Mile End. They are doing fantastic work and it is equally welcome to see an adult service being put on a statutory basis. Organisations such as Keep Britain Tidy will be very much in support of that.

On local government and planning, when we passed the Planning Act 2008, the shadow Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), who is on the Front Bench and might speak later, led on the Bill for the Labour Government. We introduced an independent planning commission for nationally significant infrastructure projects. One of the first things the coalition did was repeal that Act, and five years later the Conservatives recognise that a fast-track planning procedure is needed for nationally significant infrastructure.

There is a real conflict for local councils that have the prospect of shale extraction and fracking. Notwithstanding the clamour from the environmental movement and the Greens for shale extraction not to be proceeded with, I think the vast majority of people in the country would much rather that we use our own natural resources than import gas from the US, Qatar or Russia. Shale extraction makes much more sense for our economic security, but the Government have to address the conflict between local communities being panicked and scarred by opposing shale extraction applications and the need for that national industry to be developed.

The measures on counter-extremism, anti-terrorism and security are all welcome. We are living in much more dangerous times, and getting the right balance between civil liberties and the opportunity for the security and intelligence forces to protect us is a real challenge. When the three girls from Bethnal Green went to Syria, people asked why the security forces and the police had not intervened, but exactly the same people objected when the Government tried to improve security, intelligence
gathering and interception. I supported identity cards under the Labour Government. I thought it was wrong that we did not proceed with them, and it is wrong that the current Government are not doing so. They would be a simple mechanism and a positive step forward at a time when we are all carrying ID in the shape of credit cards, contactless payments cards or whatever.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

2.11 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I want to talk about the importance of rail manufacturing, and primarily about the importance of Hitachi to the local economy in my constituency. The Hitachi Rail Europe factory in Newton Aycliffe opened last year and is creating 730 jobs, with many more in the supply chain. The factory is a superb, modern facility. Costing £82 million, it is the largest private sector investment in the north-east of England since Nissan. The factory’s first task is to build the next generation of inter-city trains for the Great Western line, which will begin entering service next year. It will then build trains for the east coast main line from 2018. For those who use the service on a regular basis, that day cannot come too soon. The company has also won contracts for commuter trains in Scotland and on the trans-Pennine route.

Hitachi built the first bullet train in Japan in the 1960s, and I understand it is now on its seventh series of bullet trains. I want to see that technology brought to Britain and manufactured in Newton Aycliffe. Hitachi’s expertise means that it could manufacture the rolling stock for HS2 in Newton Aycliffe if it wins the contract. That would provide a great boost to manufacturing in the north-east and the rest of the UK. I see the 730 jobs that are already to be created as a minimum.

There are other areas of expansion. Hitachi Rail Europe has that name for a simple reason: it sees the UK and the north-east as its launch pad for exporting rolling stock into the European Union. That is one reason why our continued membership of the EU is vital. Hitachi has shown great confidence in UK manufacturing’s capabilities, and I can only endorse its faith in the workforce of Newton Aycliffe and the surrounding area. It has moved its global rail headquarters to London and opened a European rail research centre there, and for one primary reason: because the United Kingdom is part of the European Union. I worry about future investment in the Hitachi plant if we leave the EU.

What I am saying is not meant to be part of some “Project Fear”, but as the MP for Sedgefield, which includes Newton Aycliffe, I feel that it would be irresponsible of me not to express my deeply held worries about the future of Japanese investment if we leave the EU. Those worries find their source in statements made by the chairman of Hitachi, Mr Nakanishi. In an interview with the Financial Times on 12 October 2013, under the headline “Hitachi president warns UK against leaving the EU”, he said that he did not expect the UK to leave the EU, but that if it did,

“I would have to reconsider how to manage our railway business.”

In an article that he wrote for the Financial Times on 11 May this year, Mr Nakanishi stated:

“Britain is the centre for Hitachi’s two largest overseas infrastructure projects, in rail and new nuclear power. We invested in the country as the best base for access to the entire EU market. For our manufacturing and supplies we depend on skills and parts that come from within the UK and from Europe. Take away its EU membership, and the investment case looks very different.”

Some who want to see Britain leave the EU play mischief with major foreign investment and become cavalier with quotes and facts, picking only those that support the argument they wish to promote. For example, Matthew Elliott, the chief executive of Vote Leave, insinuated at the Treasury Committee’s public hearing on 9 May, through selective quoting, that nothing would change with Hitachi if the UK left the EU. The recent and consistent statements of the chair of Hitachi prove that there would be repercussions for further investment in the UK if we left.

As this speech is not part of a so-called “Project Fear”, I will say that if Britain votes to leave the EU on 23 June, it will not mean that the Hitachi factory in my constituency will close on 24 June. However, I am deeply concerned about its ability to generate more jobs and expand in the long term, and therefore to create economic growth both locally and nationally, if it does not have unfettered access to the EU marketplace. In a recent survey that I undertook of businesses in my constituency, more than 50% of respondents said that leaving the EU would have a negative effect on their investment plans for the future.

Christian Matheson: Is my hon. Friend aware that I made exactly the same point at a meeting of the all-party aerospace group about a large employer next to my constituency, Airbus? This is not simply about Hitachi, in his constituency; major manufacturers and their suppliers right across the UK have the same fears.

Phil Wilson: That is absolutely right. I made the specific point about Hitachi because it is based in my constituency, but it is fair to say that for a lot of foreign investors, our being part of the EU is key to their future plans.

I am disappointed that some Members are prepared to play fast and loose with the facts. The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) was recently quoted in the Daily Mail as saying that big businesses “agree with an open-border immigration policy because it means they don’t, for instance, have to worry too much about us getting local people. They think they can just get a steady supply of unskilled...labour from abroad”.

That is a slur on the good name of good employers such as Hitachi, which built its factory in the north-east because of the local people’s skills and application to their work. Some 95% of Hitachi’s workforce at Newton Aycliffe come from the north-east, and they are skilled and well paid.

Because of its commitment to the local people, Hitachi—along with Gestamp, the major employer in the town, employing 1,300 people—has sponsored a university technical college, built overlooking the Hitachi factory. UTC South Durham will have more than 60 young people passing through its doors once it opens in September, and that number will build up to 600 local teenagers, who will be equipped with the essential skills required for the world of work. That is all possible because of
Hitachi, Gestamp and Sunderland University’s belief in local people, but also because we are part of the European Union.

Hitachi has written to its workforce outlining the company’s position on Europe, not to bully but to inform. It is what a responsible employer does. It has made it absolutely clear that the decision on 23 June is one for the British people, but that it would be remiss of it as a responsible employer not to state its position. Some of the text of the email that Hitachi has sent its employees reads:

“Like many other international companies we invested here because of the UK’s strong economic fundamentals and rich access to talent. We are also in the UK in order to have access to the entire EU and European market. In particular for our manufacturing and supplies we depend on skills and parts which come from within the UK and Europe at large.

We can understand that the EU is not perfect but the UK’s departure from the EU would create huge uncertainty for all Hitachi businesses in the UK in terms of economics, trade, skills and talent, and would affect the stability that the company needs for continued investment and long-term growth.

We also believe that it would have negative impact upon the UK economy and carry significant risks for the remainder of the EU. Therefore we believe that a strong and united Europe with the UK in a single, open market offers the best conditions for Europe’s prosperity, and for Hitachi’s business.”

The matter could not be made clearer.

Like a lot of people, I campaigned long and hard to ensure that the Government went ahead with the deal to bring Hitachi to the north-east, because of the jobs and investment that it would bring. I am not prepared to stand idly by and watch that new inward investment—not just Hitachi, but other major investors—be threatened by our leaving the EU, and that is why I will be campaigning for a remain vote on 23 June.

2.20 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):

The Gracious Speech has already been described as “thin” and “short on detail”, and although I understand the sensitivity of the timing in relation to the EU referendum that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) mentioned, that could have been avoided if the state opening had been delayed, as Labour Members suggested.

The Government’s programme falls short in a number of areas, including the provision of support to carers. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to improve support for carers or to ensure that local authorities have the resources necessary to implement the duties that the Government placed on them in the Care Act 2014. The 2011 census shows that the number of carers increased by 11% over the previous 10 years, and the steepest rise was in those caring for 50 hours or more each week. The number of older carers is also increasing. Age UK has found that one in seven people over 80 now provides unpaid care to family and friends. In the last seven years, that number has increased by 40%, and now includes 417,000 people in their 80s.

Failure to address the needs of older carers will mean that many will find it difficult to cope with their caring responsibilities. Caroline Abrahams of Age UK stated that

“as public funding falls further and further behind the growing demand for care we worry that very old people are being expected to fill the gap. They can’t do it all on their own and we shouldn’t take advantage of their determination to do right by those they love.”

It is wrong to presume that when budgets for adult social care are cut unpaid carers will fill the gaps, and current pressures are bringing carers closer to breaking point.

Earlier this month, Carers UK released the findings of its annual “State of Caring” report, which highlights the difficulties of providing quality services for carers against a backdrop of continued local authority cuts. It states that

“the spirit of the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 have not become a reality for all—and carers are struggling to get the support from health and care services that they need to care, work and have a life outside caring. The survey shows evidence of public services creaking under pressure—charging is up, the right services are harder to find and vital support is cut or under threat, leaving many carers anxious about the future and their ability to continue to care.”

I have raised the impact of funding cuts on the care sector in a number of debates, because social care is too easy a target for cuts. Ministers have been prepared to slash local authority budgets, leading to cuts of £4.6 billion in adult social care since 2010. The Local Government Association has estimated that the implementation of the national living wage—as the Government call it—will cost this year an additional £330 million for home care and residential care providers. In Salford, for example, the 2% social care precept—that is all the provision that the Government are making this year—will raise £1.6 million, but the cost of implementing the national minimum wage will be £2.7 million. It is easy to imagine that gap multiplied up and down the country.

Despite what Ministers say during debates and questions, there is no extra funding from the better care fund for social care this year, and only £105 million next year. Pleas were rightly made by the directors of adult social services and the Local Government Association for the Chancellor to bring forward £700 million from later years of the better care fund, to address those immediate financial pressures. Failure to do that could lead to care providers failing or walking away from publicly funded care, and that could have serious consequences for vulnerable people who rely on care services. It is unfair to think—as seems to be the view—that unpaid family carers will be able to pick up the pieces if care providers fail because of cost pressures.

Unpaid carers are already under increasing pressure because of the impact of Government policies, and one third of carers told Carers UK that they have experienced a change in the amount of care and support that they receive. Almost 60% of those reporting a change say that the amount of care and support they receive has been reduced because of cost or availability, and in some cases those cuts have been significant. One carer reported:

“The social worker who assessed my wife said all direct payments in the borough were being reduced. We discussed the needs and were advised we would be informed of any change. Without warning or notification the budget was cut by 30% immediately.”

Given those facts, it is not surprising that 54% of carers surveyed felt that their quality of life will get worse over this year, despite the Care Act 2014.

The 2014 Act was supposed to entitle all carers to a timely assessment of their needs, yet one in three carers who have had an assessment in the past year had to wait six months or longer. Worriedly, nearly 40% of carers caring for someone at the end of life also had to wait six
months or more for an assessment. There is no time at the end of life to be considering what a carer needs “in six months’ time”, and I urge the Minister to press Health Ministers to respond to the independent review of “Choice in end of life care”, which was published more than a year ago, and to consider a new review that would extend choice at the end of life to children and young people.

Almost a quarter of carers had to request an assessment for themselves over the last year, instead of having one offered to them as the law requires. Even when carers receive an assessment, many feel that it does not address their needs. Almost 70% of carers felt that their need to have regular breaks from caring was not considered, and 74% of working-age carers did not feel that the support needed to juggle care with work was considered sufficiently. It appears to some carers that assessment is just a listening exercise that provides no real help. As one carer reported:

“All assessment areas were considered by my assessor but due to cuts there was no support they could practically offer me. I was listened to but there was no positive outcome.”

Along with the emotional stress and physical exhaustion that can occur from providing care without enough support, many carers are finding that it has a real impact on their finances. Of the carers struggling to make ends meet, nearly half surveyed are cutting back on essentials such as food and heating. Others are borrowing money, and more than a third are using up their savings. That is clearly not sustainable in the long term.

I urge Ministers to ensure that carers have the financial support they need. Carers also need access to services to help them in their caring role, and the health and social care system should have a duty to identify carers and take meaningful action to promote their health and wellbeing. Assessments should be accessible to carers, and they should be more than a tick-box or listening exercise. They should lead to carers being provided with tangible support.

The Gracious Speech did not provide any assurance that the Government will address the funding problems that local authorities face in providing social care, which I have outlined. The move to full business rate retention by local authorities will not address the chronic underfunding of social care. As with the social care precept, the proposed financial arrangement for local government fails to consider need, and could create further inequalities in funding for social care. I am concerned that those areas where most funding is needed will be those that gain the least from business rate retention. Unless the Government outline significant changes for carers in their upcoming carers strategy, it is likely that we will continue to see higher costs for carers, and lower levels of support for them or the person they care for.

It was disappointing that the Gracious Speech failed to mention addressing the injustice experienced by women born in the 1950s who are now bearing the brunt of the changes to the state pension age. They face additional financial hardship because of the Government’s failure to provide fair transitional arrangements—an issue we have debated a number of times. The pensions Bill will do nothing to address that injustice, and I would like to outline some of the options that have been suggested.

The new Work and Pensions Secretary keeps saying that there are no viable options, but he does not appear to consider those that have been put forward. In an Opposition day debate on this issue, six options have been put forward by the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, who suggested changing the timetable to delay the pension age increase until 2020, so that it would not reach 66 until 2021, and capping the maximum state pension age increase from the Pensions Act 2011 at 12 months. He suggested keeping the qualifying age for pension credit on the previous timetable, which would help some of the women who are facing the greatest financial hardship. [Interruption.] Ministers on the Treasury Bench do not seem interested in the 2.6 million women who are suffering hardship thanks to policies that they have introduced, and it is a pity that they bother to sit here but not to listen.

The fourth option, which the Work and Pensions Committee has put forward, is for people to take a reduced state pension at an earlier age or pay a lower state pension for longer. I do not support that option but it is one that is being put around. The other option is to extend the timetable for increasing the state pension age by 18 months so that it reaches 66 by 2022. I have suggested that the Government consider a bridge pension such as that which I understand is paid in the Netherlands to women affected by the increase in the state pension age.

Andrew Gwynne: I am glad that my hon. Friend has mentioned the 1950s women, and I congratulate her on becoming chair of the all-party parliamentary group on WASPI last week. She will no doubt be aware that Labour colleagues in the Welsh Assembly have tabled a motion calling on the British Government to introduce fair transitional arrangements for these very women.

Barbara Keeley: Absolutely. I fear that we will keep coming back to this until the Government realise it is unreasonable to expect these women, who were expecting a pension at 60 but had it taken away from them, to live on nothing. I have constituents trying to live on their savings.

Christian Matheson: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Government have made the cynical calculation that most of the women affected will have reached pensionable age come the next general election and that they are hoping the problem will simply go away, even if the injustice does not?

Barbara Keeley: They might have made that calculation, but they are wrong, because over the next 10 years, as the changes are made, 2.6 million women will be affected. I think the Government will find themselves with hundreds of thousands of very angry women, as well as their family members, husbands, sisters, children and so on. The numbers ought to make Ministers take this more seriously than they appear to be doing today.

I want to finish the detail because people are interested. One bridge pension was set at around £400 a month. That is better than forcing these women, who have worked all their lives and paid national insurance contributions for 40 years, on to the Work programme, employment and support allowance or jobseeker’s allowance at 62 or 63. It is disgraceful to treat women born in the 1950s that way. And while we are discussing transport and buses, I repeat what someone wrote on social media
about the lack of concessionary travel in some parts of the country for people whose state pension age has changed. Why should there be concessionary travel at 60 in London but not in many other parts of the country? That brings further hardship.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) mentioned the all-party parliamentary group on WASPI, which I am delighted to say 120 hon. Members signed up to last week. It was formed to provide a cross-party forum in which we can hold the Government to account over the transitional arrangements to compensate the 1950s-born women affected by the changes to the state pension age and campaign on all the other issues around the state pension age. I look forward to helping the group pursue those aims and to making progress to help my constituents. I would be happy to work with Welsh Labour, too, if it is an important issue for it. I will campaign for the hundreds of thousands of 1950s-born women affected by this injustice.

I have raised issues of Government policy adversely affecting 2.6 million women in the UK and 7 million unpaid family carers. There was nothing in the Gracious Speech to help those nearly 10 million people, but I have talked about their issues. It is a pity there were no measures to help them, but we might have an opportunity to do so in the months ahead, when I hope to see extra measures.

2.33 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Yesterday we had a day of tradition, pomp, ceremony and fancy costumes, but the reality behind the Gracious Speech is that we have another year of Conservative Government.

I start by commending the Government, which is not something I often do, for the opening paragraph of Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech, because it is something that all Members ought to be able to sign up to:

“My Government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged”.

I welcome that statement of intent. It is one of the things that brought me into the Labour party. I believe in social justice and fighting against inequality in whatever form it manifests itself, but I say to the Government that they will be scrutinised on the measures they bring before the House. Intentions are all fine and well, but it is on their actions that they will be judged.

I remind the Government, who speak about helping the most disadvantaged, of their actions over the past six years: the reliance of many of my constituents on food banks; the increase in tuition fees, trebled under the last coalition Government; the abolition of the education maintenance allowance, which helped so many disadvantaged young people into further education; the pernicious and evil bedroom tax, which has hurt so many families in this county; and the reduction in social security support, including for the disabled and those in low-paid work. Yes, let us try to increase the life chances of the most disadvantaged, but it is on actions not words that Ministers will be judged.

I want to talk briefly about some of the measures in the Gracious Speech. The buses Bill is long overdue, particularly in my city region of Greater Manchester, which, being one of those areas with an elected mayor, will be able to take advantage of the measures, but I ask Ministers why the powers will be available only to areas with an elected mayor and why they should not also be available to other areas and local authorities that have problems with their bus services and want to introduce an element of control into planning a strategic transport network.

It is good news for Greater Manchester, however, because 80% of public transport use is by bus. The effects of deregulation are clear: at its peak, there were 500 million bus journeys in Greater Manchester; last year, that figure was 220 million. That shows the decline in bus usage. On car ownership, still 31% of households in Greater Manchester do not have access to a car, so bus, tram and local train travel is really important. As I say, 80% of those public transport journeys in Greater Manchester are made by bus.

Greater Manchester saw the worst of the bus wars at the height of the deregulation madness. Rather than sensible competition, with a tendering regime that allowed network areas to be planned, standards set and timetables regulated and which ensured a fair competitive process, we had the opposite—an unplanned system with competition not in a council committee room, as part of a fair and transparent planned network system, but on the roads. It was chaos and it destroyed the bus industry in Greater Manchester. I really hope, therefore, that the buses Bill will be a success and that areas that want to take on those new powers can do so.

On the subject of devolution, I also want to talk about the proposals for business rates retention. Again, this could be a success, but the Government need to tread carefully. In Greater Manchester, we have come to an understanding of what is needed in the conurbation and agreed, through the combined authority, that business rates will be pooled and shared. That is really important. If we are to make sense of the devolved settlement in Greater Manchester, we must acknowledge that not all parts of the city region are drivers of growth. We must make sure that people from across Greater Manchester have the skills, education and transport links necessary to access the jobs being created in the growth areas and that the wealth and benefits generated by those jobs are spread across the whole conurbation. That is why pooling and sharing are so necessary.

I acknowledge that my constituency is probably not one of the major areas of growth in the conurbation. That would be the city centre, around Manchester airport and airport city, Trafford park and around the Trafford centre and at Salford Quays around the media city UK. We have to make sure that the wealth generated in those areas is spread across the entire conurbation. That is why I hope the Government will ensure fair arrangements for the retention of business rates.

One of the two boroughs I represent, Tameside, is a net gainer of the current system of business rates because it is a predominantly residential borough. Most of the big industries have disappeared and not been replaced with anything like the number of companies that could generate substantial business rates. That is not to say that the borough council is not trying, but to put it in context, if we did not pool and share with the rest of Greater Manchester, Tameside would require another 17 IKEAs to be built, just to break even under the new system. That is why we have to be careful, and it is why
[Andrew Gwynne]

we need a sensible approach with pooling and sharing across Greater Manchester that recognises the challenges I have mentioned.

I want to draw Members’ attention to the part of the Gracious Speech where the Government talk about tackling “some of the deepest social problems in society” in order to “improve life chances”. Her Majesty went on to say that “my Government will introduce new indicators for measuring life chances.”

I have to tell the Government that I am a little cynical about that. It does not matter how we look at the causes of deprivation if the measures are changed in order to give the answers that are wanted. We need to tackle poverty in a holistic way.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the idea of improving life chances is just another way of saying that the Government are scrapping poverty targets?

Andrew Gwynne: That is very much my worry, and I hope that the Government can reassure us on that. If they are not scrapping the targets, they are changing the goalposts, which is my other worry. What we really need to do is to look at the causes of poverty, deprivation and inequality and then tackle them.

That is broadly where I want to finish, but there is one missed opportunity—one that I hope the Government will come to consider in due course. If we are serious about tackling the endemic health inequalities that are prevalent, to a lesser or greater extent, in every single constituency, we must have better joined-up government. We need to break out of the silo mentality and get away from the notion that public health is solely a matter for the Department of Health. We need a national health and wellbeing strategy that every single Government Department and every single devolved institution is fully signed up to.

Let me give one example. When a Bill is introduced here or in the other place, Ministers have to certify to Members that it is compliant with two pieces of legislation: the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act 2010. But I would go further, because I believe that every piece of legislation should also be health and wellbeing compliant. In that way, Ministers will have to ask very simple questions: does this piece of legislation that I am proposing improve the health and wellbeing of the citizens of the UK? Does it reduce health inequalities for our citizens? If the answer is no, why the heck should we be legislating for it? I believe that that is the best way to pull all Ministers and all Government Departments towards the aim of tackling health inequalities in our country.

Whether we are talking about housing, planning, health, education, skills and training, leisure opportunities, open spaces, clean air and the general environment, jobs or transport, all those things, dealt with by myriad different Departments and agencies, impact on the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I would like to see much more joined-up thinking about that. I hope Ministers will take that on board, break out of the silo mentality and, once and for all, really tackle the health inequalities that are so endemic in too many parts of the United Kingdom.

2.44 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who offered some excellent advice to the Government Front-Bench team. I hope that they will take heed of it.

The Government have a blind spot when it comes to transport and the south bank of the Humber, and there was nothing in yesterday’s Gracious Speech to give much cause for optimism. We have seen delay after delay on electrifying the TransPennine route. The Office of Rail Regulation just last week rejected the proposal to create a direct rail service between Grimsby and London, but the lack of such a direct link is really holding back the area, giving a competitive advantage to comparative towns and cities in the region.

Grimsby and Cleethorpes combined have a bigger population than York, yet York has a direct service to London, with a travel time of under two hours. For people travelling to Grimsby, which is just 40 miles south of York, it takes an hour longer, and they will have to change trains. The Gracious Speech referred to pursuing space travel and trips to the moon, but to be perfectly honest, my constituents would be happy to get to Doncaster in under an hour.

There is a strong case for greater investment in transport infrastructure for the south bank of the Humber. We are a strategically important region for trade and logistics; and we are a gateway to Europe, with goods worth millions of pounds being shipped in and out of our ports every day, and then being transported across the country. Any plans for transportation in the region should recognise and consider those factors. Yet the Government’s 35-page “Northern transport strategy” published earlier this year does not mention Grimsby even once.

It is not just for trade and freight purposes that our region needs greater focus from the Department for Transport. Hull will be the city of culture in 2017, but while many people cross the Humber travelling to work every day, connectivity between the south and north banks remains poor. The year 2017 could bring huge benefits to the entire Humber region, but poor transport links threaten to shut the rest of us out. There are many things that the Government could do to help ensure that that does not happen. Many fellow Humberside MPs supported my call earlier this year to suspend the tolls on the Humber bridge. The lower toll since 2012 led to a 26% increase in the use of the bridge, and brought economic and social benefits to the area. At least while Hull is the city of culture, free travel across the bridge could end it being seen as a barrier to work, leisure and trade.

The last bus service back from Hull to the south bank currently leaves at half-past 6 in the evening, so people from Grimsby are excluded from spending the evening there. With no direct rail link, and just one train after 8 o’clock, our public transport network will not allow people who do not drive, and particularly young people, to access the cultural events in Hull next year. Putting on evening bus and rail services for 2017 would be a popular move, and could even become permanent if people continued to use them.

Children from all backgrounds should be able to cross the Humber to see the performances in Hull next year—whether or not their parents can afford the tickets
and travel. I would like to see the Government support state schools in the region with a fund for free school trips to visit arts and cultural activities. Those minor steps would go a long way towards ensuring that 2017 leaves a lasting impression on the current generation, and I hope that the Transport Secretary will agree to meet me, and my fellow Humberside MPs, to discuss them.

I welcome the announcement of a Bill to change the franchising system for bus services, but I worry about what the effect on services in my constituency will be if Britain votes to leave the European Union next month. The numbers 1, 2 and 20 buses—with which I hope everyone will be familiar—are all funded by the EU. The number 1 bus is particularly important to our local economy. It goes to Europarc, Grimsby’s flagship business park, which is the location for hundreds of jobs in the town, and which, as the name suggests, is also funded by the EU. If the bus were to stop running, I should be worried about the impact on businesses on the site. I should like to hear the Minister’s view of the potential impact of Brexit in that context.

Let me now turn to an issue about which I have previously written to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). Owing to a change in the lighting regulations last year, community first responders are no longer permitted to attach certain reflective markings to their vehicles. A constituent of mine who is a first responder contacted me to say that he feared that the change could put his safety at risk if he was called out to an incident on a country road, or at night, and approaching vehicles did not see him until a very late stage. He is also worried that the lack of reflective signage on his vehicle will make it harder to spot when other emergency service vehicles are attempting to locate the site of the incidents.

I want to record my thanks to the Minister for his response to my letter, and also take the opportunity to follow up a couple of the points that he made. First, he raised the prospect of an amendment to the regulation of retro-reflective Battenberg livery in the Deregulation Act 2015. I should like to hear confirmation that the Government intend to pursue that, and also to hear of any further progress. Secondly, he referred to concern that attaching Battenberg livery to the vehicles of members of the public as they went about their daily business devalued the livery. Given that the point of the signage is visibility for safety purposes, I am not sure that I see why that would be such a bad thing. The Minister said there would be a consultation, and I would appreciate more information about what opportunities my constituent will have to feed into it.

I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to those points in a letter to me after the debate. I am sure that he and all Members agree that first responders do an incredibly important job. They save lives, they do it voluntarily, and they should be given all the tools that they need to do the job safely and to the best of their abilities.

2.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and to follow the many speeches that have been made so far.

Today we have heard about drones, driverless cars, spaceports and space planes. That all sounds a wee bit like a sci-fi movie, but it forms the headlines of a Queen’s Speech that is forward-looking when it comes to transport and infrastructure. The forward-looking, fully prepared United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that we all need and want is taking the lead on the global stage, and making sure that we are ready to lead beyond the globe. A forward-looking Bill will secure future transport and the jobs of tomorrow that will come with it.

Not only does the Queen’s Speech refer to provisions for driverless vehicles, space planes and spaceports, but we see a welcome recognition of the need to adapt the insurance market to reflect the changes that driverless vehicles will bring about. This is not just about the vehicles themselves; it is about the way in which the system will work. Autonomous vehicles could represent a safety revolution. Insurers have already been trying to shape the right framework to keep insurance simple for future drivers. I believe that this commitment could throw some of these “rocket boosters”—if I may use that terminology—behind efforts to turn the future of driving that is envisaged into a reality.

A few weeks ago, during Transport questions, I asked what moneys were being set aside for electric cars and the ministerial reply was that moneys were being disbursed throughout the United Kingdom. However, there needs to be a sea change of attitude on the high street as well. If we are to have electric cars, there will have to be better charging points on the high street, where the people are, on every garage forecourt, and in shopping centres and stores. We need a policy and a strategy that extends throughout the UK.

That said, while it is all well and good to look to the future—as indeed we should—existing problems with our infrastructure and transport sectors need to be sorted out now, rather than being left to the future. There has been that futuristic commitment to spaceports and space plans, but the Government need to keep their feet on the ground just for now and postpone take-off, because huge issues affecting airports and aeroplanes are still outstanding. For instance the Government still cannot agree on where to build a new runway in the south-east.

A recent announcement from Heathrow—supported by the Democratic Unionist party, which is committed to Heathrow 3—shows that it is willing not only to meet the requirements set by the Independent Aviation Noise Authority, but to go even further. Surely the process of securing the future of the country’s premier airport is just as important to our future, in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, as ensuring that we are in a position to harness future transport means. For us, with Belfast City and Belfast Aldergrove, Heathrow is an international airport that gives us connectivity to the rest of the world, and the development would also help our economy to grow. There has been no mention of air passenger duty, but it would have been nice to see something about that. In the past week or two, we have heard—this does not affect my constituency, but it is good to recognise it—that we will have more direct flights from China to Manchester, and some Members will obviously speak to that. The boost that that will
[Jim Shannon]

give to the economy will be £230 million, so we must get connectivity right and make sure we benefit across the whole United Kingdom.

One of those writing today about the Queen’s Speech said:

“While there was praise for the futuristic vision, there were complaints that the government’s programme made no mention of the long-awaited expansion of airports in the southeast… The business community will be surprised that the Queen’s Speech included a commitment to build a new spaceport but there was no commitment to make a final decision on a new runway for more conventional aircraft,” Gavin Hayes, director of the airport campaign group Let Britain Fly, said. “We are urging government to make a final decision by the summer recess.”

I also urge them to do that. Let us have this decision made once and for all.

Every Member who has spoken so far has referred to the bus services Bill, which is most welcome—I thank the Government for it. However, we need to see that commitment turned into action. We had the same commitment last year, but we have yet to see it delivered on. The Bill is an opportunity to make a real difference at ground level, allowing powers over bus services to lie with those people closest to the operation of services. Talking buses are also an exciting prospect. If they are implemented properly and become widely available, they will be a great way of making a difference to vulnerable people—those in society we have a duty to support and help.

On spaceports, we face competition from over 20 rivals, including the United Arab Emirates, Spain and Australia, so the Government are right to take that into account by committing to spaceports. A Bill will pave the way to our seeing spaceports built by 2018. However, as with the bus services Bill, we need the vision to become a reality and to be delivered.

I want to make a quick comment about drones, because they are also part of infrastructure. We need better monitoring, regulation and control of drones. We need to make sure they are used correctly. Like many things in this world, if they are used correctly, they can benefit us all, but when they are used in a dangerous fashion and for the wrong reasons—for instance to deliver drugs, mobile phones, money and contraband over the walls of jails—something is wrong. If they are used dangerously around airports, we also have to control them. When it comes to drones, let us have a wee bit more detail about how things will work.

Infrastructure does not mean just transport. The Government are in danger of moving on to the next phase of infrastructure advancement without finishing the implementation of the last great advancement—the internet. My constituency, like those of many hon. Members in the Chamber, does not have proper access to broadband just yet. The commitment to fast broadband nationwide has been a long-standing one, but one that, moving towards 2020, still has to be delivered.

The fact that every UK household is to have a legal right under the universal service obligation to a fast broadband connection is welcome but, again, it will have to become a reality. I have had literally hundreds of constituents contacting me every week about their broadband connection. The issue of broadband has been brought up in the House, in questions and in Westminster Hall. Some 13% of my constituents cannot get broadband. People want to grow their business and to employ extra people, but they do not have broadband. The Government committed some money to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland a while ago, but it has now run out. It is time that we had a concrete, strategic plan on paper to show how we are going to reach the 100%, which is something that I certainly want to happen in my constituency.

I am pleased about the Government’s commitment to 1 million houses; I will be interested to see how that works. Again, however, it is important that we put that commitment in place. I make a plea for social housing and for us to make sure that people have the opportunity to acquire property for a rent or a mortgage that they can afford.

I have laboured the issue of infrastructure so, to conclude, I would like to touch on a couple of other issues. We have a commitment to the infamous sugar tax—I totally support and welcome it—or rather to the soon-to-be-famous sugar tax, once this great nation reaps the inevitable benefits of this long-overdue measure. There may have been some controversy about the issue, but when it comes to the facts and those who are affected, it is clear which side those who want to make a positive difference are on. Some of my colleagues who sit alongside me—they are not here today—have a different opinion, but I am pleased that the Government are committed themselves to dealing with the issue.

From obesity networks to sports clubs and cancer charities, all the stakeholders we would want to be onside are in the right place on this measure. This move is not a magic wand, and many people look at it and say, “What is it going to do?” It cannot do everything by itself, but it is a good step towards tackling the nationwide obesity epidemic and reducing the risk of the many diseases associated with obesity. The debate around this issue has been met with some cynicism and opposition, but we have to commit ourselves to the measure, and I am pleased that the Government have done so.

As we approach June, no contribution would be complete without a mandatory opinion about the European Union. It will be of no surprise to hon. Members that I am in the out camp. The Government have tried to keep this one even quieter than usual this year—perhaps that is why the Queen’s Speech was a wee bit low key—no doubt to ensure that their abject failure on renegotiation is put as far as the back of the nation’s mind as possible. There was no mention of the much-lauded sovereignty Bill—it is now quite clear that that will be scrapped. The will of the House would have shown the British people just how much of a success the Prime Minister’s charade of a negotiation was. Where was the negotiation for the fishermen? Where was the negotiation for the farmers? Time will tell where we will be on 23 June, or when the result is made available on 24 June.

Furthermore, the silence is accompanied with despair, as tight restrictions are to be imposed on visitors using the NHS, with less free healthcare access for EEA visitors. In reality, we all know that such a move will have little or no impact, and will result in little or no saving. All it does is to show the level of the Prime Minister’s desperation with respect to what he is willing to undertake to keep the European project on the road. Playing immigration politics with health is the latest in
a long list of insults to the intelligence and decency of the British people. The Prime Minister might have had a good deep breath of the scuba gas, but he must be careful when he resurfaces after the referendum. We all know that resurfacings from such depths is extremely dangerous, and we are not sure what state of mind he will be in when it is all over.

I am pleased that the Government will introduce an adoption Bill to speed up the system and reduce delays. I am also pleased about the Bill on reforming prisons, but I have to say that we can build nice new prisons and give prisoners all the accommodation we like, but that will do no good if we do not address neo-Nazism and radical Islamism in prisons, where people are being radicalised before they come out. Perhaps at some stage we will find out what is going to happen about that.

The military covenant, and Northern Ireland’s full involvement in it, is something that I also wish to see. I look forward to the state visit of the President of Colombia in November. That is important because we in Northern Ireland have a peace process that has worked, and it is good to see that peace is at least resembling some sort of normality in Colombia. We welcome that, and we look forward to seeing it continue. We also look forward to the Government working, as the last paragraph of the Queen’s Speech states, “in Northern Ireland to secure further progress in implementing the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements.”

The DUP is committed to the Stormont House agreement and fully committed to the peace process. Our election results, with Arlene Foster becoming First Minister, are an indication of that. We believe in the democratic process, and the people of Northern Ireland will be the greater for supporting the partnership and the political system as we move forward.

3.2 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I want briefly to comment on the words of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and I echo the sentiments he expressed about the visit of the President of Colombia. I pay tribute to Members from all parts of the Northern Ireland Assembly who have played a role in the Colombian peace process based on their own experience. Hon. Members in this House can be proud of the role that our colleagues from Northern Ireland have played in making the peace process as successful as it has been so far.

I welcome those parts of the Gracious Speech that we are able to support, particularly those that have been purloined so successfully from the manifesto on which I stood for election just one year ago. I am really pleased that the Government will be proceeding with the infrastructure commission. I am also pleased to welcome the measures in the buses Bill, although I was concerned to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) about the restrictions that the Government seem to be imposing.

The ability to regulate bus services will be extended only to those areas where the Government have decided that there will be an elected Mayor. Perhaps the Minister for Housing and Planning might convey my concerns to the Secretary of State and his fellow Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government about the fact that the Government say that they do not have a one-size-fits-all policy but proceed with one anyway. It would seem that they will require Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington to adopt a mayoral structure in an area that, frankly, is most suitable for it. The requirement comes with a carrot and a stick, and there will be no carrot unless we take on an elected Mayor. That is wrong for the area I represent, and I ask the Minister to bear that point in mind and take it back to his colleagues.

I welcome the moves to improve the infrastructure for electric vehicles. Following a question asked by the hon. Member for Strangford a couple of weeks ago, I made the point that infrastructure includes knowledge infrastructure. Electric vehicles are entirely different from those that use petrol or diesel. I urge Transport Ministers to consider very carefully the proposals of the Institute of the Motor Industry about providing a training and certification programme for automotive engineers so that they are aware of the dangers that electric vehicles pose to those who work in the industry and are properly trained to deal with electric engines.

On transport infrastructure, Her Majesty said that the Government would continue to support the development of the so-called northern powerhouse. I suspect that the northern powerhouse is little more than a sham—a slogan to distract from the fact that the substance is entirely lacking. I congratulate the Government on their sloganising because it has got us all talking about the northern powerhouse, rather than examining its substance. The northern powerhouse has almost become an accepted reality, which displays their mastery of distraction.

London is getting Crossrail and will now get Crossrail 2, as well as another runway. I confess that I do not have a dog in the fight when it comes to where the new runway in the south-east should be, except that I suspect it should be at Heathrow, if only because that option is least far away from the rest of the country. However, I am concerned that infrastructure development is seen merely as an extension of London infrastructure. I have always supported HS2 and I would support HS3, HS4 and HS5, because I believe infrastructure investment should be just that: investment that brings a return in the shape of jobs and prosperity. I have to say that before I became a Member I always wanted HS2 to be built from the north to the south. I fear all we will get is a London to Birmingham fast railway line, which will do little to encourage growth north of Birmingham. If so, we in the north-west of England in particular will become part of a client region of London, feeding off the scraps of London’s economic growth, rather than developing our own.

I was very concerned to hear the Secretary of State for Transport talk about HSBC transferring jobs to Birmingham as though that was something to be proud of. That will not be good for the people in London, but, more importantly, it will detract from the whole point, which is that infrastructure development should generate economic growth of its own, not simply shift growth around or across the country.

As other hon. Members have said, the danger is that the Treasury is threatening to take over the HS2 project and to trim it back so that none of the benefits originally promised will be delivered for the north-west.

Andrew Gwynne: Will my hon. Friend give way?
Christian Matheson: I would always give way to my good friend from Denton and Reddish.

Andrew Gwyne: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. There is some suggestion that, in the trimming back process, the HS2 station at Manchester airport might be dropped. Does he agree that that would be incredibly short-sighted? This is about having a high-speed rail link to the airport running not just from north to south, but—with HS3—from east to west. The airport station ought to be a hub, which would provide new links not just from the north-east right through to Manchester airport, but to Chester and beyond in the other direction.

Christian Matheson: What an excellent point. We used to talk about an integrated transport policy with a few local buses and a couple of local railway services. My hon. Friend has identified an integrated transport policy that includes international transport as well, and he made that case very eloquently.

The Secretary of State talks about HS2 having an impact, as I am sure it is, but the danger is that, because of the uncertainty, it will be a negative impact. To some extent, we are seeing that in the north-west, where investment decisions have been delayed until we find out exactly what will be proposed. If the Government are really serious about the northern powerhouse, they should put a stop to the anonymous briefings and the newspaper speculation, and commit to HS2 in a way that benefits the whole of the north, along the lines described by my hon. Friend. I do not want to see HS2 simply as a new line painted on Harry Beck’s London underground map, making the midlands an extension of London. That means making a reality of Sir David Higgins’s vision of a true northern rail hub at Crewe, with at least seven HS2 trains an hour stopping there to provide the great connections to the rest of Cheshire, Warrington and beyond, and a commitment to run some trains direct from HS2 to Chester—of course—and the north Wales line, some of which could make up those seven trains. We need to make sure that it is not just people living close to the stations who benefit from the £40 billion that the Government will invest in HS2. Local roads and railways must be built that allow my constituents and those of all other right hon. and hon. Members in the north-west to benefit from that investment. The Chester, west Cheshire and north Wales cross-border economic area is one of the fastest growing in the UK. If the Government want to pull the plug on that, it is easy: just cancel the northern HS2 hub at Crewe.

If I return briefly to the matter of road transport, the Minister will know exactly where I am going. The M56 in my area is desperately in need of an upgrade to deal with the impossible congestion that drivers experience on a daily basis, but the need for investment goes far beyond this. I remain desperately disappointed that no action is planned by the Government before 2020. I remind the Minister that this is a cross-party campaign. My next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), is leading the campaign and has support from across the parties because of the importance of the motorway for my area and as a principal artery into north Wales and parts of Merseyside. Unless the Government commit to that work now, they will stifle further economic growth in that area. If I were being cynical, I might predict that the Government will make a promise to upgrade the motorway just before the 2020 election, but such a promise will be made with the same scepticism as befits any of their promises after the collapse of their £38 billion pledge to upgrade the railways immediately after the 2015 election.

The local authorities and the local enterprise partnership in my area are clear about where investment is needed if their ambitious plans to double the size of our economy are to be delivered, and the Government need to commit to supporting those. Transport infrastructure does not come cheap, and in calling for the electrification of the Crewe to Chester to north Wales line, to link up with a new HS2 hub at Crewe, and an upgrade of the M56, I am calling for cash spending which requires prioritisation. But investment must be considered as just that: investment to generate economic growth. It is not like sticking a pin in a bet on the grand national. My area has proved its ability to grow. The local enterprise partnership has proved its ability to work with local authorities across the political spectrum to deliver that growth and bring in businesses from across the sectors to work together to achieve that growth potential. If the Government are willing to waste £70 million on an unnecessary vanity garden bridge across the Thames in London, surely they can recognise that HS2, as a national project, must benefit the whole of the nation and allow the whole of the nation to grow under its own enterprise. They should not just consider London to be the sole driver of economic growth in the UK. For all the sloganising about a so-called northern powerhouse, without the correct infrastructure in place, it seems that crumbs from London’s table will be all that we can get.

3.15 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): At a time of major economic challenges, it has become painfully obvious that Her Majesty needs a new scriptwriter who can add a bit more substance to the Gracious Speech. As I read the 21 Bills mentioned, I thought, until a short time ago, that this was simply a stalled Government awaiting the results of the European referendum. However, I listened to the Leader of the House this morning who indicated that these 21 Bills...
would mean the full accomplishment of the Tory manifesto—after only two years. We have a threadbare Queen’s Speech, with no future plans, and it would appear that a period of long-term economic misery awaits many people. We should be addressing the chronic UK productivity problem, a matter that is not even mentioned in the Queen’s Speech, where the word “productivity” does not appear.

Before I address some issues of transport and infrastructure, I would like to discuss an anti-terrorism matter connected with future initiatives, and I wish to give some praise to the Government. Some weeks ago I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on establishing standards for forensic linguistic analysts—people who can analyse text messages and help identify some of the most dangerous people in our society. Although the Bill has fallen, I am pleased to say that the Government have agreed to a meeting with me to discuss whether this is something they could take up in the future, and I am very grateful for that.

Of the measures in the Gracious Speech, I welcome some of the moves on transport, and I wish to comment briefly on a couple of those areas. First, when the Government consider the buses Bill, I ask them to remember, among other things, the needs of students, particularly those in rural areas who attend college. The National Union of Students has already pointed out that it considers this to be one of the major barriers to some students engaging. I hope the Government will consider that, and perhaps it would be a good idea to engage soon in deep conversations with the NUS to address the issue.

I also wish to address an issue raised by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who mentioned not only the great cause that many of us share in the WASPI campaign, on whose behalf she has done some outstanding work, but concessionary travel schemes, which are very important for women and men who are of or nearing retirement age. If I recall correctly, she said there were inequalities in England, in that in London it is possible to engage in these schemes at 60 but elsewhere in England the relevant age is already 63 for women, with the prospect of that rising. May I recommend that the Government think about the very simple solution adopted by the Scottish Government of having a flat-rate entry common for women and men at the age of 60 for concessionary travel? The difference that has made to the lives of large numbers of women and men over the age of 60 in Scotland has been remarkable. Other Members have talked about the importance of health and wellbeing in our society, and a measure such as this would command the support of the whole House.

Barbara Keeley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. He makes the good suggestion that the Government adopt the London model, whereby men and women have concessionary travel at 60. I met some WASPI women from Derbyshire last week here in the House. One of them was telling me that she no longer went out with a group of people who were her friends before, because she is still working, cannot afford the fares and has not got a concessionary bus pass, whereas they are retired with their pensions and concessionary travel. How unfair to divide friends in that way.

Roger Mullin: Absolutely. That adds to my point about how this is about not merely the simple issue of travel, but people’s health and wellbeing and their ability to engage with their friends, to engage in the community and to contribute more to the life of that community.

Drew Hendry: It is worth underlining the mental health benefits of concessionary travel. The scourge of loneliness comes with an ageing population and more people being isolated, and the ability to get out and travel on the bus network and to socialise is a real boon. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is something we should foster and encourage to reduce that scourge of loneliness?

Roger Mullin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, perhaps the Government could consider making their disabled companion programme for those on disability benefits a national programme, not something available only on a regional basis. That would bring it into line with what is happening in Scotland. It is of great benefit to people who otherwise face considerable disadvantages.

I am aware of the time, but I wish to mention something that concerns me greatly about the Government’s infrastructure plans. I have to say that the way in which some of them have been undertaken leaves a lot to be desired, particularly when it comes to how some so-called major national infrastructure projects are being funded and managed. I wish to highlight what some might consider to be the financial shenanigans that are going on in relation to the Thames Tideway Tunnel project. The funding model of this rather controversial multi-billion pound project comprises conventional equity—made up of about 40% pure equity and 60% subordinated debt with interest tax deductible—and medium-term bank debt to be refinanced with bonds issued over the six-year build period. However, if market conditions prevent bonds being issued, the UK Government provide a £500 million loan facility as contingent support. The liability associated with the £500 million support is unrecorded in UK Government accounts. This Parliament has never been informed of the details of this type of contingent support. It is a dodge. It exposes customers, and it should be thoroughly examined by this House. We need to have proper methods of financial management of major infrastructure projects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) mentioned the Queensferry Crossing—the new bridge being built across the Forth—which is very close to my constituency. Using the new Scottish Futures Trust, which was developed when we got rid of the horrendous private finance initiative, this major new bridge is coming in quicker than planned and £1 billion under budget. How many other major infrastructure projects in the UK have come in quicker than planned and significantly under budget? The answer is very few. Perhaps we should look again at the Scottish Futures Trust model of investment.

We face many transportation and infrastructure challenges in this country, but, above all, we face major productivity and economic challenges. They should have all featured much more strongly in this Queen’s Speech. We need to focus on them not just for our benefit but for that of future generations.
3.24 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I was eager to speak today on transport because I believe that there is arguably no more potent policy lever in the hands of Government that has the capacity to drive increased economic prosperity than that of improving transport. Transport is a policy area that requires Government action more than any other. Infrastructure projects begin to deliver payback only over the longer term and, in the case of railways, decades. With that time horizon, business finds such projects difficult to finance, but the payback, which includes more jobs, increased housing and a more diverse and knowledge-intensive business sector, is critical to the continued prosperity of our country.

Importantly, not only politicians but business people believe this. Business requires Government to step up, show leadership, and signal their commitment to helping our business community to deliver what we all agree it is best able to deliver—increasing prosperity throughout this country.

Unfortunately, I fear that my constituents and the constituents of so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will find little comfort in the measures announced in the Queen’s Speech. As this House knows all too well, this Government are fond of grand announcements, backed by even grander rhetoric. And no area of Government policy is blessed with grander rhetoric than transport. We hear much about sea changes and renaissances from the other side of the House. A case in point is the northern powerhouse, and more recently, its close relative, High Speed 3. These so-called powerhouse projects both promise, we have been told, a renewed industrial revolution in the heartlands of the north. As you can imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, as an MP who proudly represents the city of Bradford, I was keen to hear more about how this Government intend to invest in improved regional transport, whether railways, buses, roads, or indeed air, to help to rekindle an economic renaissance in my city. I was hopeful that I would be able to offer a debt of gratitude to this Government for investing in the city of Bradford, helping my constituents to realise their potential. But in reality little has emerged from this Government’s Queen’s Speech, other than further confirmation that the Government’s term of office is going to be marked by a roll-call of broken promises and a litany of excuses.

Despite six years of the so-called northern powerhouse, the only realities felt by my home city of Bradford, and by my constituents, have been bruising Government cuts and a continued concentration of wealth, economic activity and capital investment in London and the south-east of England. Until I and other northern MPs hounded the Government into an embarrassing U-turn, we faced a broken promise about the trans-Pennine electrification project. This has now been reinstated, albeit with a much less ambitious delivery date.

By most measures, Bradford is one of the UK’s strongest players. It is the fifth largest local authority in Great Britain, with a growing population of over 528,000. It benefits from having the youngest population of any city in the UK, with 23.5% of the population under 16 years of age, compared with 18.8% nationally. In 10 years’ time the population is expected to increase to 569,000, with its working age population forecast to rise by 24,000 to 353,000.

Bradford’s economy is valued at £9.2 billion, the 11th largest in the UK. The city is home to a number of major companies, including Morrisons, Yorkshire Building Society, Princes, Santander, Provident Financial, Pace plc and Hallmark cards. In total, 17,000 businesses call the district of Bradford their home, providing much valued employment to over 195,000 people. But despite these figures, Bradford continues to be shackled by poor connectivity. This poor connectivity is especially glaring when we take the time to consider the city’s regional rail links. Unlike comparators, both nationally and internationally, it has few direct services to other major regional cities. For example, and most shockingly, Bradford has no direct rail services to Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Hull or Manchester airport. Where Bradford does have a direct service to major regional cities such as Manchester, the average speed of the journey is a disery 33 miles per hour.

A further indictment is the poor regional rail link with Bradford’s neighbouring city, Leeds. Currently 45,000 workers commute between Leeds and Bradford on a daily basis, the largest flow between any two major cities in the UK. Despite the two city centres being only 8 miles apart, three quarters of those journeys are made by car rather than by public transport—an unbelievable figure.

As many will recall, since being elected to this House I have reserved my precious few opportunities to question the Prime Minister directly for the subject of regional rail improvement. I first asked about the Government’s broken promise on trans-Pennine electrification. My second question, asked only a few weeks ago, was on electrification of the Calder Valley line, because of the key role it promises to play in HS3 and Bradford’s connectivity.

My constituents might have hoped that the Prime Minister and his Government would take the opportunity offered by the Queen’s Speech to bring forward proposals to improve rail connectivity between Bradford and its neighbouring major cities. The northern powerhouse and HS3 promise no increased regional connectivity for Bradford. For a city the size of Bradford, with an economy valued at £9.2 billion, the 11th largest in the UK, to be notable by its absence from one of the Government’s flagship infrastructure projects is a stark and disturbing oversight. There was an opportunity in this Queen’s Speech to put right that error and to announce measures to better connect a vital cog in this country’s engine room of growth. It is a shame that this Government have chosen not to take that opportunity.

3.31 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): What an extraordinary waste of time! I counted 42 announcements in the Queen’s Speech and only four had not been announced before yesterday. This is a Queen’s Speech that risks being a waste of the Queen’s time, the people’s time and Parliament’s time. I cannot recall in 19 years in this House seeing a Queen’s Speech debate in which the speeches from the Government Back Benches numbered two and ran out before we got a third of the way into the debate, and those Benches were entirely empty for the rest of the debate.
Headline measures in legislation for this year are little more than a middle manager’s task list for the next month: more control over budgets for prison governors; stop radical preachers from taking jobs in elderly care homes; longer school days; more NHS charging for non-EU citizens; money for school sport from a levy on fizzy drinks. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker! This is the “So what?” Queen’s Speech—minimal, managerial, marking time; minor policy changes hugely overblown and hugely over-briefed to the Minister.

What was not a waste of time was the speech from the shadow Transport Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), and many of the speeches made this afternoon by hon. Members on both sides. My hon. Friend warned the Secretary of State for Transport, who is again not in his place on the Treasury Bench, about the gap between what this Government do and what this Government say. She welcomed the buses Bill, which has received wide support in the House this afternoon, including from the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett), my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—who also referred to this as the sci-fi Queen’s Speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) also talked about how valuable the buses Bill is, and I think the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), who is no longer here, might have said that, too. Although they welcomed the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South and for Denton and Reddish both questioned why it was only for areas with elected mayors. We want other mayors to get the same powers in the same way as the Bill goes through this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South took the Government to task for the lack of response to the Law Commission’s report and the lack of a taxi licensing Bill. We want the system to be tightened up so that drivers who are rightly and properly rejected for a licence in their own area cannot sidestep the bar by getting a licence in another area. Above all, my hon. Friend took the Secretary of State to task for the continuing delay regarding any decision on airport expansion, particularly on the runway at Heathrow.

My hon. Friend was strongly backed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), with the authority that she brings as the Chair of the Transport Committee, by the hon. Members for Bath, for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and for Strangford, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who said that the big absence from the Queen’s Speech was any announcement on airports and on Heathrow. He described such an announcement as long overdue and rightly reminded the Government of all the groundwork done by the Labour Government—a White Paper on aviation in 2003 and the decision in 2008 on the expansion of Heathrow, but nothing since.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse went on to talk about housing and the damage that the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which has just reached the statute book, will bring—

Jim Fitzpatrick: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

John Healey: Let me finish my comments on my hon. Friend’s speech, then I will give way to him.

My hon. Friend went on to speak about leasehold reform. He is one of the champions of leasehold reform in the House. I was glad to hear that the Minister for Housing and Planning is now taking an interest. For too long, under Governments of both parties, leasehold reform has been put in the “too difficult to do” box. To the extent that the Minister is willing to act on leasehold reform, we are willing to support him where we can.

Jim Fitzpatrick: Because of time constraints, I was not able to point out our belief that the Government’s housing record is not very good. Notwithstanding the claim that they have a better house building record than we had when we were in power, they are taking credit for things that we paid for and put in the planning process before they even came to office.

John Healey: It will not surprise my hon. Friend to know that I will come on to that. He is right. We sometimes hear the Government say that they have built more social homes than we did, but 90% of the social homes built by this Government were commissioned by the Labour Government and largely funded by the Labour Government. I should know—I was the Minister who did it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) made a strong case for lower tolls on the Humber bridge. Existing tolls, she said, were a barrier not just to work and to trade, but to leisure. I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Transport on the Front Bench. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby asked whether he would be prepared to meet her and other MPs from the area to discuss how the barriers that transport creates—especially barriers to leisure for young and older people, as well as to their work and trade—could be overcome. The Secretary of State is nodding, which is a good sign. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend that that meeting will go ahead shortly.

One thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish always brings to debate is passion and principle. I love the way he speaks. He rightly said that intentions were well and good, but it is on actions that people will judge this Government. It is fine to talk of social justice, increased life chances and reducing inequality, but we look to the actions for proof that the Government mean what they say and do as they say. As my hon. Friend said, when we look at the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance, the introduction of the bedroom tax, and the cutting of benefit support to disabled people and to people working hard on low incomes, all the signs from the past six years point in the opposite direction.

My hon. Friend described this Queen’s Speech as a missed opportunity. I thought he made an interesting argument, which he could perhaps take up with the Procedure Committee, about whether, as one of the consistent systematic checks that this House applies to any new legislation, we could assess its impact on national health and wellbeing.

Over the years that I have known her there has been no more consistent, forceful or better champion of older people than my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). She gave the House the extraordinary statistic that one in three carers now has to wait six months to get an assessment
of their needs, never mind get those needs met. As she rightly said, the £4.6 billion cuts to adult social care since 2010 are a big part of that story, and there is nothing in this Queen’s Speech to reassure people concerned about this that the essential funding is in place. She also noted that there is no pensions Bill to deal with the problems of the 2.6 million older women who have been hit so hard by the recent pension changes.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), who has left the Chamber, argued that it might be helpful to adopt the Scottish model—or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South pointed out, the London model—for concessionary travel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) rightly reminded the House that business demands better infrastructure. A city as big as Bradford, as rich in business history and business innovation, as it now is, is being badly let down by the quality of the investment and transport infrastructure to support it. As she said, grand rhetoric is what we get from Government while real change, real investment and real improvement falls so far short of that, and people in her city, businesses and residents alike, will find little comfort in the Queen’s Speech announcements.

I liked the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) made when he reminded the House and Ministers that we require intellectual infrastructure as well as hard building and capital projects. He urged a training and certification programme for, for instance, engineers involved in the development of electric vehicles and in the electric infrastructure to support those vehicles. He expressed a fear shared by me and many colleagues in Yorkshire and Humber that HS2 will simply mean faster rail journeys between London and Birmingham, and the north-west will be left out. The Secretary of State said nothing to reassure the House about the plans or promises on HS2 being delivered in full.

The Secretary of State talked about UK infrastructure and, with a flourish, picked two dates, he said, at random—1997 and 2010. In 2010, Labour’s last year in government, public sector net investment—or infrastructure investment from Government—was 3.4% of GDP. One year later, in the first year of the previous Parliament, after the Chancellor made his cuts, it was down to 2.8%. By the end of that Parliament, it was 1.9% of GDP. This year, it is 1.9%. By the end of this Parliament, it will be 1.5%. That is the reality between the great rhetoric that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South talked about and the actions, investment and long-term commitments we see from this Government. Housing investment—part of the picture—was slashed by 60% in 2010, the first year of the previous Government. In the same year, roads investment was slashed by £4 billion. The renewables obligation—Labour’s renewables obligation, which was creating the funding to invest in green energy—was removed entirely. That is the reality of what happens when the Government do, rather than talk about, infrastructure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) spoke about why this sort of investment is so important—why it is more than simply figures and argy-bargy in this House. He talked about Hitachi in his constituency, and the huge number of jobs and a big boost to growth in that region because of the investment in our rail system and in the rolling stock required to upgrade it.

It is that sort of impact, on all parts of the country, that makes infrastructure investment more than simply a matter of political and policy debate. It has a real impact when we get it right in areas all across the country. Instead of that investment in Britain’s future, the Chancellor and Conservative Ministers have, from 2010 onwards, cut investment that would secure our place in the world, stronger long-term growth and the future welfare of our citizens.

The Transport Secretary told us at the beginning of the debate—I have checked this—that yesterday’s Queen’s Speech was “all about building a stronger, more resilient, more modern economy”. I have to say, however, that after six years of failure, it is clear that the Government are doing no such thing. It is clear that the Chancellor did not fix our economic foundations after the global crash. Any right wing, hard-line Finance Minister can cut public spending, but he is dodging the really tough decisions that he himself promised to take in 2010.

Rather than helping British businesses to sell to the world, our UK trade gap was a record £96 billion in the red last year, which is the biggest ever deficit since records began in 1948. Rather than reforming the finance sector and rebuilding our production base, the number of manufacturing jobs in this country is still almost 10% below that before the global crisis and crash. Rather than rebalancing the economy away from borrowing, debt and household consumption, it is now forecast that household debt will top pre-crash levels and reach 160% of income by the end of this Parliament.

The six years of failure on the economy will be unaffected by many of the measures in the Queen’s Speech. There have also been six years of failure on housing. After 2 million more homes were built and 1 million more households became homeowners under Labour, we have seen failure on all fronts since 2010. When this Queen’s Speech needed direction on housing and planning, we got more of the same.

The effects of six years of failure include 200,000 fewer homeowners in this country. A third of a million fewer under-35s—young people—are able to own their own home than when the Prime Minister took over in 2010. The number of families accepted as homeless has risen by a third in the past six years. Rough sleeping has doubled and is up by a third in the past year alone. Last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse said, fewer affordable homes were built than at any time in more than two decades, and the housing benefit bill rose by £2 billion in real terms over the course of the last Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee took the Housing and Planning Minister to task over his target of 1 million homes. He made the strong argument—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Strangford—that social housing, new social housing and affordable housing to rent as well as to buy must be part of the picture. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown)—he is not in the Chamber, so I will not mention him again—made a similar point.
Yesterday the sovereign said in the other place: “My Government will support aspiration and promote home ownership through its commitment to build a million new homes.”

The Housing and Planning Minister sometimes plays fast and loose with the figures. It is not possible to house people in planning permissions or to live in a start. It is building new homes that counts, and if he is to build 1 million new homes in this Parliament, he will have to do a great deal better than what we have seen over the past six years.

There were fewer new homes built in the last Parliament than under any peacetime Government since the 1920s. Even in the latest full year, 2015, the number of new homes built was still far below where it needs to be—a total of just 143,000. By the way, that is still 24% below the peak during Labour’s 13 years in office. Because growth in new house building has been so sluggish under this Government—astonishingly, it has been only 2% on average since 2010—if they do not improve that run rate, they will not hit their target until 2033.

Some of the best policies are bigger than party politics and capable of commanding a broad consensus, such as Bank of England independence, the national planning Act for major infrastructure projects and the localisation of council housing finance. Under the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, there is a welcome commitment to put the National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory footing. Like the commission itself, that was a recommendation made in Labour’s Armitt review in the previous Parliament, so we are pleased that the Government have taken it up. We look forward to seeing what further compulsory purchase powers the Government introduce in that Bill. Labour’s Lyons review in the previous Parliament recommended updating legislation on compulsory purchase orders to streamline and simplify the relevant powers and to enable CPOs to be secured at closer to existing use value. I hope that those suggestions will be in the Bill, because they will be among the tests that we use in considering it.

We will, however, oppose the privatisation of the public Land Registry, which will undermine the trust of homeowners, mortgage lenders and solicitors, and put at risk the essential neutrality, quality and transparency that the Land Registry offers. It will be a gift to tax evaders and avoiders. I remind the House that the Land Registry returned a profit of £100 million to the taxpayer in 2012-13 and has delivered a surplus to the taxpayer and the Treasury in 19 of the past 20 years. It is a public asset that makes money for the public purse, and we should keep it that way.

The deeper truth about this Queen’s Speech is a Conservative party riven over Europe and too divided to prepare a serious legislative programme that even tries to get to grips with the country’s problems. It is a Queen’s Speech for a quiet life in No. 10 Downing Street. It confirms a Prime Minister past his sell-by date. As the former Work and Pensions Secretary said in 2012-13 and has delivered a surplus to the taxpayer and the Treasury in 19 of the past 20 years. It is a public asset that makes money for the public purse, and we should keep it that way.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is my great pleasure to deliver the closing remarks in today’s debate. It is also nice to see the shadow Housing Minister in the Chamber, taking an interest. Given his absence throughout much of our deliberations on the Housing and Planning Act 2016 in the previous Session, I wondered where he had got to.

Happily, there has been no back seat for the Government’s agenda on local growth. Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government continue to play a prominent part in the debates that follow each Queen’s Speech. Budget and autumn statement, because local growth remains central to everything that the Government do. The right hon. Gentleman might be used to listening to Labour speeches that are full of high words and no action, but we are clearly focused on ensuring that we deliver for our country, and that is what this Gracious Speech is about.

Another thing that never changes is the shadow Housing Minister himself. He goes back to his old lines that he has used before, forgetting to mention that he was the Minister who oversaw the lowest level of house building that this country has seen since 1923, at just 88,000 homes in a year. He is rather like a fleetingly successful popstar of yesteryear—he cannot help but sing the same tune over and over again. Well, he is welcome to keep his record of boom and bust; we will stick to, and build on, our record of rescue and reform.

When the right hon. Gentleman was speaking about this country’s economic situation, it was as if he had completely forgotten the sheer mess in which the Labour Government, in which he was a Minister, left this country. We have not forgotten, however, and neither has the country. Indeed, the situation was well outlined in the letter from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who explained that there was “no money left”. Under a Conservative-led Government, employment is up, inflation is down, rates are down, and wages are up. The country is on the move, and the Labour party would do well to stop doing it down and start recognising that we are moving forward. I am sure that at some stage Labour Members will come back and tell us what the spending reductions that they outlined in their manifesto would be.

We heard more original contributions to the debate from Members across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) stated his desire for more neighbourhood planning and outlined his work to support that not just in his area, but with Civic Voice more generally. I have already spoken to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the National Association of Local Councils, and the Royal Town Planning Institute about proposals in the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, which were welcomed by them all.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) was pleased with the innovations in the Queen’s Speech that were outlined earlier by my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary and outlined the importance of seeing UK-wide benefit from those measures—I am glad that he now agrees that we are “Better Together”. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) continues to make a strong case for improvements to
roads and infrastructure in his area, and I will come on to the comments made by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) about 1 million homes in a moment.

I have worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) to ensure that new and affordable homes are built in areas such as his, and that people have the chance to buy a home of their own. The Labour party tried to block that policy at every opportunity, but we have delivered it though the Housing and Planning Act 2016, and it can deliver new jobs. I look forward to working with hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), and I appreciate his comments about our work to improve the situation for leaseholders. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) outlined his views on neighbourhood plans, again reinforcing just how important they can be. We should remember that such plans deliver more homes.

The hon. Members for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) spoke about a wide range of matters that ranged from transport to health and business rates. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) also mentioned business rates, and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) outlined the issues with the Humber bridge. I reassure her that we will ensure that tolls on the Humber bridge do not return to their peak under Labour—we cut them in 2012. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) spoke about investment in the northern powerhouse, as did the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). The northern powerhouse involves vast investment and devolution, and that has been welcomed by Labour council leaders in the north, who are working with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), the Minister for the northern powerhouse.

Barbara Keeley:Labour Members are getting used to discourteous winding-up speeches from Ministers, but the hon. Gentleman did not have the courtesy to listen when I and other Labour Members were speaking, and he has just summarised what three people said in about six words. I spoke on behalf of 7 million carers and 2.6 million women who are affected by this Government’s changes to the state pension age, and I think that that deserves a little more than three words from the Minister. He is extending a discourtesy. This is a “so what?” Queen’s Speech from a “so what?” Government who cannot even be bothered to support it.

Brandon Lewis: I am slightly surprised, if not disappointed, by the hon. Lady’s slightly snipey intervention, because I have not finished mentioning what Members spoke about. If she had paid more attention when she was speaking, she would have seen that I listened to everything she said, particularly about the pensions Bill. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions reads her speech so that he can respond to it, and when the Bill is brought forward, he will no doubt respond to her directly. The hon. Lady can do better than that kind of intervention.

Hon. Members from across the House have outlined their views and concerns about the effect that the vote on 23 June could have on investment and about the importance of our EU membership. I agree with them that our membership is important for investment, particularly overseas investment, and the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will agree with me that stability for investors is vital if housing is to continue to grow. Any disruption to that could be quite damaging, and if housing is damaged, our economy will be too. I think, therefore, that hon. Members have made an important point.

Today’s debate, as was fitting to its subject matter, has ranged far and wide, from pensioners and integrated transport to intergalactic transport, but hon. Members will excuse me, I hope, if I bring us back to the Bills that my Department will be leading on in the year ahead. Having just completed work on the Housing and Planning Act 2016, in the last Session, DCLG officials, who like to stay busy, are delighted to be taking on two new Bills. The first is the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill. Since 2010, the number of homes granted planning permission has increased by over 50%. In the last year, permissions have been granted for over 255,000 new homes. Net additions to the housing stock have recovered from the record lows that the right hon. Gentleman oversaw and which were achieved under the last Labour Government, while the number of first-time buyers is up by 57% since 2009, with 262,000 first-time buyers last year alone. But we must go further and faster. We want 1 million more homes this Parliament and 1 million more first-time buyers. The right hon. Gentleman might want to update his figures. Homelessness remains below its peak under the last Government. We have been clear we want to deliver 400,000 affordable homes, meaning the biggest Government-led building programme since the 1970s. More than 181,000 homes were built last year, up from the 88,000 he left us with. That is a 25% rise last year alone, which dwarves the 2% he referred to.

Melanie Onn:Homelessness has doubled under this Conservative Government. Is the Minister suggesting that people will go from being homeless to accessing these 400,000 so-called affordable homes?

Brandon Lewis:We need to work across the piece not only on building new homes but on the better care fund, social services, the No Second Night Out campaign and our extra investment in homelessness. So ultimately, yes, we will have done our job to the best of our ability when we give everybody in the country the chance to own their own home. Labour seems to want to stop people having that chance. The hon. Lady might want to think about the fact that 86% of our population want to own their own home. She might want to support their ambitions rather than doing them down.

In addition to the 1 million more homes and the 1 million first-time buyers, we want enduring, sustainable improvement to the delivery of new housing in this country. The chronic under-supply of new British homes is a failure that was decades in the making. Halfway through this turnaround decade, our changes are bearing fruit. In this Parliament and the last, we have devoted the effort required first to rescue and then to reform housing delivery. Time spent building carefully on each round of reform, learning from experience and forming the local relationships required for delivery, is time well spent.
As we saw in the previous decade, the quick and dirty debt-fuelled approach to building more houses is no solution at all. Rather, it led directly to a disaster that set Britain back by years. The purpose of the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill is to empower local communities to plan and deliver the development they need where they need it. It will simplify and streamline the neighbourhood planning process and give communities confidence and certainty that their voices will be heard as soon as possible. The creation of a fully fledged neighbourhood planning system stands as one of the great reforms of this Government. The neighbourhood planning process is now under way in thousands of communities.

Andrew Gwyne: The Minister knows that I have an interest in neighbourhood planning because he responded to my Adjournment debate earlier this year about problems in the Haughton Green area of my constituency. What assurances can he give to the people of Haughton Green that the things they want to see happen in their community could be delivered through the Bill? For example, will there be a neighbourhood right of appeal—something the Government blocked when Labour tabled amendments on such a measure?

Brandon Lewis: Actually, the Labour party did not vote or even call a vote on the neighbourhood planning third-party right of appeal. The hon. Gentleman might like to check back and see how that issue played out. What we want to ensure, through the Bill, is that there is no need for a third-party right of appeal, because the community’s voice will have been heard at the beginning of the process. I think prevention is much better than cure. Having talked to organisations such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England, and to colleagues and people who have drawn up neighbourhood plans around the country, that certainly seems to be the more popular way to get things done.

Barbara Keeley: I was one of the shadow Ministers on the Localism Bill and we did support the community right to appeal—I know because I was there. A big issue is brewing in my constituency. There has been a lot of talk about neighbourhoods having a say, but the Secretary of State appears to have dropped support for a substantial local application. My community and my constituents are thoroughly sick of the lack of support at national level from the Secretary of State for important local green-belt issues.

Brandon Lewis: I am sure the hon. Lady will appreciate that I cannot comment on any particular planning application, but when it comes to support for the green belt, this Government have gone further than ever before to ensure that the green belt is properly protected. Ultimately, it is a matter for the local community, but as I said, when it comes to neighbourhood planning, she might like to have a look at what her party called votes on during the passage of the Housing and Planning Act 2016. She might like to update her knowledge on that.

To date, almost 200 neighbourhood plans have passed referendums, including a case in the last couple of weeks. We saw 18 go through in just one week—pretty much a record—with more going through week by week. Local people are now participants, not bystanders, in the planning process. That is helping to transform attitudes to development, and there is a much more positive approach to it. It turns out that when planning is done with people instead of to them, we create trust and see more homes given planning permission. We want to go further, and I am determined to provide the certainty and ease to neighbourhood planning that people want.

The Bill will make sure that planning conditions are imposed by planning authorities only where necessary. Let me be clear about the problem. As the Minister for Housing and Planning, I have had examples come to me of planning permissions with hundreds of conditions attached, the worst of which are those that stop any work happening at all until further details are agreed—so-called pre-commencement conditions. The worst I have heard of so far had over 800 of them. I am aware of cases where half of the conditions attached require further agreement from the local authority. These are planning permissions that have been given the green light for building, but it can take months or even years to resolve these conditions. Many Members of all parties will have had residents affected or seen for themselves examples of sites for which permission has been granted, yet they have not been built on. It is most frustrating for a community to see that, and we need to put an end to it. We need to get people building on sites more quickly. The grief this causes is not restricted to companies who cannot get on with building because it affects communities themselves—the local communities that draw up their neighbourhood plans and go through the process of getting planning permission. They decide for themselves where they want new building to take place, and that localisation and simplification of the planning process is behind much of the successful new building since 2010.

When sites that have gained permission are drowned with pre-commencement conditions, disillusion with the entire planning system sets in. Frankly, it is toxic. We need to make sure that the power to decide where building will take place stays in the hands of local communities, which is why we need to refine the process. This is not—let me be very clear—about taking away any protections or checks; it is about stopping needless bureaucracy and time-wasting. Our intention is that many issues will be resolvable at the same time that the bureaucracy and time-wasting. Our intention is that many issues will be resolvable at the same time that the building is under way, making sure that any legitimate concerns are addressed without holding up production of the houses that we need.

Another key element of the Bill is the completion of our reforms to compulsory purchase. For the avoidance of confusion, this involves purchase at current, not future, use value. The Government do not propose changing the existing fundamental principle that compensation should be paid at market value in the absence of the scheme underlying the compulsory purchase. These proposals are intended to make the compulsory purchase process clearer, fairer and faster for all parties involved in it. The key point is that we are not changing anything like that.

If we want a much wider range of developers to play their part in building the homes and infrastructure we need, we must remove risk from the process of planning and land acquisition. Needless uncertainty does nothing to protect the countryside or to guarantee good design. What it does is restrict home building to the biggest
players. The Bill, however, will give communities the tools that they need to diversify development, enabling both quantity and quality to be achieved in house building. It will also establish the independent National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory basis. I appreciate what was said about that by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne. The establishment of the commission is the next step in the Government’s plan to improve UK infrastructure, and will help us to deliver our manifesto pledge to invest more than £100 billion in our infrastructure networks during the current Parliament.

The second piece of legislation, the local growth and jobs Bill, will make an equally important contribution, not least by giving communities a direct financial stake in their future growth. Most important, the Bill will deliver on our commitment to allow 100% retention of business rates by councils, and, moreover, will allow them to reduce the business tax rate. It will also enable combined authority mayors to levy a supplement on business rate bills to fund new infrastructure projects. That will require the support of the business community through the relevant local enterprise partnership, but the potential for locally led infrastructure investment is clear.

All this takes place within the broader context of localism—of growth and devolution deals throughout our country, and of the decentralisation of billions of pounds of infrastructure funds. Local communities have never had a bigger opportunity to direct their future development. Indeed, who can blame certain Opposition Members for eyeing up those opportunities? With the political undead occupying their Front Benches, a new life in our newly empowered city halls has never looked so enticing. “In the name of God, go!” is what Oliver Cromwell told a previous Parliament. What I would say to Opposition Members such as the shadow Home Secretary who have itchy feet is “Yes, go for it: there has never been a better time to be in local government, with more influence and more power to do things for your local community than ever before.”

**Mr Betts**: May I return the Minister to a point that I raised earlier? May we have this on the record? Is the building of a million new homes during the current Parliament a Government commitment?

**Brandon Lewis**: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present for the first part of my speech, but I made it very clear that yes, we have an ambition to deliver a million homes during the current Parliament.

It falls to me to have the final word in today’s debate, but in years to come it will not fall to me, to the hon. Gentleman—the Chair of the Select Committee—or, indeed, to anyone else in the House. The final word on transport, infrastructure, housing and other matters that are vital to local growth will not be heard in the Chamber at all. Instead, thanks to this Conservative-led Government, key decisions will be made with communities that have been empowered to set their own course. They will be part of their own destiny. They will be designing, drafting and delivering on their own long-term economic plans, and I am proud to be part of the one nation Conservative Government who are setting them free to do so. That is why this is such an important Gracious Speech. It is delivering for our country, and I commend it to the House.

**Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)**

*Debate to be resumed on Monday 23 May.*
Committee on Standards

[Relevant documents: Report from the House of Commons Commission, Additional Lay Members of the Committee on Standards: Nomination of Candidates, Session 2015-16, HC 848.]

4.13 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I beg to move,

That, in accordance with Standing Order No. 149A, the following be appointed as lay members of the Committee on Standards:

(1) Jane Burgess and Dr Arun Midha, for a period of six years; and

(2) Charmaine Burton and Sir Peter Rubin, for a period of four years.

As Members will recall, we started in 2013 with three lay members on the Committee on Standards, together with 10 elected members. Let me take this opportunity to thank the three pioneers who were appointed at that time—Sharon Darcy, Peter Jinman and Walter Radar—for their continuing dedication to the work of the Committee. Such has been their impact that in March 2015 the House agreed to the Committee’s recommendation that there should be equality of numbers, with seven elected and seven lay members. Last year, the House of Commons Commission accordingly set in train a recruitment process to select four additional members, and today’s motion is the last step in that process.

The Commission has produced a report giving much more detail of the process that was followed, but, for the record, I should emphasise that, in accordance with the Standing Order, these candidates were selected on the basis of a fair and open competition. The recruitment panel was headed by an independent chair and was assisted by a recruitment consultant.

Rather pleasingly, 380 applications were received. After longlisting, shortlisting and final interviews, the panel put forward to the Commission a package of candidates reflecting a mix of skills and experience and a diversity of background, gender, age and geographical location. The Commission was happy to endorse those recommendations, and I would like to put on record our thanks to the recruitment panel for its hard work in identifying such a strong group of candidates from the field.

Looking at the candidates themselves, I am sure the House will agree that they are not just the usual suspects and that they will bring a broad range of insights and experience to their work on the Committee. In brief, Jane Burgess is the partners’ counsellor and a main board director at John Lewis Partnership; Charmaine Burton is involved in community work and is the host of her own radio show in Birmingham; Dr Arun Midha has experience working with a number of public bodies in different sectors, primarily in Wales; and Sir Peter Rubin is the former chair of the General Medical Council and professor emeritus at the University of Nottingham. Further biographical details of all the candidates are published in the Commission’s report for the information of the House and beyond.

The House will note that the motion proposes differing lengths of office for these appointments. Lay members may be appointed for fixed terms of up to six years. The appointments are not renewable. On the advice of the recruitment panel, the Commission is recommending that the new appointments be staggered to provide for two terms of four years and two of six years, to mitigate against the loss of expertise and experience when lay members come to the end of their service.

I am sure other Members will join me in wishing the new lay members well in their new role. I ask the House to agree the motion for the appointments.

Question put and agreed to.

PETITION

Closure of Lloyds Bank in Bredbury

4.16 pm

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I rise to present a petition relating to the closure of the Lloyds bank branch in Bredbury, located in the Woodley precinct in my constituency. High street banks play a vital role as part of the make-up of our high streets. They are a significant point for people to access their money and to get financial advice. Members of the community will struggle if the bank closes. This is particularly important to elderly and vulnerable people, who may not use online banking facilities. A further local petition on this matter has attracted over 580 signatures. The petitioners therefore request that this House urge the Government to do all they can to prevent the closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds bank.

Following is the full text of the petition:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank will have a negative impact on the local area; further that vulnerable members of the community will struggle if the bank closes as most do not use online banking; further that the bank staff deal with many different situations with dignity and care which is vital in a community where there is a large elderly population; further that a number of dedicated staff will be made unemployed; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 580 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to stop the closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]
Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr Shaiiel Varaj.]

4.17 pm

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I am very grateful that this debate has been selected. It deals with an important subject, which has gained even greater relevance in recent weeks.

Kamal Foroughi is a 76-year-old dual UK-Iranian citizen. In 2001, he was working in Iran as a consultant for the Malaysian oil and gas company Pemex. He had never previously been in trouble with the law. He spent his life socialising with friends, playing and watching tennis, and working for Pemex. He had no involvement whatever in politics—in fact, he was glad to be both British and Iranian. However, on 5 May 2001 he was arrested by plain-clothes police who refused to show any identification or to explain what was happening. He was given no choice but to get into their car, in which he was driven to the notorious Evin prison. He was held there in solitary confinement for the following 18 months without charge.

Mr Foroughi was finally told the charges when his trial commenced in early 2013. The trial was conducted by branch 15 of the revolutionary court. It was lacking in the rudiments of natural justice. He was granted access to a lawyer only the day before the hearing, he was forced to attend the trial without his lawyer, and no record or transcript of the trial has even been produced. Indeed, the Iranian authorities have never publicly mentioned Mr Foroughi's name, let alone explained why they are holding him. We know that he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment: seven years for espionage and one for possessing alcoholic beverages, both of which, of course, he denies. As hon. Members know, the United Kingdom, as part of the P5+1, recently secured agreement with Iran on the joint comprehensive plan of action to deal with its nuclear programme.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing the matter to the House for consideration. He will be aware of the UN resolution on human rights in Iran, where there is quite clear and blatant discrimination against ethnic minorities and persecution of Christian groups. Is he aware of any steps that the Home Office has taken to secure Mr Foroughi's release, or of any discussions that have been held to establish what evidence, if any, exists against Mr Foroughi?

Oliver Dowden: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. On his second point, it is hard to determine whether there is any evidence to substantiate the charges against Mr Foroughi, because the Iranian regime is so lacking in transparency. Even his own family do not know the details of what he has been charged with or the evidence for it. I understand that representations by Her Majesty's Government have been undertaken by the Foreign Office, and I will come on to those in a minute. The matter has been raised at every level, including by the Prime Minister.

As I was saying, Members are aware that the United Kingdom has recently secured a deal with Iran on the joint comprehensive plan of action. Many of us had reservations about the seriousness of Iran's intent in concluding that deal. Its underlying purpose is to secure a path for Iran to normalise its international relations. In regard to that, the complete lack of transparency shown by the regime in relation to Mr Foroughi's case is a worrying indication. It demonstrates a disregard for basic international norms against arbitrary detention and for the right to a fair, public, independent and impartial trial.

This May marks the fifth anniversary of Mr Foroughi's detention. His son, my constituent Mr Kamran Foroughi, is up in the Gallery today, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for his tireless efforts to secure his father's release. He has been joined by many other Members of this House in that campaign, and I pay tribute to them for the work that they have undertaken.

In today’s debate, I seek to draw attention to Mr Foroughi's case, to make the case for his release on humanitarian grounds and to show the world—and, most importantly, the Iranian regime—that his case has not been forgotten. That is well represented by the fact that more than 130,000 people have signed a petition calling for his release on compassionate grounds. That really demonstrates how many people care about his plight. Since my constituent chose to go public last year, I have raised this case on two occasions in the House, and I have met my hon. Friend the Minister. Friend the Foreign Office Minister with Mr Kamran Foroughi to discuss ways of securing his father's release. I know how seriously my hon. Friend the Minister takes this case. I am pleased that the Prime Minister has personally raised it with President Rouhani. I know that the Foreign Secretary has raised it with his opposite number in Iran, and that representations have been made by my hon. Friend the Minister.

One of the challenges faced by Ministers is the fact that Iran does not recognise that the United Kingdom Government have any locus in relation to dual UK-Iranian citizens. That puts them at particular risk when they travel to Iran. We have seen that in relation to both UK-Iranian citizens and US-Iranian citizens, and it appears that the Iranian regime views them with particularly intense suspicion. Their rights are often trampled on by the Iranian judicial system, and, given the stance taken by the Iranian regime in relation to dual citizens, it is very hard for them to be represented properly by their home Government.

Previously, the Foreign Office has warned of the risks faced by British travellers to Iran from “high levels of suspicion about the UK”, arbitrary detention, and “the UK Government’s limited ability to assist in any difficulty”. The Foreign Office used to make reference to a case in 2011, which we presume was the case of Mr Foroughi. That guidance has recently been removed, and I would be grateful if the Minister could address the risks faced by British citizens travelling to Iran, and the reasons for the change in that advice, when he responds to the debate. This risk has been very vividly illustrated in recent days by the case of Mrs Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, another dual UK-Iranian citizen. Nazanin’s family in Iran in early April when she was detained by members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard at Imam Khomeini airport in Tehran. She was transported 600 miles south to Kerman province, where she has been kept in solitary
confinement. Her 22-month-old daughter, a—sole—British citizen, was stripped of her passport and taken away from her mother at the airport.

I know that all our hearts will go out to Nazanin, her husband Richard and her family for the suffering that they have endured. My constituent Mr Kamran Foroughi has been in touch with Mr Ratcliffe, and they have been a source of comfort for each other during this extremely difficult time.

This case illustrates the fact that the Iranian regime is alert to international coverage and representations. Since Nazanin’s case secured a lot of coverage in the media, she has in fact been released from solitary confinement and has been given very limited access to her daughter. Although that is clearly well short of the full and immediate release that her case demands, it is a welcome signal.

Similarly, in Mr Foroughi’s case, there are urgent humanitarian grounds for his release. Not only is Mr Foroughi an elderly man, but in 2011, before he was detained, his London-based doctor informed him that he was at risk of developing cancer and required regular check-ups. Since his detention, Mr Foroughi has received only one medical check-up, which took place last November. Again, that happened only after international attention had been drawn to Mr Foroughi’s case. Sadly, his family still do not know the outcome of that check-up, which is a source of considerable concern for them.

Given that Mr Foroughi has three years left to serve, my constituent and his two girls—Kamal Foroughi’s grandchildren—are very concerned that he will die in prison, isolated and alone. Iranian law allows somebody to be released early if they have served a third of their sentence. As Mr Foroughi has served over half of his sentence, I really urge the Iranian authorities to show some humanity and urgently release this elderly man purely on compassionate grounds so that he can finally be reunited with his children and grandchildren.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate about his constituent Mr Foroughi. He mentions that the right thing to do—purely on compassionate grounds, without any reference to the Iranian justice system—would be to release Mr Foroughi. Does he agree that, since Islam is a religion of compassion, releasing Mr Foroughi would also be the Islamic thing to do?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That approach has been taken by Mr Foroughi’s family. To put aside my earlier criticisms of the manner in which his trial was conducted, however the Iranian regime may dispute such criticisms, it really cannot dispute the compassionate and, as my hon. Friend says, the Islamic grounds for his release, which are that he is a very elderly man suffering from cancer.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on putting forward this case so articulately. May I suggest that, as well as its being compassionate, humanitarian and Islamic, it would also be very diplomatic for the Iranian authorities to do this? They seem to be showing some sort of compassion towards Mrs Ratcliffe, about whom one of my constituents has written to me. It is important that the Iranians realise the extent of the coverage and awareness of these cases, and the positive signal this would send to this country and to many people here who are worried about such cases. If Iran really wishes to improve her relations with the United Kingdom, this would be a wonderful way of making an appropriate gesture.

Oliver Dowden: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. I was coming on to the point that UK-Iranian relations are in general improving, and it would be a very good signal of the warmth of those relations if the release took place. I understand that the Iranian Government have made the legitimate point about the separation between the judiciary and Ministers, but I feel that Ministers should bring to bear every kind of pressure they can to secure that release.

Sadly for Mr Foroughi’s family, they have suffered considerable ups and downs in relation to his case. They were initially advised that if they kept quiet about it, his release could be secured. That did not happen, so they eventually took the very difficult decision to go public. There were indications from the Iranian regime that he might be released on both the fourth and fifth anniversaries of his imprisonment. Again, that did not happen. The family’s fear now is that he may face the fate of other prisoners who, at the end of their original sentence, are then charged with further crimes, leading to longer and possibly indefinite spells in prison.

I would be grateful if the Minister could update the House on his understanding of the current status of Mr Foroughi’s case and what further steps the Government plan to take over the coming months to facilitate the release of both Mr Foroughi and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he has been very gracious. The issue I want to bring to his attention is the gentleman’s medical condition. We all know that cancer can be exacerbated by stress and poor conditions. The hon. Gentleman has asked the Minister what contact he has had with the Iranian authorities, but could he also ask whether regular medical checks can be made, because those are very necessary at a time of critical medical and health needs?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I was slightly loose with my wording earlier: the fear is that Mr Foroughi has cancer. Because he has had only one check-up, the family do not know whether cancer has developed, which adds to the worry. Again, it is a solid humanitarian basis for him to have regular check-ups and, frankly, for his release. Releasing him would be compliant with Iranian law because he has already served a significant proportion of his term.

Releases have taken place in the past. I was pleased to see that in January four American-Iranian dual citizens were released, including the journalist Jason Rezaian who had been detained for two years. Again, I would be grateful if the Minister could explain to the House what lessons might be learned from those cases. I know that they are not directly comparable, but it would be helpful to understand the distinctions.

As I said earlier, UK-Iranian relations continue to improve overall, but many hon. Members would take it as an indication of the seriousness of the Iranian Government’s commitment to improving Anglo-Iranian relations if they were to use every means at their disposal
to secure the release of both those citizens and others in similar situations. I will conclude my remarks by conveying a message from Mr Foroughi’s son and grandchildren. It is simple—“Please let Grandpa come home.”

4.32 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulatethe hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) on securing the debate and thank him and the Minister for allowing me to make a short contribution. I welcome the recent improvements in relations between the UK and Iran, and I hope that this will provide some space and an opportunity for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to raise human rights issues with the Iranian authorities and have a constructive dialogue with them.

Mr Foroughi’s case, which I have raised previously with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is distressing and perplexing. It is unclear what the charges against him are. Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s case is very similar. Some 150,000 people have signed the change.org petition in support of her release. Both she and Mr Foroughi appear to have been subject to arbitrary detention. In the absence of any justification from the Iranian authorities, we have to come to that conclusion.

I am aware from a parliamentary answer that I have received that the Foreign Secretary has discussed Mr Foroughi’s case with the Foreign Minister, Dr Zarif. Can the Minister give any indication of whether the Iranians are considering changing their position in relation to dual citizenship? Are they willing to consider doing that? Can the Minister confirm when the Foreign Secretary will next raise the cases of Mr Foroughi and Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe with the Foreign Minister? If the UK authorities are not allowed access, could the FCO request access by another organisation, such as the Red Crescent or local humanitarian organisations, or does the Minister think that that would not, regrettably, deliver any results? I hope he would agree that as Iran opens up and more businesses from the UK go out to develop relationships there—I suspect that these will often be initiatives driven by British-Iranian citizens—they need to have certainty that if they do go to Iran, whether on business or to visit family, they will be able to return. Otherwise, those business and family links will not be established or will not be able to be re-established as Iran opens up to UK citizens and UK trade.

I wish to raise one final issue. Many Members will know that the fate of the Baha’is in Iran is difficult, and the Minister will be aware of the case involving 24 Baha’is who were sentenced to 193 years in prison by a Gorgan court. Although probably not a matter for this debate, I suspect that these will often be initiatives driven by British-Iranian citizens—they need to have certainty that if they do go to Iran, whether on business or to visit family, they will be able to return. Otherwise, those business and family links will not be established or will not be able to be re-established as Iran opens up to UK citizens and UK trade.

4.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) for securing this important debate and for the measured tone he has adopted in raising this delicate matter. As he implied in his speech, he has not just brought this to the Floor of the House today, but has been pursuing it and supporting the family for a long period. We have met on a number of occasions and I have been grateful for the support and communication he has provided to me in being able to place light on this, and improve the communication with the family and make the case to the Iranians. I am very grateful to him for the approach he has adopted.

My hon. Friend pointed out that we are dealing with dual nationality here, which is critical to this case in comparison with others. It is important to make it clear to the House that Foreign Office support for those who carry two passports, who have two nationalities, is different from that provided to those who have a single British passport. Ownership of that second passport obligates the citizen to that second state, and the laws and processes it has in place. From my Foreign Office consular policy perspective—this is consistent through not just our Government, but previous Governments—I can say that we do not normally provide the same level of assistance to dual nationals in the country of their second nationality, unless there are extreme, exceptional circumstances, for example, humanitarian grounds, health conditions and so on. It is important to make it clear that there is a distinction between the two.

Today, we are considering a case in Iran, which does not recognise a dual nationality, regardless of what that country is, be it Britain or otherwise. Iran formally does not recognise another country in terms of intervening in any way whatsoever. Although we disagree with that position on dual nationality when we speak to the Iranians, we need to understand it and place it into context. I have also explained in my meetings with the Iranians that the reason why Britain, the Foreign Office and Parliament take an interest in these things is that these individuals do hold a British passport, hence there is an interest and we therefore request that dialogue in certain specific cases.

Let me step back from consular matters per se, as my hon. Friend did touch on this point. Following the nuclear deal, we are seeing Iran enter a new chapter of opportunity for transition—I choose my words carefully, because there is an awful lot to move forward in order for this opportunity to come to fruition. Our embassy has reopened in Tehran, visits are now taking place in both directions and trade opportunities are also being explored.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My constituent Councillor Jill Houlbrook, a former lord mayor of Chester and the auntie of Richard Ratcliffe, whose wife Nazanin has been detained, will be most relieved and gratified to have heard the contribution by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden), and the delicate but persuasive way in which he put it. The Minister talks about Iran opening up, and the Chairman of the Defence Committee mentioned that Iran might be opening up and also opening out. The Minister will be very cautious about his dealings with Iran, but does he detect an improvement in the tone of Iran that might assist us in resolving the cases that the hon. Member for Hertsmere spoke about so eloquently?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The atmosphere developing between our two countries is providing greater opportunities to raise
With that embassy opening, there are more opportunities for bilateral meetings to take place. A series of meetings have already taken place at a number of levels. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi’s case with Foreign Minister Zarif in the margins of the International Syria Support Group. The meeting took place on Monday of this week. Yesterday afternoon, in preparation for this debate, I met Iran’s chargé d’affaires, Mr Habibollahzadeh, to discuss Mr Foroughi’s case.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi’s case with Foreign Minister Zarif in London in February, and the Prime Minister wrote to President Rouhani last year, and also discussed Mr Foroughi’s case with him in January of this year. The Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi’s case during his visit to Tehran in August 2015 when our embassy was reopened. We have also been utilising our partnership relationships with Germany, France and Italy to get them to lobby the Iranian Government on our behalf.

There has been a huge amount of effort at the very highest of levels to raise these matters. On a consular level, the team in the Foreign Office is working to support the family and to make sure that we are providing the consular assistance that is expected.

In answer to the questions of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), the reopening of the British embassy on 23 August last year has enabled us to have face-to-face discussions about a series of consular cases—not just the two that have been mentioned here today. He asked specifically about the direction of travel. We have seen the results of the Majlis elections and the panel of experts. Clearly, that is an indication that Iran wants to move in a new and welcome direction, but there is a long way to go. Part of that includes showing that discussions on sensitive matters such as this can also take place at the same time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere asked a couple of questions, to which I will now turn. First, our travel advice explains that the security services in Iran remain suspicious of individuals with links to the UK, and we advise travellers to keep in close contact with friends and family. British nationals, including dual nationals—British-Iranian nationals—face greater risks at present than nationals from other countries.

My hon. Friend asked about the medical checks for Mr Foroughi. Again, we have asked the Iranians to ensure that he receives regular medical check-ups. The Iranians have confirmed that he now has access to a doctor.

Specifically on that point, it is important to know not just whether the check-ups are taking place, but what the outcomes are. Can diplomatic efforts be made to secure the outcome of those medical checks, particularly to comfort Mr Foroughi’s family?

My hon. Friend makes an important point. I will make sure that that is passed on to the Iranians. The family should be kept more readily informed of the medical condition of Mr Foroughi. May I also pay tribute to Kamran Foroughi, whom I have had the honour to meet? He has been working on this extremely delicate matters. I will, if I may, come on to that point later, and I will also, time permitting, touch on the Mrs Ratcliffe case in a second.

Going to the media is a double-edged sword. Sharing the story and having it on front pages can have an adverse effect. Without reference to this case, I can say that the reaction to discussion of other consular cases in the media has delayed matters, caused frustrations and affected sensitivities. In other cases, media attention has highlighted matters and could be perceived to have moved things on. It is the family’s call in all cases. I simply make the humble point that it always makes sense to work with the Foreign Office and consular staff so that our strategy to leverage change and ensure that an individual is able to leave or whatever they are requesting to do is as efficient and expeditious as possible.

I was asked when would be the next opportunity to raise this matter. I will seek to meet Mr Zarif, the Foreign Minister, in Helsinki next week at a conference. It will be another opportunity to keep the matter to the fore.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is another dual nationality case. She was arrested on 3 April and has not been charged. She has a very young daughter in Iran. We have provided consular support to Mrs Ratcliffe’s family since we were first made aware of the arrest. I met Richard Ratcliffe yesterday to discuss the matter and I raised it at my meeting with the Iranian chargé d’affaires when I met him in the afternoon. I understand that the daughter is now with her grandparents, which is good news, and I welcome the fact that Mrs Ratcliffe has been released from solitary confinement.

We are concerned about Mr Foroughi’s continued detention. I understand that it is both worrying and distressing for his family, and we are doing all we can to support them.

Mr Bacon: My hon. Friend mentioned the Foreign Office’s travel advice, which has changed. It is certainly not for me to question it. When I went to Iran a year or so ago, I found it very safe. It is probably fair to say that it is now one of the safest places in the middle east.

To return to my hon. Friend’s point about dual nationality, of course, even if we differ from the position of the Government of Iran, we can respect their position. When I met the chargé d’affaires, Mr Habibollahzadeh, two weeks ago, he lobbied me about the fact that OCR had withdrawn the Persian GCSE. I spoke to the Education Secretary about it and she told me yesterday that Pearson had agreed to take it on. That is one more indication of the efforts that are being made to strengthen relations. The Iranian embassy legitimately takes an interest in the welfare of the 350,000 people of Iranian heritage who live in this country, many of whom are dual nationals, and in their desire to protect, cherish and enhance their links, including with the language. Does he agree that it would be a powerful symbol of the Iranian Government’s seriousness about improving relations with the United Kingdom if they could apply all possible pressure within their own system in the case of Mr Foroughi?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the interest, knowledge and expertise that my hon. Friend provides in relation to Iran. He is right, and he touches on a number of avenues for leveraging and advancing the bond. I fully
agree that this is an opportunity to show that this is what countries that develop stronger relationships are able to do—we can engage behind the scenes and through consular matters to get the best outcomes, engaging at the same time in other areas, including education. I fully concur with what my hon. Friend says.

The reopening of the British embassy in Tehran last year and the successful implementation of the nuclear deal earlier this year are positive steps in our relationship with Iran. Our renewed diplomatic presence gives us the opportunity for face-to-face discussions on issues such as Mr Foroughi’s case. The Government will continue to do whatever we can to support Mr Foroughi’s family and to raise our concerns with the Iranians at every opportunity. I sincerely hope that he will be reunited with his family soon, and I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere and believe that there are strong humanitarian grounds for consideration of the release of both Mr Foroughi and Mrs Ratcliffe.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.50 pm

*House adjourned.*
Mr Speaker: Order. It should now have become clear, but for the avoidance of doubt, in particular for the benefit of those attending our proceedings who are not within the Chamber, that these matters should be self-contained and readily intelligible. The request from the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) was to the Minister to provide a statement on dietary advice and the childhood obesity strategy. All is now magnificently clear.

Keith Vaz: May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent debate and the Minister for his answer to the question?

The National Obesity Forum’s report published today has led to a public outcry and confusion. Indeed, the conclusions of this report contradict much of the health and lifestyle advice issued by the Government and the NHS over the past decade. Ordinary people are now caught in a whirlwind of conflicting advice at a time when they desperately need clarity, consistency and straight talk. Quite simply, they do not know where to turn. The Royal College of Physicians, the Faculty of Public Health and the British Heart Foundation have all raised concerns about this report. Some have claimed that local authorities, schools and the NHS are receiving guidance from organisations whose funding and motivations are not known. I welcome the use by the Minister of the word “irresponsible” in respect of this report.

The critical issue, however, is the delayed publication of the childhood obesity strategy. We were first told that this would be published in December 2015. We were then told that it would be February 2016. It is now expected at the end of the summer. No doubt you will confirm, Mr Speaker, that there is no clear indication from the Government as to when the end of the summer will be. Amid the delays, other voices are filling the vacuum. Clearly, a strategy is required on what steps are needed to prevent and tackle the growing levels of obesity, which, at current rates, are expected to reach 60% of the adult population by 2025. We need a definitive date for the publication of the strategy. Will the Minister give us a date today? In the Queen’s Speech last week, the introduction of a sugar tax was confirmed, which I warmly welcome. That could prevent 2.7 million people from being obese, by 2025.

Finally, obesity is a leading cause of type 2 diabetes, as the Minister has said. Just as the rates of obesity are set to increase, the number of people with diabetes is expected to rise to 5 million by 2025. As a type 2 diabetic and chair of the all-party group for diabetes, I live with how stark the situation is. Sadly, today’s information tsunami has demonstrated a lack of leadership in public health. Although the Public Health Minister should be commended for all the work she has done, the Government must go further. Failure to act now will jeopardise the future of our nation’s health and the solvency of our national health service.

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for taking the opportunity of the report’s publication to give the Government the chance to respond and, hopefully, to put in the public realm a degree of concern about the important issue of childhood obesity.
report to back up the comments that he has made. I can do no better at this stage than quote what the chief knowledge officer of Public Health England, Professor John Newton, said today:

“Suggesting people should eat more fat, cut out carbs and ignore calories conflicts with the broad evidence base and internationally agreed interpretations of it.”

He continued:

“This opinion paper from the National Obesity Forum and Public Health Collaboration is not a systematic review of all the relevant evidence. It does not include an assessment of the methodological quality of the studies and should not be confused with the comprehensive reviews of the evidence that are produced by our process. For example, this paper highlights one trial suggesting high dairy intake reduced the risk of obesity, while ignoring a systematic review and meta-analysis of 29 trials which concluded that increasing dairy did not reduce the risk of weight gain.”

I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has given us the opportunity to agree with him and others who have said the report is irresponsible.

To respond to the right hon. Gentleman’s questions for the Government, it is clear that the childhood obesity strategy will be much welcomed, but it has to be soundly based. Much though I would like to give a date, I have to say that its launch will indeed be “in the summer”, and the summer is in parliamentary terms a flexible period. In saying that, I do not in any way minimise its importance.

The presence of my hon. Friend the Minister for Children and Families demonstrates that this is a cross-Government strategy. We know it will be scrutinised by many different parties, so it has to be right to give the guidance the right hon. Gentleman talks about. One can look at any national newspaper—one in particular—any day of the week and read conflicting advice on what is good and what is bad. Whereas that might be a source of amusement to the news programmes, for parents looking for what is right for their children, it is vital that they have advice they can trust. That is why the childhood obesity strategy, much commented on in this place, is so important.

The right hon. Gentleman is an important voice in dealing with diabetes. “Healthier You”, the national diabetes prevention programme based on international evidence, will start this year in 27 areas covering approximately 45% of the population and making up to 10,000 places available to people at high risk of developing diabetes, and will roll out to the whole country by 2020. The right hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of diabetes. I hope he acknowledges that is recognised by the Government.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend not agree that instead of all this complex and conflicting nanny state advice, it would be far better simply to advise children to move more and eat less?

Alistair Burt: I am delighted to welcome the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North—may God bless all who live there. I had a small bet with the Secretary of State on how long it would be before the words “nanny state” were uttered, and I was not disappointed.

My hon. Friend is right to ask the question, and we still want to encourage children to move more and eat less—there is nothing contradictory about that. However, a Government who take children’s health seriously, whether in relation to dentistry, deprivation and the environment, or indeed their physical health, weight and wellbeing, are as entitled to comment on this issue as anyone else. The childhood obesity strategy will not contradict efforts to encourage physical activity, but it will, I hope, have elements that my hon. Friend and everyone in his constituency welcomes.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Obesity, and in particular childhood obesity, is one of the biggest public health challenges facing our country. Today’s report not only questions official Government advice, but says that it may have had disastrous consequences. Whether that is right or wrong is a matter for debate.

Let me start by asking the Minister about today’s report. It makes a number of recommendations, but perhaps the most controversial has been the call to stop recommending the avoidance of foods with a high saturated fat content. I am pleased that the Minister has reaffirmed that he has no plans to review the Government’s official advice in the light of that call, and has also reaffirmed that the evidence on the current dietary advice remains valid, but does he share the views of experts, including the British Heart Foundation, who have today stressed the importance of official guidance being informed by robust evidence, free from interference by industry?

On the childhood obesity strategy, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, in September we were told that it would be published before Christmas. Then at Christmas we were told that it would be published in the new year. In the new year we were told that it would be published in the spring, and now we are told that it will not be published until the summer, so can the Minister explain this delay? May we now have a cast-iron guarantee that the strategy will be published before the House rises for the summer recess, so that Members will have the chance to question Ministers on the contents of that strategy?

We welcome the recent announcement of a sugar levy, but does the Minister agree that alongside action on cost, we need action on advertising and labelling? Perhaps the real cause of rising childhood obesity has been not the Government’s dietary guidance, but their failure to take tough action on the marketing and packaging of unhealthy products. Will the Minister confirm that the strategy will contain comprehensive and co-ordinated action to tackle this growing public health challenge? Some of the best advances in public health have come about because past Ministers have shown leadership and vision, so may I say politely to this Minister: “Enough of the delay. It is now time to act?”

Alistair Burt: I am sure the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, will be able to pick up a number of issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but let me respond to some.

First, in relation to the report, as I emphasised by quoting the remarks from Public Health England, any advice that goes into the public domain which is to have credibility and upon which people should want to rely must be fully evidence based and as thoroughly researched.
as possible. If there is any doubt about that—if the evidence appears to be scant—it is right that such advice should be dismissed as irresponsible. We should continue to urge people to look at far more in-depth studies and internationally accepted views on health, diet and wellbeing. I made that point and I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

In relation to the Government’s activity, the childhood obesity strategy will come forward in due course, but it cannot be said that nothing has been done in the meantime. The sugary drinks tax has been taken forward, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that advertising, labelling and promotion definitely come into the strategy and will be looked at. Having spoken to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, I am sure that the intention is to get the report out at a time when the House will be able to consider it. There is little likelihood of the House not having an opportunity to discuss and debate such an important matter, but it is important to get the report right. It is important that it meet exactly the challenges that the hon. Gentleman made from this area, I think that would be unwise. I can inform my hon. Friend that I have him on an accumulator with the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) in urging him to curb the Department of Health’s natural nanny state instincts when it comes to a childhood obesity strategy? If the sugar tax is part of that childhood obesity strategy, can he explain why the tax is being directed at a certain number of products, when other products with far more sugar in them will not be covered by the tax? Will he abandon this policy and encourage the Chancellor to abandon it before it becomes the new pasty tax policy?

Alistair Burt: Tempting though it is to use my temporary position for a whole range of announcements in relation to this area, I think that would be unwise. I can inform the hon. Friend that I have him on an accumulator with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) in urging him to curb the Department of Health’s natural nanny state instincts when it comes to a childhood obesity strategy? If the sugar tax is part of that childhood obesity strategy, can he explain why the tax is being directed at a certain number of products, when other products with far more sugar in them will not be covered by the tax? Will he abandon this policy and encourage the Chancellor to abandon it before it becomes the new pasty tax policy?

Alistair Burt: Yes, I am very conscious of the issues surrounding this. The hon. Lady already has a meeting with the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, when these issues can be taken further.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I welcome the Government’s words on the national child obesity strategy and the necessity of making sure that it is authoritative when it is published. However, in the light of today’s unhelpful reports, is not the real point that it is absolutely critical that that strategy deals with many of the myths out there and is truly authoritative and conclusive in the advice that it relays?

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—that is important. The strategy has been awaited, and if it is to do the job we all want it to do, it should deal with the myths and concerns that have been raised, and do so in a proper evidential manner.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): May I join in a partial, and rather surprising, alliance with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) in questioning the sense in taxing just one particular type of product? Would not the Government instead—this is where I part company with him—consider taxing sugar as an ingredient to create an incentive for reformulation of products to reduce sugar content across the board, rather than just picking on one type of product?

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. He was not on my accumulator, so it has gone down. What he is calling for is exactly what the strategy does. It is designed to be quite wide and to take into account the possibility of other action in other places. He is absolutely correct about that.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Far from raising the nanny state, I welcome the Government’s proposals regarding sugar. There is a difficult issue not only about childhood obesity but about dentistry and the shocking evidence showing that young children today are having to go through procedures that should not be necessary. Will the Minister reissue that guidance and warning to all parents? I have a son who is 19: I know many people will be shocked to hear that. When he was 16, he had not had a fizzy pop; by the age of 18, after he had had fizzy pop from 16 to 18, he had 12 fillings. Will the Minister reiterate the dangers of fizzy pop?

Alistair Burt: Now we are back on home territory, as I am the Minister responsible for dentistry and can thoroughly concur with what the hon. Lady has said, while sharing the House’s astonishment at her news. The issue of dental clearances and young children’s teeth is a scandal. I will be speaking about this because on Friday I am going to a British Dental Association conference in Manchester and it will form part of my speech. The question is how to reach the parents and carers who have charge of their children to make sure they have access to the sort of treatments that are available, and how we work through schools, and through dentistry itself, to try to make more provision available for those who can be reached so that we deal with this terrible problem. There are some good experiments going on, not least in Nottingham; I think that the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) is partly responsible for those. The hon. Lady is right: dental issues are a serious matter to be dealt with in the overall health strategy.
Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I first declare that I am a believer in the nanny state? It was the nanny state that stopped children being sent down mines and up chimneys, and much more besides. May I applaud my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) for raising this very important issue? Last week when I had a peanut butter sandwich, it tasted rather sweet, so I checked the jar and found it had sugar in it. May I suggest to the Minister that we go well beyond a sugar tax and have some means of stopping sugar being put wrongly into foodstuffs?

Alistair Burt: We now have a sugar app, which means that the next time the hon. Gentleman goes down to the supermarket and wants to check how much sugar there is in a product, he can use the app by placing a device against the barcode. My family have used it and they have found, to their astonishment, how much sugar is contained in products that they never expected to contain it. This is not only about making sure that there is a reduction in sugar content where that is possible and appropriate, but about alerting consumers to the amount of sugar, which is really important. I shall ensure that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, gives him details about the app he can use.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I know the Minister is a very reasonable man, so will he explain to my constituents how it can be reasonable for the public health budget in Hull to be cut by £1.56 million in-year? That means a reduction of £300,000 in the obesity strategy, and local authorities of course lead on obesity public health issues, do they not?

Alistair Burt: They do. I just have to tell the hon. Lady that all parts of Government are making the sorts of efficiencies they need to make in relation to such matters, and that can be no different for her area.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Prior to the reported publication date in the summer, will the Minister make sure that he discusses the co-ordination of the strategy very carefully with the Welsh Assembly? In border areas such as mine—advertising crosses the border and labelling crosses the border—people from my constituency who buy sugary drinks in Chester will find that their resources are put into sport in England, but not necessarily in Wales. It is important to consult the Assembly.

Alistair Burt: In accordance with the last answer I made to the last question when I was last at the Dispatch Box, the answer is yes.

Mr Speaker: Order. We now come to an urgent question to be asked by Mr Bernard Jenkin. Not here. Where is the fella?

Hon. Members: Brussels.

Mr Speaker: I find it very hard to believe that the hon. Gentleman is in Brussels. [Interruption] Order. Given that I have granted the hon. Gentleman’s application for an urgent question, it is a considerable discourtesy for him not to be here at once. He should have been in the Chamber. This must not happen again. The hon. Gentleman is a very serious and conscientious parliamentarian. If you put a question in, man—be here. Let us hear it. I am sorry to be annoyed, but I am annoyed, because the House’s interests are involved. This is not just about the hon. Gentleman; it is about all the other Members who have bothered to be here on time and about the interests of the House. The Minister was here well in time, which is good, and the shadow Minister has toddled in—the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) beetled into the Chamber just in time. Let us hear from the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin).

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I accept your admonition with good grace.
UK Economy: Post-Referendum Assessment

2.58 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)

(Urgent Question: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set out his latest assessment of the UK economy following the result of the EU referendum, which he has published today; and if he will make a statement.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): Last month, the Treasury published a detailed report on the long-term impact of EU membership on our economy. Today, the Treasury has published a full assessment of the immediate impact of leaving the EU. It provides yet further evidence to support the Government’s firm belief that it is in Britain’s best interest to remain in the European Union. The analysis makes it clear that a vote to leave would cause a profound economic shock, creating instability and uncertainty that would only be compounded by the complex and interdependent negotiations that would follow. The central conclusion of the analysis is that the effect of this profound shock would be to push the UK into recession and lead to a sharp rise in unemployment.

Two scenarios have been modelled to provide analysis of the adverse impact on the economy: a shock, and a severe shock. In the shock scenario, a vote to leave would result in a year-long recession, a spike in inflation and a rise in unemployment. After two years, our economy would be about 3.6% smaller than if we remain a member. The value of the pound would fall by about 12%, house prices would sink by about 10% and unemployment would rise by about half a million, affecting people in all regions of the United Kingdom.

Under the severe shock scenario, the effects would be even starker, with GDP 6% lower than it would otherwise be, a fall of 1.5% in the value of sterling and unemployment up by more than 800,000. If negotiations with the EU were to take longer than two years to conclude, or if the outcome were to be less favourable than expected, the UK economy could be subject to further instability, which would depress UK economic prospects further. That would undermine the hard work of the British people in forging an economic recovery since the crash of 2008.

As I set out at the start, today’s paper forms part of the case that the Government are making that Britain will be stronger, safer and better off if we stay in the European Union. It is based on serious, evidence-based analysis, and I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In fairness to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), he is at least here, which is more than can be said for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to whom the question was directed. It appears that, as has happened on many occasions, the Chancellor has chosen to uncork the Gauke. We will now hear from Mr Bernard Jenkin.

Mr Jenkin: I reflect on the fact that obesity was rather less of a crisis for the House this afternoon than I imagined it would be, Mr Speaker.

May I first say to the Minister that we all know that these forecasts are just rubbish being produced by a Government who are now obsessed with producing propaganda to try to get their way in the vote rather than enlightening the public? Has this report been signed off by the same Professor Sir Charles Bean who has previously said that models of economic shocks are based on “gross simplifications”? Will the Minister confirm that the so-called shock scenario suggests nothing more serious than that the economy will remain the same size as it was just last year? Does that not demonstrate how Ministers have become preoccupied with dishonestly talking down Britain’s economic prospects, which is highly irresponsible?

Why do the Government not agree with the chair of the remain campaign, Lord Rose? He has been reassuring in saying:

“Nothing is going to happen if we come out of Europe in the first five years...There will be absolutely no change.”

What about my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary? He said in February last year:

“As I’ve said before, a vote to leave the EU is not something I’m afraid of. I’d embrace the opportunities such a move would create and I have no doubt that, after leaving, Britain would be able to secure trade agreements not just with the EU, but with many others too”.

What does the Minister say in response to his Conservative predecessor, my noble Friend Lord Lamont? He said this morning:

“A lot of the Government’s so-called forecast depends on business confidence, which the Government is doing its best to undermine. Economists are no better than anyone else in predicting shifts in confidence...We have nothing to fear but fear itself—which the Government is doing its best to stir up.”

The Government say that wages will fall, so why did Lord Rose tell the Treasury Committee that wages would rise if we left the EU? Is this report produced by the same Treasury that failed to foresee the banking crisis and the great recession that followed?

Why do none of the Government’s post-referendum economic assessments look at the risks of remaining in the EU? Given that in 2014 the UK contributed £10 billion net to support other, failing EU economies rather than our voters’ own priorities, what effect will the continuing collapse of the eurozone economies have on the EU budget as a whole, and particularly on the UK’s net contribution?

Does not the Government’s entire campaign reinforce the unfortunate impression that today’s political leaders will say anything they think will help them get what they want, whether it is true or not? Does the Minister not realise that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are contributing to cynicism about politics and a sense that voters should not trust their rulers but should make their own choice and judgment, which is why they will vote leave on 23 June?

Mr Gauke: The economy is a key issue in the debate and in the choice that the British people will make on 23 June. Today’s analysis is an attempt to assist the British people in making an informed decision, based on the likely consequences of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Indeed, many supporters of the leave campaign have been prepared to acknowledge that leaving the EU would at the very least have a short-term impact on our economy and create a shock.
As my hon. Friend said, the analysis produced by the Treasury has been signed off by Sir Charles Bean, the former Deputy Governor of the Bank of England and a distinguished macroeconomist. He said that

“this comprehensive analysis by HM Treasury, which employs best-practice techniques, provides reasonable estimates of the likely size of the short-term impact of a vote to leave on the UK economy.”

It is not only the UK Government who are highlighting the risks of leaving the European Union; the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, the leadership of pretty much every ally we have, business groups, and many respected independent economists have all made it clear that this country would lose out from leaving the EU. However one looks at this debate, we cannot get away from that central fact.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Unusually, perhaps, I find myself agreeing with a great deal of what the Minister has said. The hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) tried to rubbish the report and referred to trade agreements. If we were to leave the European Union, we would have to negotiate in very short order trade relationships with the rest of the world, including more than 50 other countries. Rome was not built in a day, and there would be huge uncertainty. As he will know—and as I know from having been in business—one key concern of business is always uncertainty.

At the moment, our economy is in great shape in terms of jobs, but on almost any other indicator—productivity, balance of payments, the housing crisis, investment in infrastructure, and the national debt, which has risen by two-thirds in the past six years—the economy already has red lights flashing, as almost every economist has said. Were we to leave the European Union, that would become considerably worse. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer now recognise that the large majority of the problems we faced in 2008 and onwards were caused by a Labour Government, but by a world recession. We now need not a Tory Brexit, but an economy that is not by a Labour Government, but by a world recession.

Mr Gauke: As I understand it, the leave campaign have made it clear that they would not want to go down the Norway route and be members of the EEA, because that would require continued contributions to the EU budget, continued compliance with EU regulations, and continuing to be signed up to free movement of labour. Given that the leave campaign is now focused almost exclusively on immigration, it would be strange to suggest that one option to take would be one that has been dismissed by the campaign to leave the European Union.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Here we go again. The Government seem determined to recycle “Project Fear”, based on Treasury projections invented on the back of its now famous neo-classical fag packet. If all the Government have to offer is fear, they do the cause of the EU no favours. There are many positive reasons for staying in the EU. Why is there no analysis of the emerging trading opportunities for business; why is there no analysis of the value of appropriate immigration to the labour market; and why is there not more respect for those of us who want to make a positive case for the EU?

Mr Gauke: I must admit that I am slightly confused by that contribution—my understanding was that the position of the Scottish National party was to favour the remaining part of the European Union.

Roger Mullin: We want a positive case.

Mr Gauke: If the hon. Gentleman wants a positive case, let us put it this way: according to the shock scenario we have set out, in two years’ time, the UK economy will be 3.6% bigger if we stay in the EU than it will be if we leave. He criticises and wants to re-fight the Scottish independence referendum. May I just remind him—I suspect it will not be for the last time—that the Unionists won that referendum?

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Why does the forecast leave out the very beneficial impact of spending another £10 billion, which we would get back in contributions, on our own priorities, jobs and services, which would boost the economy by 0.6%? Why does it leave out the impact of the lower interest rates and the big injection of liquidity that the Bank of England says it will grant the economy around the time of the vote?

Mr Gauke: First, the report is for the next two years. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, even if we vote to leave the European Union, we will continue to be members of it for those two years as we negotiate our
departure. During that two-year period, we would continue to make contributions to the EU budget. May I also point out what the International Monetary Fund has said? It said that, essentially, if the economy shrinks by 1% or more, any fiscal gain from ceasing to make contributions to the EU will be wiped out by lower tax receipts and greater costs. Indeed, under the central scenario set out in the report, the public finances will be £24 billion worse off as a consequence of our leaving the EU.

On interest rates, the assumption in the report is for no changes to fiscal or monetary policy. I point out to my right hon. Friend that one of the predictions in the report is that we would see the pound falling in value and inflation increasing. The Monetary Policy Committee has made it clear that it would have a difficult trade-off to try to get the economy going at a time when there would clearly be a slowdown. At the same time, the pound would be falling and inflation would be rising. In those circumstances, the safest thing to do is to make no assumptions on what monetary policy would be.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Has any assessment been made of the impact if we leave the EU on 23 June on companies such as Siemens, which invest in new industries in this country such as renewables?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Lady’s point is particularly significant because of the long-term impacts. It is very clear to any of us who engage with those who invest in the UK—businesses that make decisions on where to locate investment—that access to the single market is an important attribute for the UK. It is clear within the report that business investment would fall significantly in both the short and long term as a consequence of leaving the EU.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Leaving aside the Treasury’s notorious incompetence at forecasting, does my hon. Friend—for whom I have a lot of time, normally—not agree that this document really does plumb new depths in “Project Fear”? The Government are trying to scare the public witless. If the consequences are so dire, why on earth did the Prime Minister say on the day they were trying to scare the public witless. If the consequences of leaving the EU are so dire, why did the Prime Minister say on the day, on the one hand, that he wanted the best deal for the UK and, on the other hand, that if we leave the EU, we shall be £24 billion worse off? The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) would have made it clear that this is the consequence of leaving the EU. That is a very positive thing, one I hope the Government will take into account in the future.

Mr Gauke: First of all, may I say that I have an awful lot of time for my hon. Friend normally, but that I disagree with the points he makes? On trading arrangements, it is impossible to see how we could negotiate a trading arrangement as strong as the one we have at the moment. Access to the single market and its benefits, particularly in the context of non-tariff barriers, is very important. We would undoubtedly be a less open economy as a consequence of leaving the EU.

On the report and trying to scare people, it is worth pointing out the Treasury’s assumptions and what the Treasury is not suggesting is underlying what will happen. We are not putting forward a view that there will be an immediate financial crisis—for example, a current account crisis. We are saying that we can reach a deal within two years, which, I have to say, is ambitious. We are not saying, under the shock scenario, that there would be any economic contagion as a consequence of the UK leaving the European Union. If we wanted to put a much more dramatic, scary report together, there are a number of things we could have included in the report, but simply did not. This was a cautious, careful, small “c” conservative report, which, as I say, has been signed off by perhaps the leading authority in this area in this country.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Isn’t the premise that the Treasury spokesman is trying to convince people of the one that the economy under this Government is doing exceptionally well? In reality, of the many people who have a job, several million are on zero-hours contracts and do not know which way to turn. A hell of a lot of people are now borrowing money on loans they cannot afford and many people are going to food banks to make ends meet each week. The whole idea the Treasury announcement is trying to convey is that everything in the garden is lovely but that that will all be thrown away if we do something else. The truth is that it is based on a phony premise.

Mr Gauke: The hon. Gentleman and I differ in our assessment of the state of the UK economy, but whether he takes his view or I take mine, in neither case would our economy and our constituents benefit from pursuing a policy that would increase unemployment by 500,000 and see average wages fall by nearly £800. I hope he considers the impact that leaving the European Union would have on his constituents.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): A 3.6% higher GDP, lower unemployment, lower inflation and a better exchange rate—surely these are things to celebrate! May we have the argument made that these are good things that will happen if we remain in the EU, rather than the other way around?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Let me put it this way: the UK benefits from being an open trading nation. Membership of the single market helps us to pursue the approach of having an open trading economy. That is a very positive thing, one I hope the British people will ensure we continue to have.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Is the Minister as concerned as I am that the leave campaign dismisses as a conspiracy the views of the Treasury, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the OECD, the CBI, the Bank of England, the Office for Budget Responsibility and the London School of Economics? Does he hope that in June people will vote with their hearts and their heads to stay in the EU, which, with NATO, has provided peace and prosperity for the longest period since antiquity, according to the outgoing London Mayor?
**Mr Gauke:** I confess that I have not seen that particular quote, but I look forward to digging it out.

**Tom Brake:** It is from Boris Johnson’s “The Churchill Factor”.

**Mr Gauke:** Actually, I think I have seen it—the right hon. Gentleman reminds me.

There is an overwhelming consensus on the economic benefits of membership of the EU, and I hope that the British people, when they make their assessment, be it with their hearts or their heads, carefully consider the economic consequences of their decision. It is a very important decision that will have an impact not just for a year or two—the focus of this report—but for many years ahead.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** Is not the simple fact that countries trade with one another to increase their mutual prosperity and that trade with our principal trading partners is easier as a member of the EU?

**Mr Gauke:** Yes, that is absolutely right. Access to the single market reduces trade barriers to a level simply impossible to find outside the single market.

**Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab):** The institutions and individuals forecasting economic doom if we leave the EU have got it wrong time and again in the past and seem likely to do so again. The exchange rate mechanism debacle, driven by the whole Europhile spectrum; the prediction that the skies would fall in if we did not join the euro; and the complete failure to foresee the 2008 crisis coming down the road—all this shows just how hopeless they are. Does the Minister accept that a plausible opposite case—that we would be better off outside the EU—can easily be made? If not, I will happily provide him with one.

**Mr Gauke:** I look forward to hearing that plausible case when it is made. I look forward to an analysis, supported by leading economists, making that case, but we have not heard it yet. The hon. Gentleman and I agree about our membership of the euro—we always have done—but if we were to single out two politicians in this country perhaps more responsible than anyone else for keeping us outside the euro, I would highlight, from my party, William Hague and, from his party, Gordon Brown, both of whom believe we should remain in the EU.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** “Project Fear” has reached new lows. Following the predictions of world war, we now have a forecast of recession equal to that of the great depression should we leave. Does the Minister accept that the Treasury got it absolutely wrong when it forecast an economic shock if we left the ERM and that the Treasury, the OECD, the IMF and even the Bank of England did not see the last recession coming?

**Mr Gauke:** The Treasury—indeed, some of the same civil servants—was involved in making the assessment of the five economic tests that kept us out of the euro. I suggest that my hon. Friend looks carefully at the report. We do not make any claims of the sort he suggests—about it being the greatest depression since the great depression of 1929—but suggest that the “shock” scenario involves the economy shrinking by 3.6% compared with the base, which is the forecast for the next few years. This is actually a very measured, conservative assessment of the impact, but none the less there would be an impact and it would result in 500,000 more people being unemployed than need be the case.

**Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op):** When does the Minister think that those advocating leaving the EU will level with the British public and provide their own economic assessment? Half of them think we can leave the EU and stay in the single market and the other half say, “Oh no, we won’t be part of the single market at all.” Is it not useful, therefore, that today’s analysis gives a snapshot of what a “severe shock” would look like if we were still in the single market? Will he also say a bit more about the “severe shock” analysis—falling back on the WTO membership rules—and how it could lead to 800,000 more people becoming unemployed?

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman is right that under the more severe shock scenario, unemployment would increase by 800,000 and GDP would be 6% lower than it would otherwise have been. These are significant numbers. They are not equivalent to the great depression, but they are still significant numbers that would have a significant effect on his and my constituents. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I hope we will get greater clarity about exactly what leaving the EU would involve. It seems to me that there is a clear trade-off: the closer a country is to membership of the EU, as for example with the European economic area model, the more it will continue to have the attributes of EU membership; the further away it is, it may have that greater freedom and flexibility, but it will clearly face a much bigger economic shock.

**Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con):** Inward investment is crucial to this analysis, and my constituency attracts it from China, Australia and the United States as well as from Japan. One crucial factor that has led me to believe that we are stronger in is the fact that all those countries and their businesses want to see us as part of Europe. Indeed, some of those inward investments are European headquarters. What estimate has the Treasury made of the potential relief rally in investment in this country, as and when we choose to stay in?

**Mr Gauke:** That is an important point. Anyone who has met international investors who are considering where to locate their European headquarters, for example, will be aware that they value and support membership of the European Union. Without that, it would clearly be harder to attract some of that inward investment. My hon. Friend also raises an important point about whether we would see a recovery. Evidence suggests that there has been a slowing down of investment due to the uncertainty about our relationship with the EU, but that—the Bank of England has supported this view, if not the IMF—there is likely to be a reasonably quick recovery if we vote to remain on 23 June, and we would see the investment coming back without a long-term detrimental impact.

**Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab):** The north-east is a manufacturing region, and recent analysis suggests that manufacturing is already in recession. Does the Treasury
analysis go into the detail of distinctive regional impacts on areas such as the north-east of the shock or severe shock scenarios if we leave the EU? It used to be said that if America sneezes, Britain catches cold, but when Britain catches cold, regions such as the north-east get pneumonia.

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The increase in unemployment would affect every region of the UK, and the north-east of England would not be immune to that. Indeed, as an important exporting region, it might be particularly vulnerable. The Treasury assessment suggests that there would be something like 20,000 more unemployed people in the north-east of England as a consequence of leaving the EU.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): When the Chancellor set up the Office for Budget Responsibility, he said that “the public and the markets have completely lost confidence in government economic forecasts.”

He went on to say:

“Again and again, the temptation to fiddle the figures, to nudge up a growth forecast here or reduce a borrowing number there to make the numbers add up has proved too great... But I am the first Chancellor to remove the temptation to fiddle the figures by giving up control over the economic and fiscal forecast.”

Why does the Minister now disagree with the Chancellor, and why does the Chancellor now disagree with himself?

**Mr Gauke:** The remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility is set out in legislation, and it can set out forecasts only in accordance with Government policy. Today’s report, however, as I said earlier, has been signed off by Sir Charlie Bean, who said that “this comprehensive analysis by HM Treasury, which employs best-practice techniques, provides reasonable estimates of the likely size of the short-term impact of a vote to leave on the UK economy.”

We have third parties endorsing the analysis, having worked through the details.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Is it not the truth that this report simply echoes the concerns about the adverse impact of Brexit that have already been expressed by businesses in all our constituencies up and down the land? They include the ceramics industry in my area, representing manufacturing, and in recent days our biggest local private sector employer, Bet365, representing international services. Yesterday, *The Sunday Times* set out in detail the fundamental concerns of London’s vitally important financial and professional services industries. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that all the evidence not only suggests, but shows, that there is absolutely no economic rationale for the United Kingdom’s leaving the European Union?

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. The analysis that we have set out in our document is consistent with what businesses up and down the country are telling us: every business survey has indicated concerns of London’s vitally important financial and professional services industries. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that all the evidence not only suggests, but shows, that there is absolutely no economic rationale for the United Kingdom’s leaving the European Union?

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Given that the independent think-tank Open Europe, which is not taking sides in the referendum debate, has said that it is a mistake to think that short-term forecasts are inevitably more accurate than long-term forecasts, can the Minister tell us, in percentage terms, what the chances are of these forecasts actually being true?

**Mr Gauke:** Of course I hope that none of them turns out to be true, because I hope that the hypothesis of our leaving the European Union is not realised.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): It is not just the Government who are warning of the economic risks of Brexit, along with the OECD, the IMF, the World Bank, and every other mainstream economic voice in this debate. The former Mayor of London’s former economic adviser himself warned of an economic shock in the wake of Brexit. Does the Minister agree, however, that it is not Project Fear that the other side are complaining about, but Project Fact? Does he agree that the leave campaign argument would be a great deal stronger if those campaigners had produced a single shred of credible evidence to demonstrate that Britain would be better off out, when the mainstream economic opinion in this country and around the world is that our economy is stronger through our remaining in the European Union?

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: mainstream opinion does support the United Kingdom’s being part of the European Union. I should be fascinated to read a report similar to ours arguing the other case. We produced our long-term report last month, and I look forward to receiving a proper, detailed response to it. I think that the reason no analysis of that kind has yet been produced is that there is insufficient support for such a view, and I hope that that will become more and more apparent over the next month.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Each year we have a Budget statement and an autumn statement in which the Chancellor corrects the forecasts in the previous statement. Will the Minister assure us that, after we vote for Brexit, the Chancellor will come to the House regularly to correct the forecasts contained in this document?

**Mr Gauke:** This scenario has been set out by means of perfectly normal, widely used techniques, and signed off by the leading economist in the field. We have made a number of assumptions that have been cautious, and have in no way sought to exaggerate the risks. I have to say to my hon. Friend that there is a real risk to the UK economy. This is not fearmongering, or scaremongering; it is simply setting out what the risks are to the British people—matters of which the British people should be aware when they vote on 23 June.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Much as I am enjoying the Punch and Judy show in the Conservative party, may I remind the Minister that if both leave and remain continue to run negative campaigns, the most negative campaign will win? At a time when we should be engaging with the electorate of the United Kingdom, they will be turning off in their droves, and that does not serve democracy well.
Mr Gauke: What we are doing is making clear what the risks to the British people would be were we to leave the European Union. All I would say to SNP Members is that if they have a positive contribution to help the remain case, let them make it, rather than lecturing others on how to put across important factors that will, I hope, sway the British people. The British public are seeking information on the consequences of leaving the European Union, and the Government have a duty to provide that information.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is right that we should deal with scare stories as quickly as possible, and I think that the Minister has done a very good job in that regard. Will he comment on the remarks made by the Minister for Employment in Leicester last Thursday, when she parked a very big red bus in front of the biggest temple in my constituency and announced that if we stayed in the European Union all the curry houses in Leicester would have to close down because the EU was responsible for a crisis in chefs? Will he confirm that the issuing of visas is actually a matter for the UK Government and has nothing to do with the EU? Will he also confirm that if the British people vote to stay in the EU, we will still be able to eat curry in Leicester, but if they vote to go out, Leicester City will still play in the European Champions League?

Mr Gauke: I shall try not to be drawn too much on the subjects of curry or Leicester City, although I of course congratulate Leicester City and look forward to their season, and possibly more, in the Champions League. Immigration policy for those outside the European Union is clearly a matter for this Government and for this House, and that will continue to be the case, whatever the result on 23 June.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Airbus, which employs 7,000 people across north Wales and north-west England and many thousands more elsewhere in the United Kingdom, has, with the full support of the trade unions, written to every employee of Airbus to explain to them why they should vote yes in the forthcoming referendum. Will the Minister confirm that the short-term and long-term risks outlined in today’s report are the very reason that companies such as Airbus have come off the fence to strongly support a yes vote on 23 June?

Mr Gauke: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Businesses are perfectly entitled to write to their employees when they see a risk to the business that they undertake, and those consequences should be made very clear. It is striking how the concerns of individual businesses, big and small, about the consequences of leaving the European Union are consistent with some of the concerns that we have set out in the Treasury document—namely, that the UK would be poorer outside the European Union and that we are stronger, safer and better off within it.

Debate on the Address

3.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today’s debate, chosen by the Opposition, is about defending public services, so I want to start by stating very simply that this Government do not believe in private wealth and public squalor; quite the opposite—we believe in prosperity with a purpose, and building high quality public services is perhaps the most important purpose of all. But there is a difference between the two sides of the House. Indeed, there is more than one difference. One is that we on this side are prepared to take the difficult decisions necessary to build the strong economy that will, in the end, fund those public services. A second difference is that we go further and say that securing funding from a strong economy is not enough, and that the battle for higher standards is as important as the battle for resources. Without high standards, we let down not just the taxpayers who fund our public services but the vulnerable citizens who depend on them.

So yes, we are proud to have protected schools funding since 2010, but we are even prouder that 1.4 million more children are in good or outstanding schools. Yes, we are proud to meet our 2% of GDP defence spending pledge, but we are even prouder of the professionalism of our armed forces operating in the Mediterranean today to help to find the wreckage of the tragically lost Egyptian airliner. Yes, we are proud to have protected science and research funding, but we are even prouder that this country continues to win more Nobel prizes than any other, apart from the United States. Yes, we are proud that, since 2010 and despite the deficit, we increased NHS funding by more than was promised by the Opposition at both elections. We are even prouder that failing hospitals are being turned around, that MRSA rates have halved and that cancer survival rates have never been higher.

With that, let me turn to the NHS and say up front that nowhere is the importance of the two challenges of proper funding and high standards more stark. I pay tribute to the 1.3 million staff who work in the NHS. Whatever they have thought over the years about the politicians running their service, their dedication to patients, their hard work, night and day, and their commitment to the values that the NHS stands for make up the invisible glue that has always held it together, whatever the challenge. I know that I speak for the whole House when I thank them for their service.
Let us look at what staff have achieved over the past six years. Compared with 2010, we treat 100 more people for cancer every single day. We treat 1,400 more mental health patients, 2,500 more people are seen within four hours in A&E departments, and we do 4,500 more operations. At the same time as all of that, hospital harm has fallen by a third and patients say that they have never been treated with more dignity and respect. In the wake of the tragedy of Mid Staffs, we should recognise the huge efforts of staff at the 27 trusts that have since been placed into special measures. Eleven have now come out, three of which are now officially rated as good. Neither Stafford nor Morecambe Bay nor Basildon—three of the hospitals of greatest concern—are now in special measures thanks to excellent local leadership and superb commitment from staff.

However, all NHS staff want to know about the funding of their service. The NHS’s own plan, published in October 2014, asked for a front-loaded £8 billion increase in funding not just to keep services running, but to transform them for the future. The then shadow Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), said that the Conservative promise to deliver that funding was a cheque that would bounce, but we delivered that promise to the British people in last autumn’s spending review, and the increase was not £8 billion, but £10 billion. It was not back-loaded, as many had feared, but front-loaded with £6 billion of the £10 billion being delivered this year.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): On the Secretary of State’s point about what the NHS asked for, is it not right that the forward view set out three different efficiency savings scenarios? It was not a case of the NHS asking for £8 billion. Does he really believe that the £8 billion—£10 billion including last year’s increase—will be sufficient to meet the NHS’s demands?

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard Simon Stevens being asked that question on “The Andrew Marr Show” yesterday. He was clear that £8 billion was the minimum of additional funding that he thought the NHS needed. In fact, we supplied £10 billion, which was more than annual efficiency savings needed. Indeed, for that £8 billion, the NHS recognises that £22 billion of annual efficiency savings are required by 2020, because even though funding is going up, demand for NHS services is increasing even faster. I will come on to talk about how we are going to make those efficiency savings. Some in this House have observed that without £70 billion of PFI debt, without £6 billion lost in an IT procurement fiasco, and without serious mistakes in the GP and consultant contracts a decade ago, the efficiency ask might have been smaller.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We all hear what the Secretary of State is saying: it is always somebody else’s fault. However, the fact of the matter is that I have been told by senior health professionals at the highest level—I do not watch “The Andrew Marr Show” often—that only two of this country’s health trusts are not in debt. Is that right?

Mr Hunt: That is not true, but we do all accept that there is financial pressure throughout the system. The question that is always ducked by Labour Members is how much greater that financial pressure would have been under Labour’s plans, which involved giving the NHS £5.5 billion less every year than was promised by the Government. I just point out that when Labour Members condemned the £22 billion of efficiency savings as “politically motivated”, as the shadow Health Secretary did in March, they cannot have it both ways. Her manifesto offered the NHS £5.5 billion less every year compared with what this Government put forward—

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I indicated dissent.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady shakes her head, but let us consider what the King’s Fund said in the run-up to the election:

“Labour’s funding commitment falls short of the £8 billion a year called for in the NHS five year forward view.”

It was there in black and white: Labour was committing to a £2.5 billion increase in the NHS budget, not the £8 billion that this Government committed to. The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways. If this figure was £5.5 billion, the efficiency savings needed would be not £22 billion, but £27.5 billion, which is a 25% increase. That would be the equivalent of laying off 56,000 doctors, losing 129,000 nurses or closing down about 15 entire hospitals.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s policy that foreign visitors should be asked to pay for non-urgent treatment that they get when they are here and that European visitors should have to recoup this through their national systems. Why do we need extra legislation, and how much money does he think we can get from that?

Mr Hunt: We need extra legislation to expedite the process. I point out to my right hon. Friend that that is another policy which has been opposed by the Labour party. All the time it says we should be doing more to get a grip on NHS finances and yet it opposes every policy we put forward in order to do precisely that. The answer to his question is that the issue with the NHS is primarily that we are not very good at collecting the money to which we are entitled from other European countries, because we are not very good at measuring when European citizens are using the NHS. This legislation will help us to put those measurement systems in place so that we can get back what we hope will be about half a billion pounds a year by the end of this Parliament.

We will no doubt hear later this afternoon the charge that the Government have lost control of NHS finances, but we strongly reject that charge. The House may want to ask about the credibility of that accusation from a party that is at the same time proposing a funding cut for the NHS and criticising the difficult decisions we need to take to sort out NHS finances.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Two months into this financial year, can the Secretary of State say whether or not the Department of Health broke its budget for last year?

Mr Hunt: We will find out those figures when the full audit is complete. I just say to the hon. Gentleman that efficiency savings are never easy, but a party with the true interests of NHS patients at heart should support
those efficiency savings, because every pound saved by avoiding waste is one we can spend improving patient care.

Let me therefore outline to the House what we are doing to deliver those efficiencies, as well as to support NHS trusts to return to financial balance. First, we are taking tough measures to reduce the cost of agency staff, including putting caps on total agency spend and limits on the rates paid to those working for agencies. So far, that has saved £290 million, with the market rate for agency nurses down 10% since October and with two thirds of trusts saying that they have benefited. Our plan is to reduce agency spend by £1.2 billion during this financial year. Secondly, we are introducing centralised procurement under the Carter reforms. Already 92 trusts are sharing, for the first time, information on the top 100 products they purchase in real time, and we expect savings of more than £700 million a year during this Parliament as a result. Thirdly, given that the pay bill is about two thirds of a typical hospital’s costs base, we are supporting trusts to improve on the gross inefficiency of the largely paper-based rostering systems used at present. This should also significantly increase flexibility and the work-life balance for staff, as we announced last week. Finally, and perhaps most critically, we will reduce demand for hospital services by a dramatic transformation of out-of-hospital care, as outlined in the five-year forward view. If we meet our ambitions, we will reduce demand by more than £4 billion a year through prevention, improved GP provision, mental health access and integrated health and social care.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** For as long as I can remember, unfortunately, discussions about the NHS have always been reduced to simplistic arguments about whether enough money is being spent on it, and whether efficiency is being improved enough. I think that the Government, in the present financial circumstances, have increased spending and pursued efficiency at least as effectively as any of their predecessors.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real issues that we ought to be considering are the rapid rise in, and the changing nature of, demand on this important service? Will he have time to consider things such as moving to a seven-day service; ending the curious divisions between the hospital service, GPs, community care and local council social services; providing for an ageing population with chronic conditions; and, at the same time, giving extra emphasis to mental health and all the things that have been neglected in the past? All these exchanges such as, “You should be spending more,” and “You are cutting, and we would spend more” are the sterile nonsense pursued by every Opposition that I can recall when they cannot think of anything positive to say.

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. and learned Friend speaks with great wisdom, as he did during the junior doctors’ strike. Perhaps that is based on his experience of featuring in a BMA poster, which was put up across the country, as someone who ignored medical advice, because he smoked his cigar.

My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The crucial issue for the future of the NHS is the simple statistic that by the end of this Parliament we will have 1 million more over-70s to look after in England, and their needs are very different from those of the population whom we had to look after 20, 30 or 40 years ago. In particular, their need to be looked after well at home, before they need expensive hospital treatment, is a transformation. That is why a core part of what we are doing is to transform the services offered in mental health and in general practice, which I will come on to a bit later.

**Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op):** While the Secretary of State is talking about transformation, let me say that I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that we have to start focusing on quality. In the east midlands, for example, the ambulance service has just been judged by the Care Quality Commission to be inadequate when it comes to patient safety. Things are in a real state of difficulty in our NHS. Ambulance services need improvement; what is he going to do about it?

**Mr Hunt:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman.

In fact, I wanted to come on to talk about that perceived tension between money and the quality of care. Until three years ago, we did not have an independent inspection regime to go around ambulance services and tell the service, the public, constituents and Members of Parliament how good the quality of care is in each area. The first step is to have that inspection regime so that we know the truth, and then things start to happen, as is beginning to be the case in ambulance services across the country.

The big point—this is precisely what I wanted to move on to—is the worry, which is shared by many people, that an efficiency ask of this scale might impact on patient care. They should listen to the chief inspector of hospitals, Professor Sir Mike Richards, who points out that financial rigour is one of the routes to excellent quality, and that there is a positive correlation between hospitals offering the best care and those with the lowest deficits. In other words, it is not a choice between good care and good finances; we need both.

**Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con):** Before my right hon. Friend moves on, I want to draw him back to the question of charging international visitors for the use of the NHS. The Government now charges non-EU citizens £200 per person as part of their visa application. Will he tell the House why he has chosen the figure of £200, which seems extremely low? An equivalent private healthcare policy for a year would be £800, £900 or £1,000, and an equivalent level of travel insurance for the same period would be £400 or £500. Is there not an opportunity to tier this and perhaps charge people more as they get older and become more likely to rely on the NHS?

**Mr Hunt:** I recognise why my hon. Friend has asked that question. We do think very hard about the level at which we set that charge, which was introduced for the first time only a couple of years ago. The reason that it is set that low—I recognise that it is quite a low charge—is that a large number of people paying it are students who tend to have low health needs and be low users of the NHS. We want to ensure that we do not create an inadvertent disincentive for people coming to the UK when they can, at the same time, choose to do their studies in Australia and America. However, it is something that we keep constantly under review.
Jake Berry: My right hon. Friend will of course be aware that there is a differential charge for students—some £150 a year rather than £200. Will he go away and consider whether there is a possibility of charging higher earners who come to this country more than a couple of hundred pounds a year, because the charge does seem so low? Will he also specifically look at whether there is a possibility of charging people who are older more, as they are much more likely to rely on the NHS?

Mr Hunt: Let me repeat that we do keep this matter constantly under review. The important thing is that, for the first time, we are charging people who come to the UK on a long-term basis for their use of NHS resources. That is something that did not happen before.

Let me return to the crucial issue of this link between the quality of care and good finances. Why is it that it is so important not to see this as an artificial choice between good care and good finances? Very simply, it is because poor care is about the most expensive thing that a hospital can do. A fall in a hospital will cost the NHS about £1,200, as the patient typically stays for three days longer. A bed sore adds about £2,500 to NHS costs, with a patient staying, on average, 12 days longer. Avoidable mistakes and poor care cost the NHS more than £2 billion a year. We should listen to inspiring leaders such as Dr Gary Kaplan of Virginia Mason hospital in Seattle, which is one of the safest and most efficient hospitals in the world. He said:

“The path to safer care is the same one as the path to lower costs.”

That brings me on to the second way that this Government are fiercely defending our public services, which is our restless determination to raise standards so that people on lower incomes can be confident of the same high quality provision as the wealthiest. To their credit, the last Labour Government succeeded in bringing down NHS waiting times. I hope that that decade is remembered as one when access to NHS services improved. However, because of poor care identified in many hospitals post Mid Staffs, we should surely resolve that this decade must become the one in which we transform the safety and quality of care. Mid Staffs was the lowest point in the history of the NHS, so we must make it a turning point, or a moment that we resolve to offer not just good access to care, but care itself that is the safest and the highest quality available. The record of the past three years shows that we can do just that.

The King’s Fund has given credit to the Government for their focus on safety and quality of care. Patient campaigners have said that the NHS is getting safer and that mortality rates are higher for people admitted at weekends than for people admitted in the week. Last week’s junior doctor contract agreement was a big step forward, but we also need to reform the consultants’ contracts, improve the availability of weekend diagnostic services and increase the number of weekend consultant-led procedures.

Secondly, a seven-day NHS also means a transformation of out-of-hospital services, especially access to an integrated health and social care system that needs to operate over busy weekends as well as during the week. It also means more GP appointments at convenient times, which is why we want everyone to be able to see a GP in the evening or at weekends. We are backing general practice with a £2.4 billion increase in its budget.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): One group of people who particularly need integrated care are those who are addicted, as their life chances are most blighted. They need to be able to make a full recovery. Will the Secretary of State tell us what has been done to support that full recovery? Like me, is he looking forward to hearing the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), conclude the debate, as we will perhaps hear how blighted communities are impacted by high-stakes fixed odds betting terminals? I would like to hear what is being done by the Government on that, as we need to act now to show that we have an all-round approach to improving life chances.

Mr Hunt: It is a pleasure to sit on the Treasury Bench with my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy for the first time in several years. I will leave him to respond to that point, but I will make a broader point in response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) which is that the change we need to make in the NHS is to prevention rather than cure. If we can stop people becoming addicted in the first place, whether to drugs, alcohol or gambling, we will reduce costs for the NHS in the long term. That is the purpose of many of our plans.

Thirdly, a seven-day NHS requires a big improvement in access to 24/7 mental health crisis care, so that whenever a problem arises we are there promptly for some of our most vulnerable people. We will deliver that alongside our broader plans to enable 1 million more people with mental health problems to access support each year by 2020.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): May I commend the Government for accepting the majority of the recommendations from the independent mental health taskforce and allocating £1 billion to implement them? The Secretary of State has been talking about system change within the NHS. To deliver on the taskforce’s recommendations, we need system change to make sure that we have the sort of mental health services that the people of this country deserve.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge and as chairman of the all-party group on mental health. He is absolutely right to say that we need system change. The system change we need is to stop putting mental health in a silo, but instead to understand that it needs to be part of the whole picture of treatment when a person is in hospital or with their GP; it needs to be integrated with people’s physical health needs. We need to look at the whole person. We will not get all the way there in this Parliament, but I think the taskforce gives us a good and healthy ambition for this Parliament and I am confident we will realise it.

Norman Lamb: I am pleased to hear the Secretary of State acknowledge the importance of quality of care in mental health as well, but of course there are also problems in areas such as learning disability, where
there are some highly vulnerable individuals. After the shocking Southern Health exposed, does he really not think that the leadership of that organisation, which presided over over some dreadful events and so many unexpected deaths not being investigated, need to be held accountable and to move on?

Mr Hunt: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the chair of that organisation has stepped down, but he is absolutely right about accountability. Accountability needs to be about not just individual organisations within the NHS, but the people commissioning mental health care and care for people with learning disabilities. That is why, from July, we will for the first time be publishing Ofsted ratings on the quality of mental health provision and of provision for people with learning disabilities by clinical commissioning groups, so that we can see where the weak areas are and sort them out.

I conclude on quality by saying that important though a seven-day NHS is, we need to go further if we really are to make NHS care the safest and highest quality in the world. According to the respected Hogan and Black analysis, we have 150 avoidable deaths in our NHS every week. That is 3.6% of all hospital deaths with a 50% or more chance that that death could have been avoided. In the United States, Johns Hopkins University said earlier this month that medical error was the third biggest killer after cancer and heart disease, causing 250,000 deaths in the United States alone every year. That is why this year England will become the first country in the world to lead a transparency revolution in which every major hospital will publish its own estimate of its avoidable deaths and its own plans to reduce them. This year, we will focus particularly on reducing maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal death and harm, with plans I hope to outline soon to the House.

If we are to do that, perhaps most difficult of all will be transforming a blame culture found in too many parts of the NHS that still makes it far too hard for doctors and nurses to speak openly about medical error. Among other measures, we have set up a new healthcare safety investigation branch to conduct no-blame investigations when we have tragedies. It is modelled on the highly successful air accidents investigation branch. As in the airline industry, our model for reducing avoidable death must be transparency, openness and a learning culture that supports rather than blames front-line professionals, who in the vast majority of cases are only trying to do their best. Part of that new culture of responsibility and accountability must be a return to proper continuity of care, which is why this Government have brought back named GPs for every patient, which had been abolished in 2004, and are introducing lead consultants for people who go to hospital with complex conditions.

In conclusion, for this Government defending the NHS involves higher standards of care, wise use of resources and secure funding from a strong economy. Because the challenges we face in England are the same as in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—indeed, the same as in developed countries all over the world—we should exercise caution in politicising those pressures, or we simply invite scrutiny of the relative performance of the NHS in different parts of the UK, which often shows that those who complain loudest about NHS performance in England are themselves responsible for even worse performance elsewhere.

What this Government want is simple: a safer seven-day service, backed by funding from a strong economy. Already we have delivered more doctors, more nurses, more operations and better care than ever before in NHS history.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hunt: I am about to conclude, so I shall finish, if I may.

But with that achievement comes a renewed ambition that our NHS should continue to blaze a trail across the world for the quality and safety of its care, and that is how this Government will continue to defend our biggest and most cherished public service.

4.6 pm

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I start by thanking the Health Secretary for joining us today. I know that he does not always choose to respond to me when I bring matters to this Chamber, so I am grateful to him for being here. I am conscious that, if the Cabinet deckchairs shift around after the referendum, this may be our last parliamentary exchange. If that turns out to be the case, let me put on record my best wishes for whatever he goes on to do, but may I gently suggest that a future career in resolving employment disputes may not be for him?

The topic of this debate is defending public services, and as the House would expect, I shall focus my remarks on what is happening to our health and care service. Listening to the Health Secretary today, one could be forgiven for thinking that all is well. One would have no idea that hospital finances are at breaking point, waiting lists are approaching a record high, and the NHS is facing a workforce crisis with endemic understaffing and broken morale. Put together, the triple whammy of challenges on the finances, quality of care and the workforce put the NHS in a very precarious position. Let me take each of those challenges in turn.

First, on the finances, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) called it sterile nonsense, but it is fundamental to whether hospitals and GPs can continue to deliver the care needed for our ageing and growing population. One of the Health Secretary’s favourite soundbites recently has been to claim that the Government are giving the NHS the sixth biggest funding increase in its history. Indeed, he has made that claim six times in this Chamber over recent months, so I was surprised that it did not feature in his speech today. However, I think I may have an explanation for that omission. Last week the King’s Fund and the Health Foundation, two well-respected independent think-tanks, looked into his claim. I have a copy of their analysis, which states:

“We’re afraid to say, although perhaps not surprised . . . that we have a very different figure.”

They go on to say that, rather than being the sixth largest funding increase in NHS history,

“we find that . . . this year it is in fact the 28th largest funding increase since 1975”.

[Norman Lamb]
Mr Jeremy Hunt: I completely defend the methodology that we used to come up with our figure, but does the hon. Lady not see the irony? She is criticising a £3.8 billion increase in NHS funding this year, when Labour’s own plans at the election last year were for a £2.5 billion increase—£1.3 billion less than this Government have delivered.

Heidi Alexander: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that intervention. He might want to rake over the last general election but he clearly does not want to talk about the crisis in NHS finances today, with a £2.45 billion deficit among hospitals at the end of this year, cuts to public health spending, and £4.5 billion coming out of the adult social care budget over the past five years. I am quite happy to debate NHS finances with him. The truth is that the NHS is getting a smaller increase this year than it got in every single year of the previous Labour Government.

The King’s Fund and the Health Foundation concluded: “Getting public spending figures right is important, otherwise they can mislead and detract from the real issues. The fact is that the NHS is halfway through its most austere decade ever, with all NHS services facing huge pressures.”

Sir Simon Burns: May I recommend that the hon. Lady read a recently published book by Tom Bower which shows the utter failure of the Blair Government, who pumped billions of pounds into the NHS over a period of years but had no control over it and made no attempt to increase productivity, so that from 1998 performance flatlined for six years, and the then Health Secretary was forced to bring back health policies that they had abandoned in ’97?

Heidi Alexander: I am grateful for the reading advice from the right hon. Gentleman, but I simply say this: I am very happy to defend the record of the previous Labour Government, who trebled the NHS budget and had the highest-ever public satisfaction ratings and the lowest-ever waiting lists.

We should be crystal clear about the crisis that we face today. The decade from 2010 to 2020 is set to be marked by the biggest sustained funding squeeze on the NHS ever. As a percentage of GDP, spending on health is set to fall from 6.3% in 2009-10 to just 5.4% by the end of the decade.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): People who are listening to this debate will want some clarification. Is the hon. Lady denying the fact that if Labour were in government it would not have increased NHS spending in the way that this Government have done? I think she needs to be clear on that point.

Heidi Alexander: We were very clear at the last election that we would have had an emergency Budget to put every penny that the NHS needs into its funding.

I was talking about the reduction of NHS spending as a proportion of GDP. In terms of real funding, the House of Commons Library has shown that, if spending as a percentage of GDP had been maintained at Labour levels, by 2020, £20 billion more would be being spent on the NHS each year. That demonstrates the scale of underfunding that we have already seen and just how tough the coming years are going to be. That is not to mention the deep cuts to adult social care, which have piled the pressure on to hospitals, and the £22 billion-worth of so-called efficiency savings that this Government have signed up to. I have yet to meet anyone who works in the NHS who thinks that efficiencies on this scale are possible without harming patient care.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I do not disagree with the hon. Lady that there are big pressures on the horizon, but can she say how much, beyond Simon Stevens’ predicted costs, her party is now pledged to spend on the national health service, because so far all we have heard is prevarication?

Heidi Alexander: I am not going to be drawn into giving figures here at the Dispatch Box today. Yesterday the Life Sciences Minister was tweeting that we need a big public debate about funding of the NHS.

Three days ago, the scale of this crisis was laid bare. NHS Improvement, the body responsible for overseeing hospitals, published figures showing that NHS trusts ended 2015-16 with a record £2.45 billion deficit—I repeat, £2.45 billion. To give hon. Members some context, that is treble the deficit from last year. What is the key cause? It is the spiralling agency spend because of staff shortages. When this Government talk about more money going in, let us remember that, before that money gets to the frontline, the bulk of it will be spent on paying off the bills from last year.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady give us an idea of how much extra money and how many more personnel she thinks we need to deal with current levels of migration?

Heidi Alexander: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I actually think that the health service benefits more from migrants than the amount migrants cost it.

I want to tell all Conservative Members that Labour Members are not going to take any lessons about NHS spending from the party that has created the biggest black hole in NHS finances in history. It has got so bad that the Health Secretary cannot even guarantee his Department will not blow its budget. It is chaos: Ministers blame hospital bosses, hospital bosses blame Ministers and all the while patients are paying the price.

Faced with this crisis, we might have thought that the NHS would get more than a passing reference in the Queen’s Speech, but that was not the case. What is the Government’s answer when it comes to the NHS? Fear not: they will introduce a Bill to crack down on health tourism. With all the problems the NHS is facing, this Government want to focus Parliament’s time on debating a Bill that risks turning NHS staff into border guards.

Let me be clear: if such measures are about getting the taxpayer a better deal and ensuring fairness in the system, we will not oppose them. However, I must ask, given everything that is happening in the NHS right now, whether Ministers’ No. 1 priority is really to introduce legislation to charge migrants and their children for going to A&E. If so, my fear is that we will see the kind of dog-whistle politics that was so rejected by the people of London earlier this month, and which I hope will be rejected again on 23 June. The truth is that the cash crisis in the NHS is not the fault of migrants; it is the fault of Ministers.
**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I genuinely believe and have no doubt that the hon. Lady is committed to the NHS and I share her desire for a wider public debate, but does she agree that, to have a meaningful debate and to add value to her critique, she needs to set out what she sees as the financial requirements of the NHS, otherwise such a debate will not be very helpful?

**Heidi Alexander:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but he will just have to watch this space.

As I was saying, the truth is that the cash crisis in the NHS is the fault not of migrants, but of Ministers. Cuts to nurse training places during the last Parliament have created workforce shortages and led to a reliance on expensive agency staff. Cuts to social care have left older people without the help and support they need to remain independent at home, putting huge pressure on NHS services. The underfunding of GPs has left too many people unable to get timely appointments, which means they are often left with nowhere to turn but A&E. The financial crisis is a massive headache for NHS accountants, but we all know it can mean life or death for patients. Waiting time targets, which exist to ensure swift access to care, have been missed so often that failure has become the norm.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very political attack. In that context, would she care to explain why the performance for accident and emergency admission is far worse in Labour-run Wales than it is in England?

**Heidi Alexander:** I would have thought better of the hon. Gentleman, but it is clear Conservative Members want to talk about anything other than their record in England. A&E performance is currently the worst since records began, taking us back to the bad old days of the 1980s, when patients were left waiting on trolleys in hospital corridors. The figures speak for themselves.

Mr Jeremy Hunt: May I ask the hon. Lady to consider again what my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) said? If A&E performance is the fault of Conservative politicians in England, is it not also the fault of Labour politicians in Wales, where it is 11% worse?

**Heidi Alexander:** From memory, I seem to think the budget going to the NHS in Wales has been cut in Westminster.

Let us have a look at the figures. In March 2011—[Interruption.] The Health Secretary would do well to listen to these figures, because I am about to tell him the record of his term in office. In March 2011, 8,602 patients waited more than four hours on trolleys because no beds were available. Four years later, the figure was up sixfold, to 53,641. In March 2011, just one patient had to wait longer than 12 hours on a trolley. Four years later, 350 patients suffered that experience. The NHS waiting list now stands at almost 3.7 million people—the equivalent of one in every 15 people in England. Only 67% of ambulance call-outs to the most serious life-threatening cases are being responded to within eight minutes.

I could reel off more statistics, but I will instead read a letter that I received the other week:

“Dear Ms Alexander,

I recently had the misfortune of using the A&E at my local hospital in Margate. My wife feels that I was lucky to escape with my life.

My experience has convinced me that our health service has never been more under threat than since Mrs Thatcher.

The fact that I was sent home after 4 hours without seeing a doctor and returned by emergency ambulance with a now perforated appendix I blame mostly on the conflict between the Health Secretary and the Junior Doctors. Had this been resolved he would have been able to concentrate on the woeful lack of resources our NHS faces.”

Take the experience—[Interruption.] / The Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Health Secretary says, “Show us the letter”. I have it here, and I got the permission of the individual who wrote to me before referring to it.

Let me refer to another example—the experience of Mr Steven Blanchard at the Swindon Great Western hospital last November. He said in an open letter to the Swindon Advertiser:

“We arrived at 6.40pm and were asked to sit with about 15 others in the unit. It became apparent this was a place of great suffering and misery…Firstly, there was a lady who was doubled up in pain who had been promised painkillers three hours before and I witnessed her mother go again and again to reception until she was begging for pain relief for her near hysterical daughter.”

Another old lady

“who had been left on her own by her son…was sat picking at a cannula in her arm trying to pull it out…A very frail and sick old man was sat in a wheelchair and he had been in the unit since 8am. He kept saying over and over ‘a cup of tea would be nice’…then I watched as urine trailed from him and fell on to the floor beneath the chair…At 10.30pm he was taken to a ward after 14 hours.”

Mr Blanchard said that he and his partner were finally seen at 1.20 am, and stated:

“Never before have I seen people crying out of desperation…I don’t know what is to blame or whether it’s lack of money or lack of staff but this place was what I can only describe as ‘hell on earth’.”

That is what is happening in our NHS in 2016, and such stories are becoming more common. Ministers may not like to hear it, but they need to start taking responsibility.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: There are always pressures in the giant national health service as demand grows and expectations rise, and there always will be. The hon. Lady could have made this speech as an Opposition spokesman 10, 20, 30 or 40 years ago. After 20 minutes, she has not yet suggested a solitary policy proposal as an alternative to the Secretary of State’s, and she has not said whether she agrees with him about seven-day working and all the rest of it. She is describing sad incidents in which things have obviously not been ideal or as they should be, but does she have anything to suggest by way of policy that may contribute to helping the NHS in future?

**Heidi Alexander:** Having had these exchanges over the Dispatch Box for the past nine months, it strikes me that the reality of what people are experiencing in hospitals is sometimes missing from these debates, and that is why I thought it important to quote from those letters.
On workforce challenges, nothing sums up this Government’s failure on the NHS more than the way that they have treated NHS staff. We have had pay freezes, cuts to training places, and the first all-out doctors strike in 40 years—a strike that the Health Secretary did not even try to prevent; in fact he provoked it. He has spoken about seven-day services, but he said little about how he proposes to improve weekend care without the extra resources and staff that the NHS will need. We can only assume that his plan is to spread existing resources more thinly, asking staff to do even more and putting patients at risk during the week.

The Health Secretary also failed to say what experts think about his approach. For example, Professor Sir Bruce Keogh said that the NHS was making good progress towards improving weekend care, but that that became “derailed” when the Health Secretary started linking seven-day services to junior doctors. Fiona Godlee, editor of The British Medical Journal, said that, by picking a fight with doctors, the Health Secretary has set back NHS England’s established programme of work on improving services at weekends. Not only does he have no plan to deliver a seven-day NHS, but he has ripped up the plan that was already in place to improve weekend care. You couldn’t make it up, Mr Speaker.

The Health Secretary often reads out his usual list of stats on staff numbers, but to know what is really happening we must look beyond the spin. A recent survey of nurses by Unison found that almost two-thirds believe that staffing levels have got worse in the past year, and 63% said that they felt there were inadequate numbers of staff on the wards to ensure safe and dignified care—that figure was up from 45% the year before. Whether GPs, nurses or midwives, numbers of staff have not kept pace with demand.

Analysis by the House of Commons Library shows that, in the Labour Government’s last year in office, there were 70 GPs per 100,000 of the population, but that figure has now fallen to just 66. In Labour’s last year, there were 679 nurses per 100,000 of the population, but there are now just 665. No wonder that doctors and nurses feel pushed to breaking point. If we do not look after the workforce, patients will suffer. There was nothing in the Queen’s Speech to help the workforce—no U-turn on scrapping NHS bursaries, no plan to train the staff needed. The Queen’s Speech is a missed opportunity because there is no announcement about increasing capacity in those new medical schools that Labour brought in.

Heidi Alexander: My hon. Friend is, as always, entirely right.

The Government have run out of answers and they have run out of people to blame. Whichever way we look at it—funding, quality of care or staffing—there is a record of failure. That will be the Health Secretary’s legacy. He rightly said “Never again” to Mid Staffs, but his time in office has been marked by tragedy and failure at Southern Health. He talks about patient safety, but his actions have made the NHS less safe.

The Government have failed patients and staff. They have proved the old saying true: we simply cannot trust the Tories with the NHS.

4.30 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome the legislative programme that the Government have set out in the Queen’s Speech, particularly on improving life chances for disadvantaged people, which is in the very best traditions of one nation Conservatives.

In opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State demonstrated his strategic vision and his clear personal commitment to improving life chances through the NHS. We owe him a debt of gratitude for the work he is doing in that respect, and for his work on ensuring that the NHS is fit for the future. There has been a great deal of discussion about NHS budgets—perhaps there was a lack of clarity from the Labour Front Benchers on their budgets—but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, we need to talk not only about the budget, but how we use that money. That is the point I will focus on in my contribution.

In this Session, whether through legislation or other ministerial action, we need to ensure that we have a nimble, agile and responsive NHS for the future. We need public services that respond to people’s needs as they change. People’s lives are changing: we are living longer and working longer, and we have growing communities with more housing. The NHS, not simply Ministers, needs to respond to those changes to reflect our changing community needs.

The NHS cannot afford to lag behind its users—its patients—in its thinking. That is why I believe that, more than ever, the Government need in this Session to ensure that there is more devolution to local government to join together NHS spending and social care spending, which will help to make sure that our money goes further in future.

Sir Bruce Keogh, medical director of the NHS, has set out a compelling vision for the NHS in this changed world. People with non-life-threatening needs should have access to care as close to home as possible, and people with life-threatening conditions should be treated in centres with the very best 24/7 consultant-led care. That is safer and better for patients.

Like many constituencies throughout the south-east, my community has grown not only in recent years, but throughout the recession. We need the Secretary of State to press for a nimble NHS that can respond to the needs of our changing community.
changes in our community, and hopefully plan for the future. We need clinical commissioning groups to work to ensure that new doctors’ surgeries are delivered where there are new houses, and that hospitals deliver the very best every day of the week.

In my constituency, we are truly fortunate to have clinicians who are already ahead of that thinking. The Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust already has fully funded plans, a site with planning permission and support across the community to establish a 24/7 critical treatment hospital, bringing together emergency care for the sickest patients in one site, leaving those requiring walk-in A&E, planned surgery and out-patient care to our local hospitals in Andover, Winchester and Basingstoke.

That approach has been developed by clinicians to keep services safe and sustainable, and I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that we listen to clinicians carefully. They often see the needs of the NHS changing before others do, and we need to ensure that those changes are put in place. The NHS investigation unit is looking at how we deal with delays at A&E, because the changes proposed by clinicians have not been brought forward in a timely manner. We are now awaiting a new models of care programme, and sustainability and transformation plan. In the meantime, my constituents regularly face more than four-hour waits in A&E, which I hope will come to an end when the long-awaited centralised critical treatment hospital is brought to fruition—after four years of planning and discussion.

Within the NHS programme for the future, we need to find ways to respond to the needs of other groups of people. The first Women and Equalities Committee report brought the needs of transgender people to the fore. It was clear from the evidence we received that access to primary and specialist care for this group of people was far from routine and, in some cases, quite shocking—another example of the need for the NHS to respond carefully to the needs of communities. I do not underestimate the challenges GPs face in our communities, but we need to ensure that they are tasked with, and deliver on, treatment and care plans for every group of people and do not leave minority groups out.

We live in a country with a proud tradition of fairness and some of the most comprehensive legislation in the world to protect disadvantaged people—the theme of the Queen’s Speech. Too often, however, legislation does not create the change in the delivery of public services that we in this House would perhaps like to see. I hope the Government will use every Bill in this parliamentary Session to challenge themselves on whether there is more that can be done to support disadvantaged people: whether, in the modern transport Bill, the Government could consider how disabled and older people can benefit from important developments in transportation; whether, in the local growth and jobs Bill, the Government could look more closely at how they can bring that into play. While we might have

achievements of disabled children in schools. Despite a great deal of work in recent years, we still need to be better at unlocking the educational achievement of disabled children. At the moment just 18% of children with special educational needs achieve good development, compared with 65% without.

The prison reform Bill will of course be pivotal in supporting disadvantaged people. I am sure there will be a great deal of debate on that today, but I would like very briefly to touch on the importance, in relation to the Bill of Rights, of the need to ensure that we really do tackle the disadvantage that people face. I refer again to the need to address the rights of transgender and non-gendered people. They suffer great disadvantage in our society. If we are to have a Bill of Rights, we need to tackle this issue head on.

Before I close, I want to touch on something very close to my heart from when I was a Minister: superfast broadband. I was delighted to see the Government propose a Bill to ensure that superfast broadband is seen as the essential utility that it is. I am sure the Health Secretary will have responded to this with great joy too, given his previous role as Culture Secretary.

The experience of my local authority means that I will be looking very carefully at the detail of the Bill. My local authority in Basingstoke has long seen superfast broadband as essential infrastructure, but when trying to make it happen, in terms of planning conditions for building, it has been blocked pretty firmly by the local planning inspector. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Hampshire County Council have looked long and hard at how they might make progress on this. I am sure they will welcome, as I do, the measures in the Queen’s Speech. Indeed, they have asked the Government for superfast broadband to be a material planning consideration. I hope the Minister will clarify that superfast broadband will be a material planning consideration and indicate when that will come into force. My local community, like those of many other Members, has seen a rapid increase in the rate of house building, and we need to know when this might come into play.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Coventry has also experienced problems with BT’s delivery of broadband. That is one of the big problems. I know that Ministers have been looking at this, but we need urgent action. BT is a big problem in this regard.

Mrs Miller: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that many Members have made, but I am making a very different point—about ensuring that local authorities can make superfast broadband an essential prerequisite for new house building. No one can build a house in this country without water, electricity and the many other utilities we have come to rely on. Superfast broadband has fast become a basic utility of life, and that is how it needs to be viewed; I am sure that other Members will mention the importance of those who put the service into place.

The Government have a powerful opportunity to continue on their mission to improve life chances for disadvantaged people, not only in the obvious Bills, such as the one on prison reform, but in every single Bill on their agenda. I urge Ministers to consider carefully how they can bring that into play. While we might have
some of the best equalities legislation in the world, when it comes to putting it into practice, we sometimes fall short. We need to admit that and up our game.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I warn Back Benchers that after the SNP spokesman, I will impose a 10-minute limit on speeches.

4.41 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I hope the House will forgive me if I reflect on an historic event that took place in Scotland this weekend. For the first time in 114 years, the Scottish cup returned to Leith, in Edinburgh, when Hibernian won the cup final. For many years those of us who are fans of Hibernian have been used to taunts that the last time the cup came back to Easter Road, Buffalo Bill was in town and Queen Victoria was on the throne. At least those taunts are over. The hurt of losing 10 cup finals—of traipsing to Hampden to face defeat after defeat—is over. A fine game, between two teams entertaining the fans, took place in Scotland on Saturday, and I am delighted that the people of Edinburgh and Leith can celebrate a cup victory at long last.

There is little to be welcomed in the Queen’s Speech. It was a missed opportunity for progressive action on pensions, social security and the economy. The UK Government are caught in a civil war over Europe and have delivered a Queen’s Speech with a poverty of ambition. The Tory party is at war with itself and its rhetoric on life chances. The scrapping of legal commitments to tackle child poverty, the four-year freeze on working-age benefits, including child tax credit, working tax credit and jobseeker’s allowance, will see families losing up to 12% of the real value of their benefits and tax credits by 2020. We have seen the butchering of the very aspect of universal credit that might have created work incentives and the hammering of low-paid workers, to name just a few of the regressive cuts that will decrease the life chances of children across these islands.

John Redwood: Why do the SNP Government not put up taxes in Scotland if they feel that they need to spend more money?

Ian Blackford: One of the things we want to do in Scotland is to deliver economic prosperity and a fairer society. We want to invest in our economy in order to grow the economy. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that we fought the general election in Scotland on a progressive manifesto that would have seen us investing over the lifetime of this Parliament, throughout the UK, £140 billion by increasing Government spending by 0.5%—investing in innovation and in our productive potential with a view to delivering confidence and growth in the economy. This was a sensible programme that would still have seen both the debt and the deficit reduced. It was a sensible way of dealing with the problems we face both in Scotland and in the rest of the UK.

It does not matter how many times the Government use the soundbite of “life chances” because in reality the so-called assault on poverty is a crusade to refine what poverty is and a shift towards blaming individuals rather than the Government, so that their austerity agenda can continue to attack the most disadvantaged in our society.

Jake Berry: One could perhaps compare the Conservative party’s disagreement over Europe to two men fighting over one woman. Is it possible that after such a catastrophe everyone can come back together as friends?

Ian Blackford: I am saddened at the depths to which the hon. Gentleman stoops. I am delighted to have friends and colleagues representing my party here and in government in Edinburgh, and they will continue to have our full support.

The Queen’s Speech demonstrates that the Tories are a threat to high-quality, well-funded public services. Having listened to the Leader of the Opposition last week on the Queen’s Speech, we are none the wiser as to what the Labour party is offering. We could have asked him, of course, had he been taking interventions, rather than forcing us to sit and listen to a monologue that lost the attention of his own party, never mind that of the House.

Some measures are to be welcomed, such as the likely delivery of the universal service obligation on broadband, as mentioned by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke, but the Queen’s Speech delivers nothing on pension reform for the WASPI women, on tax simplification or on social security, and no major action on the economy to boost exports and productivity.

The Conservatives have orchestrated some truly devastating cuts that have destroyed the safety net that social security should provide. We see through their rhetoric on life chances. The scrapping of legal commitments to tackle child poverty, the four-year freeze on working-age benefits, including child tax credit, working tax credit and jobseeker’s allowance, will see families losing up to 12% of the real value of their benefits and tax credits by 2020. We have seen the butchering of the very aspect of universal credit that might have created work incentives and the hammering of low-paid workers, to name just a few of the regressive cuts that will decrease the life chances of children across these islands.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that all the rhetoric about the life chances strategy is incompatible with the austerity agenda that is all about balancing the books on the backs of the poor?

Ian Blackford: My hon. Friend is correct: we need to invest in our children and in our productive potential, giving life chances through opportunities, which are badly missing from this Government’s approach.

Imran Hussain, the director of policy for the Child Poverty Action Group, said:

“There is a disconnect between what the government is doing and saying. You can’t spread life chances when child poverty is expected to rise steeply.”

He said that there was “very little evidence about poverty being caused by addictions or family breakdown”.

Recent Office for National Statistics figures show the true scale of poverty in the UK, with almost a third of the population experiencing poverty at least once between 2011 and 2014. The Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis of February 2016 found that absolute child poverty is expected to increase from 15.1% in 2015-16 to 18.3% in 2020-21. We do not want lectures from the Conservatives on improving life chances; all the evidence shows that exactly the opposite is happening.
What would it take for the Conservatives to wake up to the reality that increased child poverty is a direct consequence of their austerity agenda? Their attempt to disguise cuts with this life chances agenda is transparent. If the Government want to lift children out of poverty and give them an equal start in life, they must reverse their punitive cuts and be more ambitious about tackling in-work poverty.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case against austerity, with which I agree, but the SNP Holyrood Administration in Edinburgh is forcing £130 million of cuts on Glasgow City Council, which covers one of the poorest areas in the country. How does that measure up with what he has been saying?

Ian Blackford: One of the things we have done since being in government in Edinburgh since 2007 is to protect local government. What we face is the consequence of the cuts that have come from Westminster. I am delighted that an SNP Government have, through the council tax freeze, saved individuals in a typical band D house £1,500—protecting the individuals, while at the same time protecting the budgets of councils. That is what the SNP Government have done in Edinburgh.

In Scotland, the SNP Government have protected public services, despite the cuts to the Scottish budget. With cuts to Scottish public services handed down from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, lacking in compassion and empathy, the poorest and the weakest in our society are paying the price for Tory austerity.

The SNP has put forward a credible, progressive alternative to the Queen's Speech, proving once again that it is the only real opposition to the Government in the House of Commons. [Interruption.] In our dreams? Well, let us see what the Labour party is offering. We got nothing from the Leader of the Opposition last week, and we certainly got nothing from the Labour Front Bench. It is little wonder that Labour has fallen in the polls, and fallen to become the third party in Scotland. That is the reality: no hope, no vision, and no agenda from today's Labour party.

Although the debate could be characterised as focusing specifically on defending public services, to my mind, and those of my colleagues, it should be seen in a much wider context. The SNP has published its own Queen's Speech, which offers hope to the people of Scotland. It is based on segments of the market that offer our economy. That plays to our key strengths, and our export capability, and driving investment and jobs into our economy. That plays to our key strengths, and our reputation as a provider of high-quality food and drink. It is also based on segments of the market that offer long-term growth opportunities.

We need to tackle the relative decline of manufacturing in our overall economy that hampers our ability to meet the challenge of delivering prosperity. Growth sectors in the economy, such as biotechnology, can deliver opportunities for jobs and growth. We need a strategy which focuses on manufacturing growth that outstrips the service sector in terms of value added to our economy. That is not to downplay the desire to achieve growth in services, but to recognise that we have an imbalance in our economy that hampers our ability to maximise opportunities for all our people.

We cannot decouple a debate about defending public services from the wider economic agenda, because they are so completely intertwined. We need a well educated, healthy population who can rely not only on our education and health services but on our ability to deliver effective childcare, for example. When Conservative Members talk about small government, they reject the vital role of the state in providing much of the support that allows all of us to achieve our potential.

This Queen's Speech is a missed opportunity to deliver a programme that could offer so much more to those who aspire to a healthier, wealthier and fairer society. We need to tackle inequality, to improve living standards for ordinary workers, to create a fairer society and to
strike an effective balance between prosperity and investment in the public services that underpin a successful society. Today, we are moving away from that.

There is an increasing disparity between executive pay and rates of pay in the mainstream, leading to increased calls for action by shareholders and ultimately to stronger action if moderation cannot be achieved. With wage growth outpacing productivity growth, there are legitimate concerns about the sustainability of real wage growth and, as a consequence, taxation receipts and the ability of the Government to meet their targets, with all that that would entail for the public finances and, no doubt, for investment in our public services.

In short, to secure our public services, we need to tackle the shortcomings of the Government’s economic strategy. Of course we would invest for growth and create opportunities for investment by the private and public sectors, resulting in greater confidence and growth outcomes. Confidence and growth, on the back of modest investment in our public sector, would see the debt and deficit come down, by contrast with policies driven by this Government’s ideological desire to achieve a budget surplus at any cost. The logic behind that desire to achieve a budget surplus almost irrespective of economic circumstances beggars belief. If the Chancellor misses his growth forecasts, as has been the case on numerous occasions, his office can make the strategy work only through tax rises or, more predictably, cuts to public spending.

The trouble with this strategy is that we are now six years into it and it is not working. The squeeze on public spending is hurting and damaging services. Those of us who are old enough to remember the Thatcher Government elected in 1979 will recall the line from the Government that “if it’s not hurting, it’s not working”. Patently, it is hurting and it is not working—\[\text{\textit{Interuption.}}\] It might have been John Major, but it is the same old Tories. The strategy is harming the life chances of people in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Let me return to the Queen’s Speech and the future of the NHS. We strongly disagree with the UK Government’s moves to charge visitors to this country to use the NHS. NHS Scotland will not charge overseas visitors if they need to visit A&E or a casualty department if it involves a sexually transmitted disease or HIV or if they are sectioned under the Mental Health Act. That is the right thing for anyone to do in a civilised society.

\textbf{John Redwood:} Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that the Government are not proposing to charge for emergency treatment in A&E? Surely it is right, however, that if someone comes here and has elective surgery, they should pay the bill and get the money back from their own country.

\textbf{Ian Blackford:} In many cases, we are talking about the Government wanting to charge people who have come here to work and who are already paying their taxes. What a disgraceful way for any Government to behave! That measure is the latest indication that the Tories represent a real and present danger to the NHS.

The Conservatives have mismanaged the junior doctors’ contracts in England and shamefully filibustered the recent debate on a Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) that would have restated the principle of the NHS being public and free.

In the Scottish election, the Scottish Tory leader, Ruth Davidson, stood on a platform of reintroducing prescription charges. Such a measure would be a regressive tax on the ill. It is estimated that the SNP’s abolition of prescription charges has benefited around 600,000 adults living in families with an annual income of less than £16,000.

In England, the Health Secretary—who is no longer in his place—seems to favour confrontation with the health service, but we in Scotland favour a more consensual approach that delivers results. The SNP Scottish Government have delivered record funding for Scotland’s NHS despite Westminster cutting the Scottish budget. They will ensure that the NHS revenue budget rises by £500 million more than inflation by the end of this Parliament, meaning that it will have increased by some £2 billion in total. Health spending in Scotland is already at a record level of £12.4 billion. Under the SNP, the number of employees in the Scottish NHS is at a record high—up by nearly 9% since 2006.

Patient satisfaction with the NHS in Scotland is high, with 86% of people being fairly or very satisfied with local health services, which is up five percentage points under the SNP. That is the result of a popular SNP Government working together with our health professionals to deliver results. Unlike the UK Government, the SNP values and respects the work of all our medical professionals. Were we to move towards a new contract for junior doctors in Scotland, it would only ever be done on the basis of an agreed negotiated settlement. Thank goodness that we are still wedded to the principles of Beveridge in Scotland and will protect the ethos of the health service as a public asset for the common good.

Turning to further and higher education, one of our driving principles is that access should be based on ability, not ability to pay. Tuition fees of £9,000 and potentially more remain a heavy burden on the working families and students of England, and the UK Government must rule out the Higher Education and Research Bill raising the cap. The SNP has guaranteed free university education for all in Scotland, but Ruth Davidson and the Tories would have tuition fees north of the border if they ever got near Bute House.

\textbf{Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab):} Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the SNP secured free higher education by butchering the further education budget, affecting some of the poorest in the community and those who need FE’s assistance most?

\textbf{Ian Blackford:} No, I will not, because that is not true. Full-time places at Scottish colleges have increased, and I will return to that point.

Ruth Davidson would want to introduce tuition fees in Scotland by the back door. Down here, the Tories are all for front-door fees. In Scotland, the Tories are all about back-door fees. The doors are locked to many who want to participate in education unless they can pay the price. Front door or back door, with the Tories there is always a price to pay. Young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland are now more likely to participate in higher education by the age of 30 since the SNP came to power—up from 35% of young people in 2007-08 to 41% in 2014-15—which is the result of the SNP’s successful education programme. The number of qualifiers from the most deprived areas increased by over 2,300 from 8,035 in 2007-08 to 10,395 in 2014-15.
Overall, since the SNP came to power in Scotland, the number of Scottish-domiciled, first-degree students going to university has risen by 11%. Last year saw a record number of Scots accepted to universities across the UK. That is a record to be proud of. Rather than carping from the sidelines, the Labour party should perhaps get behind what the SNP has delivered in Scotland for the people of our country.

The Scottish Funding Council has invested more than £76 million in additional widening access and articulation places over the past three years and continues to fund a wide range of other initiatives to support access. We will ensure that those who have a care experience and who meet minimum entry requirements will be guaranteed the offer of a university place and a non-repayable bursary of £7,625. In Scotland, we recognise that access based on ability, investing in our human capital, is the right thing to do. That is a non-negotiable principle. It is price worth paying for our children and our future. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) said some time ago:

“The rocks will melt with the sun before”

the SNP imposes tuition fees on Scotland’s students.

There is little good news for young people. Whether someone is young and looking to start a journey towards eventual retirement or is nearing retirement, there is much to fear from this Government. Given the injustices for many women, the UK residents living in many overseas countries suffering from frozen pensions, or the constant tinkering with pensions that undermines saving, there is little for which to commend this Government. The Government are playing a risky game on pensions; the new lifetime ISA muddies the waters in an already complex area. ISA savings from taxed income undercut the pension saving from pre-tax income—in other words, the Chancellor has found a convenient tool to increase tax receipts today, but that is not necessarily good news for individual savers. According to the Association of British Insurers, presented with a choice, no employee will be better off saving into a lifetime ISA than a workplace pension because of the loss of employer contributions. ABI calculations indicate that the long-term cost of foregoing employer contributions would be substantial—for a basic-rate taxpayer, the impact would be savings of roughly one third less by the age of 60.

Jake Berry: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point, but does he not accept that one benefit of people saving for their retirement through an ISA is that it gives considerably more flexibility? As we go on our life journey, there are often times when we may want to draw down some of that money—for example, for a deposit to buy a house. Does he not see this as being about consumer choice? There is probably room for both of these things, although it is extremely important that we protect the existing pensions system as well.

Ian Blackford: This is a vastly important issue, and I genuinely want to work with the Government on it. All of us in this place have a collective responsibility to get pensions right. I will accept that there is a shared concern across the House, with a recognition that pension saving is not at a sustainable level in this country. My problem with the lifetime ISA proposal is that it undermines what should be the best route for all, which should be saving through the new auto-enrolment, with the incentives that are there. Of course, that will be discussed when the plans are presented to Parliament, but I say to the Government that they should be very careful with what they are doing, because we all share the ambition to get this right. I make the offer to the Government that we are prepared to work together to make sure that we get the best mechanisms to increase pension savings in this country.

Pension saving is at a crisis point, and no amount of regulation will right that problem—[Interruption.] I can hear some guffawing; I will try to wrap up my remarks, but I have been very generous in taking interventions from across the Floor. We need a fundamental overhaul of the pensions system. The Tories need to be more ambitious on pension reform and find real solutions that incentivise pension saving. The SNP has long called for the establishment of an independent pension commission to look holistically at pension reform, focusing on existing inequalities and paving the way forward for a fair, universal pensions system.

We must also prioritise fraud and scam prevention. Kate Smith, head of pensions at Aegon UK, commented that fraud and scams that pensioners are vulnerable to should really have been tackled in the pensions Bill. She said:

“I’m extremely disappointed that the government has failed to use the Queens Speech as an opportunity to tackle the ever-growing threat of pensions fraud via legalisation. We still need to look at ways for the industry, regulators and pension industry to work together to raise the profile of pensions fraud to stamp it out and protect savers.”

I am going to wrap up my remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, but let me just say that nearly 1 million people aged over 75 live in poverty and need more help from the Government, according to a report by City University London and Independent Age. It also suggests that the income of those aged over 75 is, on average, £3,000 a year less than that of younger pensioners. Those figures suggest the vital need for a sustainable income in retirement to be available for our older generation, and the Government must do more now to address that. There is so much that needs to be addressed to give confidence to savers and pensioners.

Our alternative Queen’s Speech proposed a universal pensions Bill to support a more progressive pensions system. Such a Bill would establish an independent pensions commission to investigate the inequalities in current and future proposed pension policies; fund transitional arrangements for WASPI women affected by the rapid pace of increases in the state pension age; and allow for further development of access to automatic enrolment and further options to incentivise pension saving. The complexity of the pension system is a real turn-off for savers, preventing them from shopping around or making sound savings choices. Just last week, the Bank of England’s chief economist, Andy Haldane, said that the British pension system was so complicated that even he failed to understand it, and he warned of the damaging consequences that that presents for consumers as they approach retirement. Conversations with countless experts and independent financial advisers have confirmed for me only one thing: they have no clue either.

That comment about having no clue could equally be made about the Government in the Queen’s Speech.
have outlined an SNP alternative, delivering a message of hope and vision for the people of Scotland. It is not too late for the Tories to open their ears and, indeed, their minds to a different direction. If the Government seriously want to increase the life chances of our children, they must return to the drawing board on social security cuts and admit that they have got it wrong, as they have done on the economy. Instead of the promised assault on poverty, we have been left with a Government plan that has a poverty of ambition. There is a different way, and I appeal to the Government to make the right political choice and abandon austerity.

5.10 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Queen’s Speech contains an important measure, the Bill of Rights, but we are told that we need to wait and get it correct. I have no problem with that. If there is to be a Bill of Rights, it needs to reflect the liberties and freedoms that have been hard won over many centuries by people and Parliaments in our country.

I welcome the principle behind the Bill of Rights—the simple principle that our ancient and modern liberties should rest on the decisions of this Parliament, to be upheld by MPs, as custodians of those liberties, or to be amended and improved as the British people see fit and as they express their will through general elections. It is extremely difficult to root our liberties and freedoms in inflexible international treaties, or to rely on the judgments of far-away foreign judges, who may not understand the mood, the temper, the history or the culture of our country, rooted in liberty and rooted in a titanic struggle to establish parliamentary control.

There is one obvious omission in the Queen’s Speech, for the reason that we do not yet know the will of the British people on the fundamental issue that overhangs the debates that we will have today and over the next few weeks. Do the British people wish to take back control? Do they wish this Parliament to find within itself the wit, the wisdom and the skill to wrestle back control of our laws, our taxes and our decision-making powers so that we can be freer, more prosperous, more independent and more democratic; or do they not wish us to do that? I earnestly hope that they will want to be on the side of freedom and liberty.

At the moment, we are but a puppet Parliament—a Parliament that struts upon the stage and pretends to be in charge and in control, but is not in charge or in control. Let us take the mighty issue of paying for our public services, which is at the heart of this debate. I am on the side of prosperity, not austerity. I think that we do need to spend more on health and education, and I welcome the extra money that the Government have managed to find. But how much easier it would be if the £7 billion of revenue that we collected from big businesses managed to find. But how much easier it would be if the welcome the extra money that the Government have on the side of prosperity, not austerity. I think that we public services, which is at the heart of this debate. I am in charge and in control, but is not in charge or in Parliament that struts upon the stage and pretends to be

The sadness of the document is that it shows that there is no political agreement whatsoever in the European Union after those negotiations and I am afraid to tell the House that that document makes absolutely no mention whatsoever of any deal or settlement between the United Kingdom Government and the European Union. It makes no mention of our need to abolish the tampon tax, and it makes no mention of our wish to keep our green taxes down at the 5% level because we want to encourage people to have more draught excluders and insulation so that they can keep warm in the winter at lower cost. It is not an unreasonable request, so why is there nothing in the European Union document on that reform that makes it clear that we could do that? There are only two things in that document: one is more centralisation of our future VAT system so that it can collect more and ensure that we are collecting all that it wishes; and the other is some general statement that perhaps at some point in the future, if the European Parliament and all the member states so agree, there could conceivably be some greater flexibility, but it is extremely unlikely.

The Government say that they have made progress in their renegotiation, that there will be some relaxation of the requirements, and that we will get a little bit more power back over the imposition of VAT. However, I have now read the document issued by the European Union after those negotiations and I am afraid to tell the House that that document makes absolutely no mention whatsoever of any deal or settlement between the United Kingdom Government and the European Union. It makes no mention of our need to abolish the tampon tax, and it makes no mention of our wish to keep our green taxes down at the 5% level because we want to encourage people to have more draught excluders and insulation so that they can keep warm in the winter at lower cost. It is not an unreasonable request, so why is there nothing in the European Union document on that reform that makes it clear that we could do that? There are only two things in that document: one is more centralisation of our future VAT system so that it can collect more and ensure that we are collecting all that it wishes; and the other is some general statement that perhaps at some point in the future, if the European Parliament and all the member states so agree, there could conceivably be some greater flexibility, but it is extremely unlikely.

The sadness of the document is that it shows that there is no political agreement whatsoever in the European Union to give back to us the right to impose the taxes that people should pay and that they might accept. There is absolutely no right for this Parliament to do what it clearly wishes to do by overwhelming majority on the issue of the tampon tax and the green tax.

We see before us the parting of the ways with those who believe that it is fine to belong to a subsidiary Parliament that pretends to be able to make choices on the part of the British people, but that has to give away a lot of its money to the European Union, has to accept a series of judgments on things such as trade union law, which it does not like, and has to accept that we are no longer free to make the laws that we need to make to reflect the will of the British people.

Is there nowhere in this Parliament on the Front Benches where we can find the Hampdens, the Miltons and the Cromwells not guilty of our country’s blood, who will rise up and say, “Surely now is the time to take back control, to make sure that we can choose our own laws, to make sure that we can impose our own taxes, to make sure that we can redress the wrongs before we ask people to pay those taxes, to go back to the fundamentals of United Kingdom democracy fought for over many centuries, and to go back to the foundations of democracy as so brilliantly chronicled in the founding documentation
of the United States of America”? We can only say that we have a proper Parliament and not a puppet Parliament if we do those things. More Members need to urge their constituents that now is the time and now is the moment to seize control and to banish the puppet Parliament.

5.18 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood). He speaks with huge passion about these matters, and of course he has always been consistent in his opposition to being a member of the European Union. He also speaks eloquently about why he feels the way that he does.

The European debate—I say this as a former Minister for Europe—has dominated the Government’s agenda to such an extent that this Queen’s Speech is a shadow of what it should be. There is no great ideological commitment in it, so it is difficult to attack too much of it. It is important that, when we get past 23 June, we can then settle down to an intelligent legislative programme that is not dominated by people banging on about Europe—I include myself in that. Although crime has gone down in England and Wales, blue-on-blue crime has increased as far as the EU debate is concerned.

As I mentioned earlier, last Thursday the Minister for Employment was in my constituency with a very big red bus parked outside the biggest temple telling everyone that if we remained in the European Union, there would be a curry crisis and people would not be able to eat curry any more. It is important that we get the European debate into perspective.

As a fellow east midlands MP, you would expect me to say this, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was surprised that there was no mention in the Gracious Speech of Leicester City winning the Premier league, but perhaps that will come next year.

I agree with the Government’s proposals regarding the revolution in the Ministry of Justice and our prisons. I and members of the Select Committee on Home Affairs have been very concerned about, for example, the number of people who go into prison with no interest in drugs and come out addicted to drugs. We are concerned that our prison system is not doing what it was intended to do: to punish, but also to rehabilitate. Although we expected the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), when he was Lord Chancellor, to talk about changing the way we look at prisons, we did not expect this from the current Lord Chancellor, although it was intended to do: to punish, but also to rehabilitate.

The second issue I am interested in and concerned about is extremism. Although the Government are proposing legislation on extremism, I do not think they have gone far enough on the counter-narrative. The Select Committee is about to conclude its year-long inquiry into counter-terrorism. I am concerned, as is the rest of the House, about the number of young British citizens who decide to give up their life in this country and go and fight abroad. The current figure for those who have done so is 800, and 400 have returned so far. I cannot understand why we are not doing enough while they are still here to prevent them from going in the first place. Also, although there are programmes to detoxify those who return to this country, there is always the risk that having gone abroad to fight, whether in Syria or elsewhere, on their return they will retain the poison that was drilled into them abroad. It is important that we treat the counter-narrative seriously. We need to support our police and intelligence services in working out who is going, and work with families so that we can try to persuade people not to go.

Norman Lamb: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that our prisons are a breeding ground for extremism and radicalisation, and that until we address that the flow of new extremists will continue?

Keith Vaz: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is not just about preventing people without a drugs habit going to prison and coming out with one. We have been sending people to places like Belmarsh, which has been described as a place where jihadists seem to be able to influence young people. Knowing his great passion for mental health issues, the right hon. Gentleman reminds me that Simon Cole, the chief constable of Leicestershire, who is the lead on counter-terrorism in the Prevent programme, has talked about the number of jihadists who have mental health problems. These are all issues that we need to confront. We cannot necessarily do it by legislation, but we need to make sure that we have the framework in legislation to provide the resources, the time and the effort to work with people.

My final point concerns the sugar tax. I was delighted when the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced it. We should acknowledge the fact that today is his 45th birthday. I hope he is having a sugarless cake because, as we know, a spoonful of sugar may help the medicine go down, but it is also one of the steps on the way to diabetes. As someone who suffers from type 2 diabetes and chairs the all-party parliamentary diabetes group, I believe the proposed sugar tax will send a clear message out to the retail companies. However, the manufacturers of drinks such as Coca Cola and Red Bull do not have to wait until the sugar tax comes into effect; they can start promoting sugarless drinks now.

I got into a lot of trouble because I did not want the Coca Cola van to come to Leicester at Christmas. I was accused by some people of robbing them of their Christmas. They had decided that the Coca Cola van was so strongly associated with the Christmas spirit—forget about Christianity, the birth of Christ and so on; it was
the Coca Cola van that gave them Christmas—that I was severely criticised. I will make a deal with Coca Cola from the Floor of this House: if the company sends its van to promote non-sugar drinks, I will be happy to welcome it, but promoting a drink containing seven to 10 teaspoons of sugar, cannot be good for the health of our nation.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The right hon. Gentleman should recognise that since 2010 sales of diet drinks have increased by 33%, and in 2014 the crossover point was reached—more people purchased diet drinks than regular drinks.

Keith Vaz: That is a good statistic, for which I thank the hon. Gentleman. The change has come about only because of pressure from parliamentarians and from others outside Parliament, particularly clinicians, who have argued strongly that unless something is done, the health of the nation will be affected. That is why I tabled my urgent question on the obesity strategy. Unless we continue to put pressure on the manufacturers and the retailers, nothing will change.

Although we will have a sugar tax, it is still up to the supermarkets to ensure that they promote sugarless drinks. At Waitrose in Wolverhampton, which is not that far away from your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a kiosk right in the middle of the store displaying only no-sugar products. The drinks with sugar content are put elsewhere. That is what the retailers have to do. The introduction of the sugar tax will encourage retailers and manufacturers to change their ways.

Finally, this is a hospitals and health debate—at least, it was opened by the Health Secretary. I shall not mention video games this time: I leave that to the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy. I am very concerned about proposals from the local health authority to close the Leicester General Hospital. The possibility of reconfiguration is being considered. I have had had discussions with the chair and the chief executive of the hospital trust. I know that we have on the hospital site a world-class diabetes centre run by Professor Melanie Davies as well as Professor Kamlesh Khunti. We need to look very carefully at any plans that will diminish the services available to local people.

The general hospital site has been used by local people for years and years as a hospital site. We were promised a new hospital, accommodation for nurses and all kinds of things in the 29 years that I have represented that city. None of those promises have been realised. Although we in the community and I as the local Member of Parliament are prepared to enter into dialogue with the local health authority over its proposals, if the authority thinks it can close the hospital and give us nothing in return, there will be a bare-knuckle fight to try to preserve those services. I am not attached to the buildings—buildings are just a means of delivering services—but I am attached to the services. It is really important that we ensure that our health services remain the best in the world. I take the Secretary of State at face value: he wants our NHS to be the best in the world, and so do we. In order to achieve that, we need to make sure that it is properly resourced, keeps up with the developments in our population, and provides the expertise that is necessary for the NHS staff, to whom we pay tribute, to do their work so that it retains the best the world has to offer.

5.30 pm

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who, as always, spoke very thoughtfully on a range of subjects, and with great passion in favour of curry and against sugar. However, I was rather surprised that he implicitly endorsed the fundamentally racist immigration policy we currently have in this country whereby any number of white Europeans can come and settle here, with or without jobs, whereas a curry chef from Bangladesh related to people in this country, with an offer of a job, cannot. That is implicit, inevitable and unavoidable for as long as we remain members of the European Union, and that is why so many members of the ethnic minority community in my seat and elsewhere will be voting to leave on 23 June.

I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is in order for me to speak to the amendment in the names of 54 right hon. and hon. Members, including me, which says that we “respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included in the Gracious Speech.”

I believe in free trade—I always have and always will. I think I am the only surviving Member of this House who has negotiated a trade treaty—the Uruguay round in the 1990s when I was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Therefore, when the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership treaty was presented, my instinct was to support it, but the more closely I looked at it, the more parts of it came to worry me. TTIP is not primarily about free trade. The average tariff imposed by the United States of America on goods from the European Union is 2.5%, and that of the European Union on goods from America somewhat higher. Getting rid of them would be worth while, but it is not a big deal.

However, other aspects of the treaty are worrying. My main concerns relate to the investor-state dispute settlement system. That creates a system of tribunals—special courts—in which foreign multinationals can sue Governments, including the British Government, but the British Government cannot sue them, nor can British companies use those courts should they wish to.

These companies can sue the British Government if they feel that Government policies are harming their investments. For example, US companies could sue a British Government who wanted to take back into the public sector privately provided services in the NHS or education, or to open fewer such services to private provision. The British and EU Governments have denied that such suing is possible, but a cogent counsel’s opinion argues that, because these tribunals can award unlimited fines, and have different evidence criteria from British courts, they could, at the very least, exert “a chilling effect” on Government decision making.

Up until now, most of the concern about this has been expressed by people who have opposition in principle to any private provision in the health service. I do not have opposition in principle, although I have always believed that the scope for it is limited in practice.
I found an example in my own constituency that illustrates the problem that could arise if TTIP were in force. A surgicentre, privately owned, set up by Tony Blair and working alongside the NHS Lister hospital in Stevenage, which serves my constituents, ran into terrible problems. The whole system under which surgicentres were set up was daft; it did not work. So I lobbied against it, as did my right hon. and hon. Friends from Stevenage and north Herts—all of us Conservatives. We lobbied that it should be brought back into the NHS, and we were successful.

However, had TTIP been in force and the company fallen into the hands of an American health company—most private hospitals in this country are now American-owned—the company could have sued the local NHS for taking back that service. At the very least, it might have won massive damages. It might even have been able to prevent that from happening entirely. Even if it had lost, the case would have cost the local health service a massive sum, because the average cost of these cases is $8 million. It seems to me that Members should be very cautious about signing up to a treaty that might have such a consequence.

These tribunals were originally invented to encourage investment by American and other companies in developing countries that had poor systems of government. Their courts were, frankly, unreliable and sometimes corrupt, so a parallel system of courts was set up with the agreement of the local Government. Such Governments were prepared to suffer the indignity of having courts that could overrule their own judiciary and laws in return for encouraging investors to invest in their country, in the knowledge that, should those investors be expropriated, either directly or as the result of Government policies, they could get fair compensation. That was fine, but such courts are not necessary to encourage investment in the UK. America invests more in the UK than in any other country in the world. American companies, like those of many other countries, choose to have cases heard in British courts because they trust our courts system. We do not need a parallel system of courts to encourage and promote investment in this country.

The Government say, “This is impossible. It won’t happen.” If it is impossible, does it really matter if they make such an assurance doubly sure by exempting the NHS from TTIP, as amendment (c) suggests, just as the French have exempted their motion picture industry and artistic endeavours from the scope of the treaty? The very fact that the Government are not willing to do so, or have not been so up till now, raises some doubts, at least in my mind, about how secure we will be.

However, the Government have now accepted the amendment, although it is true that they did not have much choice, given the wide support for it in the House. That means the Government are now committed to bringing forward a Bill, and it is very important that they do so speedily, so that we can see whether it will achieve what we want to achieve and so that Members with wider concerns than mine—indeed, I have some further concerns about whether environment or health standards should be taken entirely out of the purview of Parliaments in the ways envisaged—can amend and adapt the Bill accordingly. If the Government do not bring in such a Bill or delay it until after the referendum, we will realise that something fishy is afoot.

Mr Lilley: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we let TTIP through, it will be a further transfer of law-making power away from this country to international bureaucrats and multinational companies.

There is a referendum dimension to the TTIP treaty issue. First, the only absolutely certain way of preventing it is of course not to be part of it—by leaving the EU on 23 June. We might be able to exempt ourselves or to prevent the treaty from going ahead if we remain in, but that is far from certain. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend has said, there is a certain similarity between such courts of a supranational nature—run by bureaucrats to enforce laws negotiated by bureaucrats, which have never been endorsed by this House and are not open to rejection by it—and it is natural that those courts should sympathise with each other and carry the treaty forward. If we were outside, we could negotiate our own deal with the United States, which I hope would not need any such system of courts. Why should America need such courts to invest in this country or for us to invest in the United States? That deal would require a stripped-down and far simpler Bill, and it would be far quicker and easier to negotiate.

Some people have said, “But President Obama has said we won’t be allowed to negotiate a deal and we’ll have to go to the back of the queue”, but the House of Commons Library has revealed that there is no queue. After the negotiation of TTIP, there are no countries with outstanding negotiations with the US. Not only was President Obama trying to bully us, but he was doing it on the basis of a bluff. We will be not at the end of the queue but at the front of it, and we will no doubt be able to negotiate with his successor.

I hope that hon. Members will consider the EU dimensions of TTIP seriously. I accept that people who are very optimistic about what we can achieve within the EU, and about what the EU might be able to achieve in negotiating TTIP with the Americans, might want to take the risk. It is not a risk that I want to take. It is not a risk that those who give high priority to the NHS, or those who are worried about environmental standards, health protection standards and potential threats to our education and other public services, will want to take. In the light of the topic of today’s debate, I hope that we will give priority to protecting public services rather than going along with something that none of us has ever seen—we are not allowed to see it, and it is being negotiated in secret—and that has aspects that most of us ought to find offensive to the House and dangerous to the people of this country.

5.41 pm

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to deliver my maiden speech today.

In keeping with the tradition of the House, I would like to take a few moments to pay tribute to my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Sheffield, Brightside and
Hillsborough. Harry Harpham. I am doubly proud to say that not only was he a dedicated and conscientious Labour MP, but, as many colleagues will know, he was also my husband. He served in this House for less than a year before his death, but in that time he made his mark. He spoke powerfully against the Chancellor’s cuts to tax credits, knowing the suffering they would cause the people he represented, and, as a lifelong trade unionist, he made an eloquent speech in defence of workplace rights when they were threatened by the Trade Union Bill.

I would also like to pay tribute to Lord Blunkett, who, as colleagues will know, stood down as the MP for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough at the general election last year. David has been a tireless champion of Sheffield since he was elected to the council at the age of 22. He led the city through the turbulent years of the 1980s before becoming an MP in 1987, and his drive and tenacity soon propelled him to the Front Bench. There simply is not time for me to list all his successes as Education Secretary and later Home Secretary, but fortunately anyone who is familiar with the last 25 years of British politics will know that his achievements speak for themselves.

My constituency sits in the north-east of Sheffield, perched above the city centre on one side and the Don valley on the other, where once upon a time we could find the steelworks that were the foundation of our economy. It was my constituents and their forebears, including my father, who worked in them, forging not just steel but their own fame and reputation and that of the city along the way.

But times have changed, and after the pain and upheavals of the 1980s, we find that these days working lives are not dominated by a single industry. Having said that, nearly 20% of my constituents work in health and social services, so it is with good reason that I say we are a community that cares for one another. We are a diverse constituency, with people and communities from across Europe and beyond, both recently arrived and long-standing. Sheffield has sometimes been called the biggest village in Britain thanks to the friendly, open nature of its people. We were the first city to join the gateway programme back in 2004, through which we have provided a place of safety for 1,000 refugees. Plans are well under way to welcome a further 225 fleeing the conflict in Syria over the next three years.

Sheffield became a city of sanctuary in 2007, with more than 70 local organisations working to bring asylum seekers and refugees together with local people to celebrate the strength that we all gain through our diversity. I am proud to represent a constituency and city that are so welcoming and tolerant.

What maiden speech would be complete without singing the praises of the local football team? This Saturday, Sheffield Wednesday will be battling Hull City at Wembley for a place in the premiership. If—or should I say when?—Wednesday win, they will be back in the top flight of English football for the first time in 16 years, which is exactly where they belong. I am a proud Wednesdayite, and while I may not have much in common with the players, I like to think that we are all coming down to London to put Sheffield firmly on the map, and I wish them all the best for the weekend.

Like anywhere, we face our fair share of challenges. The rate of unemployment in Brightside and Hillsborough is more than double the national average, and we are ranked 9th in the country for the number of households with dependent children where no adult is in employment. More than a third of children in my constituency are classed as living in poverty. Seven food banks now serve my constituency, and it goes without saying that I have nothing but praise for those who give up their time to collect, sort and distribute the donations that people in the area willingly give to help those who find themselves backed into a corner. The fact that people have to rely on food parcels at all in 2016 speaks volumes about the Government’s determination to tackle inequality, particularly when a third of those who rely on them are children.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the growth in food-bank use is the way that it is now taken as read that people will have to rely on them. They have become accepted as part of the landscape, and arouse little comment. It is frankly disgraceful that we have reached the point where those in most need can no longer rely on the state to help them through hard times, and that is a damning stain on the Government’s record.

Ironically, Harry chose to make his maiden speech during a debate on productivity and the Government’s skills agenda. He said that the jobs being created in Sheffield were often low-skilled, low-paid, zero-hours contract work. He was right, and I find it sad that a year on, the Government have still not grasped the need to provide proper skills training, so that my constituents can find worthwhile, meaningful work.

One of the most pressing concerns for my constituents is the availability of housing, and I was deeply disappointed by the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which will do nothing to help people in Sheffield to keep a roof over their heads. Nearly 40% of my constituents live in council or housing association homes, and the introduction of fixed-term tenancies, alongside the hated bedroom tax, will cause them more needless worry and upheaval. For the Government, it seems that social housing is now a temporary benefit that people are to be chivvied out of, rather than a home to settle down in and to build a life.

I am glad to make my maiden speech during today’s debate on public services, because after a lifetime of working in them I feel somewhat qualified to speak up in their defence. I started my first job as an assistant at Firth Park library aged 16, and since then I have worked across library services, further education, and the NHS. I know from long personal experience how important each and every one of our public services are, and that they are often a lifeline for ordinary working people. They protect and empower those who would otherwise be unable to fend for themselves, and they are the living expression of the belief that everyone, whatever the circumstances of their wealth or health, should be able to live dignified, fulfilling lives.

Over the last six years, those services have borne the brunt of an ideologically imposed austerity that has left them withering on the vine. Men and women working across the public sector are being asked to do more with less and less. Morale is at rock bottom across the board: teachers, doctors, police officers, nurses, firefighters, social workers, prison and probation officers—the list goes on. They have all dedicated their working lives to public service, and all see on a daily basis their ability to serve being undermined by this Government.
I make no apology for saying that I am Sheffield born and bred. I grew up there, have spent my whole life working there, and raised a family there. We may sometimes be blunt, but it always comes from the heart, and it is in that spirit that I intend to work for the people of Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough. No one would have chosen the circumstances that led me to this Chamber, but nevertheless here I am. I am deeply humbled by the trust that my constituents have placed in me, and I pledge to repay that trust by fighting for their interests and making sure that their voices are heard loud and clear here in Parliament.

5.49 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) on her maiden speech. It always takes courage for an hon. Member to make a maiden speech in this daunting Chamber, but it must especially have been so when she paid tribute to her predecessor—her late husband—whose untimely death robbed this Chamber of a promising new Member who spoke with equal passion for his constituents in her city of birth, Sheffield. She will clearly be a great champion for her constituents, and will speak with the bluntness that she declared. I am sure she will be a much respected Member.

I did not intend to address the issue of the European Union, but will respond to the points made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) and for Wokingham (John Redwood), to whom I listened with great interest. I listened with care to the concerns of my right hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. It is surprising that those who have been campaigning to leave the EU, and who for so long have criticised the EU for not completing enough trade deals despite the fact that the EU has more trade deals than any other country—it has far more than the United States—find themselves in the position of criticising trade deals. In my judgment, the benefits of TTIP include a £10 billion a year trade boost to our economy, which would enable us to invest more in public services.

Mr Lilley: First, may I clarify to my right hon. Friend that I have long campaigned against TTIP? Secondly, Switzerland has more deals than the EU, including deals with China, Australia and India. The only countries with which the EU has deals that China does not are very minor states.

Nick Herbert: My point is that the EU has trade deals with more than 50 other countries, whereas the US has only 14. I thought the narrative was that we want the EU to have more trade deals.

The issue is this: any modern international trade deal will involve some kind of binding arbitration mechanism. My right hon. Friend is clear that he opposes the Canadian free trade deal, but that has been championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who leads the leave campaign, as a model that our country should adopt if we leave the EU. It is also true that the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the North American Free Trade Agreement and even the World Trade Organisation all involve some kind of arbitration panel that takes decisions out of the hands of elected Chambers. If we are to take the position that any trade deal of that kind should be resisted if decisions can no longer be taken by elected Members, none will be acceptable. We would then be in the position of trading without any such arrangements, at potentially enormous cost to our country.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham spoke with characteristic passion about parliamentary democracy and described this place as a puppet Parliament. I note that none of the Bills in the Gracious Speech that are of interest to me and my constituents are restricted or affected by our membership of the EU. That goes to a central point: we can vote on and discuss much of our legislation and domestic affairs without the encumbrance of the EU. I therefore find it difficult to accept that the 650 Members of the House of Commons are puppets, and that our views and votes on those matters are entirely irrelevant simply because of our membership of the EU. That strikes me as an exaggeration, legitimate though the concern about parliamentary sovereignty might be.

I welcome the proposed prisons and courts reform Bill, having been the author of “Prisons with a Purpose” before the 2010 general election. The document urged the rehabilitation revolution and a transformation of the way in which we run our prisons. The radical reforms proposed by the Government are welcome in respect of reducing reoffending.

A number of measures are of special interest to my constituency of Arundel and South Downs in West Sussex. The neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will address a problem that I spoke about in the House recently. The welcome reform of neighbourhood planning introduced under the Localism Act 2011 empowers local communities to make plans that benefit their local area, but they must not be undermined by speculative developments that call into question the legitimacy of plans that have been voted on democratically in referendums. It would be very welcome if the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill addressed those problems and prevented those speculative development applications. We should remind ourselves that neighbourhood plans have had the effect of producing more and not less housing than was originally intended. Therefore, the proposal will not reduce house building, but will properly empower local communities.

The digital economy Bill is welcome—I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy on the Front Bench. He will know of the concern that many in rural areas have to close the emerging digital divide. We want to ensure that the Government’s welcome proposal to extend superfast broadband throughout the country reaches those in hard-to-find rural areas—they, too, are entitled to fast broadband speeds. That is important for rural employment, but it is also important on the ground of fairness. It will take new means, and I hope the Bill sets out measures that will future-proof broadband provision to ensure that the speeds obtained in those areas meet tomorrow’s as well as today’s needs. Many areas in my constituency currently cannot get broadband at all.

I welcome the education for all Bill and its promise to meet the Conservative party manifesto commitment to a fair funding formula for our schools. West Sussex schools are unfairly disadvantaged in that respect.
I also welcome the modern transport Bill. I should like to refer to two crucial infrastructure issues that affect my constituency. First, on the A27 upgrade, I am delighted that the Government have announced that that major route will be upgraded to include the Arundel bypass and that funding has been provided. I hope the plans continue to timetable, so that work on the bypass begins by the end of the Parliament, as has been set out.

Secondly, the rail service to my constituency is a concern to a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The performance of the Govia Thameslink Railway franchise has simply been unacceptable over the past year, hugely inconveniencing passengers. It must be said that 60% of the delays are the responsibility of Network Rail and result from infrastructure failure. It should also be acknowledged that the Government are embarking on major infrastructure investment, including the £6 billion London Bridge upgrade, which will improve services. Nevertheless, GTR is not meeting the self-set targets in its performance improvement plan. Those targets were low in ambition, but the company is falling below its original performance thresholds set one year ago to improve performance for customers. That failure is exacerbated by the entirely misconceived industrial action of the RMT on driver control of doors. It cannot be a safety issue when drivers rather than guards already control the doors on 40% of Southern services. Industrial action has exacerbated existing problems with the service, meaning a very serious level of disruption for passengers over the past few weeks. This is now causing real anger among my commuting constituents and many others in the area covered by the franchise.

First, there is no justification for the industrial action and it should not continue, and nor should the unofficial industrial action caused by drivers and guards who seem to be suffering from an unusual level of sickness. Secondly, the management of the GTR franchise must recognise that, while the proposed measures to reform how it runs the trains may be justified, its management of the franchise as a whole has been absolutely lamentable. It has brought the Government’s rail policy into disrepute. It is essential that the company and Network Rail are held to account for their poor performance and that they meet their own self-set performance improvement targets.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend think that the licence to operate this service should be taken away and a new supplier found to ensure it is delivered properly and in line with what he would expect?

**Nick Herbert**: My hon. Friend raises a fair point. The ultimate sanction available to the Government for the failure of a franchise to perform effectively is to withdraw it. Indeed, that has been suggested by the Prime Minister. The franchise has only just been awarded. One problem is that the company failed to plan for enough drivers, so for the past year there has been a driver shortage. There has literally been an inadequate number of drivers available for the trains and there is a very long training period. The company assures the Government that it can improve its performance. The Government are reluctant to withdraw the franchise and find themselves in the position of running the railway, but unless the position improves more radical measures will have to be taken to deal with the underperformance of this service. Frankly, it has been simply appalling. It is unacceptable for the rail-travelling public in this area. It is time that both Network Rail and Southern recognise that it is no longer acceptable to deliver a low-standard performance of this kind.

6.2 pm

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great privilege to be called to speak in this debate at this particular juncture. You will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that sometimes Mr Speaker teases me a little about my long service in the House. I, in turn, accuse him of being slightly ageist. Well, I have to say that of all the maiden speeches I have heard, the speech delivered to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) was one of the best. It was delivered with passion, knowledge, experience and wisdom. She will be a first-class Member of Parliament representing her constituents, because she knows her community. She has lived and worked in her community. We are all proud of her, and Harry would be proud of her, too. I look forward to her brilliant career. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Some of us will have been a little hurt by the remarks of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who was very keen to tell us that he is passionate about freedom and liberty. I do not mind him using his speech to say how passionately he is against the European Union, but to seem to suggest that we who oppose that view and who believe our liberties work better as members of the EU do not care about freedom and liberty is a little hurtful. As I said to the Prime Minister on an earlier occasion, I was born the day before the worst day of the blitz. German bombers bombed the street in which I was born. Seventy years of peace and prosperity can be too easily taken for granted.

When looking at a Queen’s Speech, it is important to track what has been left out or forgotten. There are some high-flown ideas at the beginning of the speech:

“...My Government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences.”

The Secretary of State for Health, at the beginning of his speech, said that he did not believe in private wealth and public squalor. I do not believe that he believes that and I do not believe that the Government believe that. What they do believe is in some ways more insidious: private sector good, public sector bad. That is the message I get all the time from Government Members. Those of us who have worked in education, health, welfare, transport or housing know that lurching towards the private sector for an answer is not always the right or most efficient way. I feel embarrassed to hurt the feelings of those sitting on the Government Front Bench, but I mention in passing the botched rail privatisation that nobody wanted and which was executed badly. We now spend more money on trains, which are normally run by foreign-owned companies, than any other country in Europe—and to provide what? A very poor service.

We have heard a very large number of long speeches about health. I represent the constituency of Huddersfield. It looks as though we are going to lose our hospital and
A&E not because anything is wrong with it—it used to be very high performing and financially sound—but because it has to absorb a weaker health trust next door, the Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust, and because we are imprisoned by a PFI contract that we cannot deny or modify. That is a real threat.

The elephant in the room is that the health service is struggling to make ends meet. It is underperforming not because we do not have amazing and dedicated staff, but because we do not have enough of them. We do not have enough doctors, nurses, A&E specialists or people supporting doctors. The fact is that the NHS needs more resources and investment. I will say this a number of times in my speech: it also needs more imagination to deal with new demands. Yes we have an ageing population and need to deliver healthcare in a different way, but that needs leadership and imagination that does not exist at the current time.

Members on all sides complain about the health service lacking resources, but they go through the Lobby to vote for High Speed 2. On the latest figures, HS2 will be three times more expensive than it was predicted to be: £138 billion and rising. The Cabinet Secretary has now been drafted in to look at this, because even the revised costs are out of control. It seems strange to be ploughing money into HS2 when, according to the Queen’s Speech, we will very soon end up with driverless cars. We will have the ability to dial a number and have a pod arrive outside our house and take us anywhere in the country. I predict that by the time we have completed HS2, in 2033, it will be redundant, because driverless cars and the new generation of transport will have wiped out the need, just as the invention of the railways did away with the effectiveness of, and the investment in, canals.

As you would expect, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to home in on education and skills, on which subject the Queen’s Speech also makes reference in, canals.

Members on all sides complain about the health service lacking resources, but they go through the Lobby to vote for High Speed 2. On the latest figures, HS2 will be three times more expensive than it was predicted to be: £138 billion and rising. The Cabinet Secretary has now been drafted in to look at this, because even the revised costs are out of control. It seems strange to be ploughing money into HS2 when, according to the Queen’s Speech, we will very soon end up with driverless cars. We will have the ability to dial a number and have a pod arrive outside our house and take us anywhere in the country. I predict that by the time we have completed HS2, in 2033, it will be redundant, because driverless cars and the new generation of transport will have wiped out the need, just as the invention of the railways did away with the effectiveness of, and the investment in, canals.

As you would expect, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to home in on education and skills, on which subject the Queen’s Speech also makes reference in, canals.

The Queen’s Speech makes reference to the northern powerhouse, but we see no stuff in our universities. Degrees and accountancy—that cross-subsidises the difficult things the House would not expect from me. Today, we could get the whole of our defence forces—100,000 men and women—into Wembley stadium. If anybody wants to read the truth about our lack of preparation for defending this country, they should read Max Hastings in The Sunday Times this Sunday. We are struggling to maintain a credible force for the defence of our country and the maintenance of our liberties. At this time, the EU is a bedrock of our freedoms.

6.12 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). Having listened carefully to his remarks, I would take issue with his assertion that many on the Government Benches are fully committed to the notion that private sector is always good and public sector is always bad. That is not my approach. I wanted to speak in this the third day of the debate on the Queen’s Speech because I think that the delivery of quality public services is critical to what we deliver to our constituents, and it is really important that we have an open mind about how we deliver those services effectively. The biggest employer in my constituency, Salisbury hospital, is from the public sector. It has just gone through the rigours of a Care Quality Commission inspection, and I am grateful to Professor Sir Michael Richards for his constructive observations around that and the way to move forward.

I welcome the many Bills in the Queen’s Speech that seek to address the biggest issues facing our nation, both now and under all Governments: how we create the conditions where the most vulnerable can be helped on to a better pathway. I was genuinely shocked and saddened when listening to the response from the Leader of the Opposition last week, when he said:

“Apparently, it is all about instability, addiction and debt—all things that can be blamed on individuals about whom Governments like to moralise… Poverty and inequality are collective failures of our society as a whole, not individual failures.”—[Official Report, 18 May 2016, Vol. 611, c. 16.]

I agree that it is a failure of society as a whole that people in our communities must endure complex, ongoing problems, but it is not about labelling society collectively or people individually as failures, and it certainly is not about moralising; it is about a credible analysis of the diversity of individuals’ problems, recognising that it is incumbent on Government to deliver a customisation, adaptation and reformulation of public service delivery if they are sustainably to meet the needs of our communities. It is naive to say that a financial measure of poverty, by itself, is likely to provoke a meaningful recognition of the complexity of poverty.

I want to make some observations about several of the proposed Bills, but three themes will emerge as I contemplate them. The first is about the need to innovate in public service delivery and the second is about the need to integrate. Going back to my opening remark, it is not about public versus private; it is about recognising that sometimes we need to innovate and integrate good public services, bringing in new ideas and providers able to improve how we have done things to date. The third important element is about timeframes. I vividly remember, in my six years’ service as a magistrate, seeing individuals come back again and again before the court for crimes related to the same underlying problems—typically addictions—in their lives. On average, it takes people seven attempts at rehabilitation to overcome some of those addictions. There is no one template for delivering those sorts of services. That is why we need to be careful, when we frame the legislation, to put in place
reasonable measures of what success looks like and to show an understanding of the complexity of the lives of the people we are trying to help.

My enthusiasm for the children and social work Bill is infused with a strong conviction that the Government are absolutely right to look at looked-after children and care leavers, who experience some of the worst outcomes, in terms of life trajectory, of any in our society. It is important, however, that innovation is examined. In local authorities near me and across the country, we are beginning to look at schemes, such as those run by Safe Families for Children, where trustworthy families are engaged to look after children when underlying issues need to be dealt with in families. I recognise that the pathway to securing the engagement of safe families for children obviously necessitates more work in order to complete the process of safeguarding, but this is an example of where innovation and integration with existing public sector provision—in this case, within local authorities—can deliver enhanced outcomes.

On all the Bills, we need to look at how health, education and social services can work better together, so that the payback is significant. I remember, three or four years ago, being asked to visit a residential centre in Devon, with the Amber Foundation, which was working with young adults leaving the criminal justice system and in grave danger of not finding their way—often they were without family support and, being low-skilled, finding it difficult to get into employment, and typically they had been engaged in the criminal justice system previously. I hope that when we come to consider the proposed legislation, we will find room to enfranchise groups such as the Amber Foundation into the delivery of services. It is through commitment over time that those individuals are able to find a sustainable trajectory into independent living. We need to be honest and real about the challenges that those individuals face. I welcome the overdue reform of adoption. I have seen too many cases in which the evaluation stresses reasons why not, while in the meantime too much time passes and the individuals are left behind.

I welcome the education for all Bill, and there is particular enthusiasm in my constituency for the fair funding formula. Wiltshire is the third worst funded local authority, and that has a significant impact on the ability of schools to plan their budgets going forward. It is critical at the moment in the formation of a multi-academy trust, because trying to anticipate what the uplift will be is significant in giving assurance to governors as they come together.

When we look at options facing young people at 18-plus, it is important to be clear about the integration of the great macro-policy goal of having 3 million new apprenticeships with enabling children from difficult backgrounds to get on to a pathway that will deliver the skills and employment opportunities that they crave. The prisons and courts reform Bill is also very welcome. The emphasis on rehabilitation to reduce reoffending is wholly necessary. Importantly, it will introduce new boards with external experts and emphasise prisoner education and the necessity to have a pathway to employment.

Finally, there is the digital economy Bill, and this is a massive issue for rural Wiltshire. I have campaigned on it for many years. We must have a reliable plan for the last 5% in particular. The universal service obligation must have meaning and teeth in ways that my constituents and those across rural England can fully understand.

I finish where I started. I have no ideological objection to the integration of innovative ways of delivering public services. I hope that this Government will continue to have ambition and will measure their success in a way that allows further developments to take place so that we can meaningfully address the conditions of the poorest in our society with solutions that give them dignity and the justice that they deserve.

6.22 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): We can all recognise that this Queen’s Speech contains a thin raft of legislation and that it is perhaps a Queen’s Speech in hiding for obvious reasons. It is certainly one that misses out many things that people might have thought would be included. It may not contain some terribly bad things, but we can ask a central question about it, following on from the thoughtful contribution by the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen). It is not just a question of changing services and ensuring we get the best out of them, because we need to think about who actually achieves the things set out in the Bills.

We should ask ourselves whether it is good enough to pass legislation and then say, “Get on with it; it is down to you. We have done our bit on the legislation, and it is your job now.” Here lies an increasingly central flaw in the roster of Bills presented for our inspection. They certainly do not come with any “how to do it” impact assessment. It is important to recognise that we can have good public services only if we have good public servants carrying them out. When it comes to many of the measures in the Queen’s Speech, one cannot say, “That is a good thing.” One should increasingly say exactly how to make it more than just a good thing, so that it actually becomes a good thing achieved.

The title of today’s debate is “Defending Public Services”, but there seems to be a disjunction between what a service can do and what is coming its way as a result of this and other recent Queen’s Speeches. We discuss this one against a background of a crisis in funding for the NHS. We know that the NHS simply cannot do what is required of it as a public service with its existing funding. Deficits are rising for hospital trusts, and it is not sufficient to answer, as the Prime Minister did in his opening speech, that it is necessary to do “more with less”. The people who are doing more with less are the public servants who have to carry out the services.

Statistics show the number of doctors per 100,000 head of the population between 2009 and 2015. There were 70 per 100,000 in 2009 and 65.5 in 2015. The same figures for nurses are 680 in 2009 and 664 today. That shows exactly what is happening. Public servants are doing more with less and continuing to have more and more piled on them with less and less resource—until, I suspect, the service starts to break down.

Social care is the other part of the health service revolution that we have debated today, but £1 billion has been taken out of social care budgets in the past year alone, with £4.5 billion taken out over the last five years. Local government is generally responsible for social care and social services, but councils have lost something like 79% of their direct funding between 2010 and 2020, with a further £3 billion of cuts announced in last year’s autumn statement.
The most deprived areas of the country, those with the most pressing concerns on social care and the most disadvantaged seem to suffer the worst cuts. How can it be that nine out of 10 of the most deprived areas are seeing cuts above the national average? We face a Queen’s Speech, on the other hand, that places substantial new requirements on those desperately stretched services in the areas of the country that need them the most. In my authority, by no means one of the most deprived parts of the country, £72 million has been cut from the budget since 2010, and there is expected to be a further £90 million a year by 2020.

The services that we seek to defend are, frankly, in a position of near starvation as they seek to provide us with the cover and the response to statutory responsibilities that we require. For example, the Queen’s Speech contains a requirement for further responsibilities to be put on local government and social care departments under the Children and Social Work Bill. This is what the Prime Minister said:

“So, in this Queen’s Speech we are saying to care leavers: you will get guaranteed entitlements to local services, funding for apprenticeships and a personal mentor up to the age of 25. All this will be included in our care leavers covenant, so that our most disadvantaged young people get the opportunities they deserve.”

[Official Report, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 26.]

Who could disagree with that? On the other hand, who could disagree with the people who are going to do those things?

I declare an interest in that my daughter is a social worker. I am very proud of her hard work in becoming a social worker in the first place and her dedication in carrying out her duties and responsibilities. I see her on a daily basis, so I can see the effect as her case load gets stretched and the authority has to cut corners increasing just to keep the service going. These new requirements are going to be a huge strain on her; she will be one of the many people who will have to carry out this new piece of legislation as part of her local authority responsibilities. I know, by the way, who will get the blame if services fail because departments cannot stretch themselves far enough to take on those new responsibilities. It will not be the Government who presided over that near-starvation, but the poor social services departments that were worked into the ground while they were just trying to cope.

The Prime Minister spoke of the services that local authorities would provide, but they are decreasingly in a position to do so. New responsibilities are coming their way, not just for social care but for planning, as a result of the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, and for buses, as a result of the bus services Bill. Moreover, authorities apparently have an interesting future in connection with the devolution of business rates. It is being suggested that the local growth and jobs Bill will enable them to retain 100% of business rates, and who would disagree with that? I have championed the idea for many years. However, when it comes to who will implement the retention, there is as yet no indication of how business rate devolution will be married up with local equity. It appears that the authorities with the highest business rate bases will do much better than those in the most deprived areas which have much lower bases, and whose public servants will suffer as a result.

It has been announced that combined authorities will be handed powers from above, but they will be left with the same responsibilities and the same costs. How will they be funded? An authority that takes on devolved powers in south Hampshire, for example, will do so through a levy from a pooled business rate, which means that other authorities will have less money with which to support their already stretched services. I suspect that “more out of less” will not redound to the benefit of the public servants who are working in those authorities.

This is the central problem for our services. We can talk all we like about the sunny uplands, and about what shiny new words in shiny new pieces of legislation mean for people, but if those words are not followed by a commitment to make the services that will deliver on the promises work, they are hollow promises, and that, I think, is what this Queen’s Speech suffers from.

6.32 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Like me, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know that Lancashire has some of the finest public services in our country. I represent the police force and the health service in my constituency with the greatest pride here in Parliament, and rely on them when I am at home in Lancashire.

However, proud as I am of our public services in the north-west and Lancashire in particular, we need to show that our businesses and our economy will improve in order to support them. This Queen’s Speech—a one nation speech—did not give preference to the private sector over the public sector, but set out a programme in which both could succeed, and in which, specifically, the northern powerhouse, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), could play a central role.

Many years ago, my home city of Liverpool contributed more to the Exchequer than the City of London. In 1889, when our great county council—Lancashire county council—was formed, our first civic leaders, some of whom had been Cabinet Ministers, resigned as Members of Parliament to lead it. Was that because, at the time, it was said that the empire’s bread hung by Lancashire’s thread? Well, it may have been, but I believe that the real reason was that those MPs—including former Cabinet Ministers—knew that more power resided in our great northern cities, and in our town halls, than at Westminster and in Whitehall.

Of course, all that changed during the first and second world wars. As we waged total war in this country, it became necessary to concentrate power in London. We saw the nationalisation of our industries, and we saw many decisions taken away from our great regional local authorities. Just as the power came to London, wealth and skills moved away from the north of England to the south. The Queen’s Speech, and its commitment to the northern powerhouse, means that some of that money and power will be removed from London and returned to the north. London has had it for far too long, and we want it back.

This scheme did not drop out of thin air. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer first advocated the idea of a northern powerhouse in June 2014, at the Museum of Science and Industry. It could not have happened in a better place than Manchester, close to
our Free Trade Hall. With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to reflect a little on the progress that we have made in the last 23 months.

During debates in the House, Members often ask why so much money is spent on London’s infrastructure. Why has London been given Crossrail 1, and why is it to be given Crossrail 2? Well, one reason is that Transport for London unifies all the London boroughs so that they can work on infrastructure projects throughout this great capital. For far too long, our local authorities in the north of England have been in competition with each other when it comes to rail and road infrastructure projects, rather than working together to ensure that we have a plan in the north to enable our cities to grow. That is why I am so pleased that we now have Transport for the North fighting for our cities and towns throughout the region.

It is so important for the north of England to become super-connected. What do I mean by “the north of England”? Well, within 40 miles of Manchester we have Leeds, Liverpool, Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, and the city of Sheffield. That belt of counties, towns and cities encompasses 10 million people. One powerful urban conglomeration could become one powerful, super-connected economic unit, which would not compete with London, and would certainly not pull London down, but would create growth and wealth throughout the north of England so that we could compete not just with the south, but with other cities across the globe. If the north were an independent economy, it would be the ninth largest economy in the European Union, and—much as it pains me, as a Lancastrian, to say this—if Yorkshire were its own country, it would have created more jobs in the last five years than the whole of France.

Of course the northern powerhouse is hugely important, but we are also very excited about the digital economy Bill. The commitment to super-connect every house with a universal broadband connection is important to our rural communities throughout the north-west of England. It is a glue that can bind towns and villages into the northern powerhouse project, and Lancashire can play its part.

We have three world-class universities; Uclan—the University of Central Lancashire—Lancaster, and, of course, Edge Hill. However, I must make an appeal to Lancashire county council. If we are to have a powerful, knowledge-based economy in which we all become wealthier and more successful, the council must not cut our library services. If we want young people throughout Lancashire to be able to study in peace, and to look things up on the internet in, for instance, Bacup, Whitworth and Crawshawbooth libraries, we must be far-sighted. We cannot focus on short-term cost savings. I accept that budgets are under great pressure, but we must have a long-term plan, and that will not be served by robbing our young people of their libraries.

In the last 23 months, we have also seen development to help the northern powerhouse to grow throughout Lancashire. The Heysham link road is nearing completion, and a close partnership with Peel Ports in both Liverpool and Heysham is enabling us to create a global gateway through the sea for the north-west’s industry. That, of course, includes the aerospace industry. We are very lucky in Lancashire—our aerospace industry is globally pre-eminent—but we must ensure that, through the northern powerhouse project, we can build on the success of that existing industry. In my own constituency, companies such as J. and J. Ormerod plc, Linemark, WEC Engineering and of course the world-famous Crown Paints are already making the northern powerhouse a reality.

I have a simple ambition, and I hope that it will be reflected in the Queen’s Speech. It is to drive the northern economy ahead and to narrow the north-south divide. In a one nation speech, we in the north of England must show that we do not want to drag down London or the south; rather, we want to create a more prosperous north of England to rival and succeed the south as we build our economy. Those who talk the northern powerhouse down—as the Leader of the Opposition did in his response to the Queen’s Speech—are making a mistake. Perhaps the ambition of Members from across the House who represent the north of England is not understood in Islington or other parts of London. People who say that the northern powerhouse is dead just because one infrastructure project has been delayed or because one business has closed do not understand the scale of our ambition. I caution those Labour Members who are hanging on in the south of England—one of whom we have just heard from—against talking down the north, because to do so would be a terrible mistake. I know that the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) did not do that; it was the Leader of the Opposition who talked it down in his response to the Queen’s Speech.

I have some small suggestions for the Government. First, we have handed over an unprecedented amount of power to our cities through city deals in Preston, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. There was some criticism when civil servants from the northern powerhouse were brought to London. Let us reverse that by creating a northern powerhouse board made up of civic leaders based in the north of England. Secondly, people in the business world want clear guidance about how they can be involved in this project. It excites businesses across the north of England like no other Government initiative, and we have to get the information out there. Finally, I hope that the Government will keep in mind our creative industries in the north-west. Those industries are supremely successful at competing on a global scale, and the northern powerhouse must drive that forward and celebrate those industries.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I was hoping for a lot more from this Queen’s Speech. I hoped that there would be something to address the ever-growing housing crisis in this country. I also hoped that there would be something on the environment or on the long-awaited and much promised Bill on wild animals in circuses. But mainly, I hoped that there would be some hope for my region and my constituency. Yet again, however, we heard only scant warm words with the brief mention of the northern powerhouse—the Chancellor’s pet project—which does not even seem to reach the north-east.

I do not think the Chancellor heeded my words on the lack of measures for the north-east in his ultra-shambolic Budget back in April, when I warned him that, despite his ambition to be king of the north, he needed to recognise that there was a lot more of the north beyond Manchester before he got to the wall. Mercifully, his time as Chancellor is almost up. Who knows where
he will be when winter comes, post-referendum: in No. 10 or in the wilderness on the Back Benches? His legacy for the north-east is, sadly, only more pain and hurt.

Today’s debate is all about our public services, and I want to highlight the damage that is being inflicted on them by this Conservative Government, who are continuing to starve them of proper investment while forcing through damaging and unnecessary legislation. The Tories are now trying to dismantle and ruin two of our country’s greatest and most precious institutions: the NHS and the BBC. These are two public services that we probably all use almost every day and both are central to our national way of life. This Government are hellbent on completely changing the culture and ethos of the two institutions. They have already started the process, but we must not let them complete it.

Since the Conservatives came into office in 2010, the NHS has faced crisis after crisis, all of which could have been avoided if it had been given proper investment and support. Instead, we saw an unnecessary top-down reorganisation of the NHS that disjointed funding streams and placed unnecessary burdens on services through cuts that have been detrimental to our constituents’ experiences of using the NHS. This abysmal mismanagement of the NHS by the Health Secretary and his equally appalling predecessor is compounded by the fact that 3.7 million people are currently on waiting lists, by the understaffing of our hospitals and by patients’ struggles to see their GP. The mismanagement has been acutely felt in the north-east, with the prime example being the underperformance of the North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust. That was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate about two weeks ago in which I and a dozen other north-east colleagues raised our numerous concerns. I hope that the Government have listened to those concerns and will act as soon as possible.

Instead of addressing the issues that the NHS is facing on a day-to-day basis, the Health Secretary took it upon himself to enter into a protracted fight with our junior doctors. They do an amazing job of treating patients in difficult circumstances, yet he has battled with them remorselessly over their pay and conditions. It is welcome that a deal has now been struck between the Department of Health and the junior doctors after everyone was at last brought back around the negotiating table. However, this all could have been avoided, including the recent strike action, if only the Health Secretary had meaningfully listened to the junior doctors’ concerns about the impact the proposed changes to their contracts would have on the NHS.

The Health Secretary must rethink his entire strategy for the national health service and ensure that it does what it was created to do. I want to quote from the leaflet that every home received when the NHS was launched in 1948:

“It will provide you with all medical, dental and nursing care. Everyone—rich or poor, man, woman or child—can use it or any part of it.”

It was Nye Bevan who said:

“Illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay, nor an offence for which they should be penalised, but a misfortune, the cost of which should be shared by the community”. We should have seen something like that in this Queen’s Speech. But wait—no, that only happens in a Labour Queen’s Speech. That is how we got our NHS in the first place.

The BBC is another of our treasured public services that the Government are trying to undermine. The Culture Secretary is using tactics that can only be described as bullying and intimidation to make the BBC accept a new charter—which is in no one’s interests other than those of commercial media moguls—and he has shown his true colours by going on record as saying that the disappearance of the BBC is a “tempting prospect”. Those are the words of the man who is supposed to be in charge of nurturing and championing British culture and talent.

The Government’s proposals aim to hobble the BBC, and they will put its position as an independent public broadcaster in jeopardy by introducing Government appointees to oversee the organisation. That is a clear attack on the BBC’s independence and its ability to hold the Government to account. Putting Government-approved people on the board would threaten the very existence of the BBC as we know it. Peter Kosminsky, the director of “Wolf Hall” and winner of the BAFTA Best Drama award, has said that “the BBC’s main job is to speak truth to power—to report to the British public without fear or favour, no matter how unpalatable that might be to those in government.”

Those words remind us of exactly why the Government must maintain the integrity that the BBC has come to be respected for, not just in the UK but right across the world.

The BBC is not only one of our main sources of news and information; it also acts as a beacon for British culture and talent and is a true cornerstone of UK plc. From giving that much needed break to up-and-coming artists on BBC radio stations to the many TV programmes that showcase the greatest aspects of British life—commercially successful shows such as “Strictly Come Dancing” and “The Great British Bake-Off”, informative and incredible documentaries such as “South Pacific”, “Frozen Planet” and the many other David Attenborough documentaries that have taken us into some of the most remote and exotic places in the world—the BBC is the very best of British in everything it does, and we get to enjoy all that for the remarkably good-value price of just 40p a day while sitting in the comfort of our own home. However, the Culture Secretary has consistently put the future of commercial BBC programming in jeopardy by saying that the BBC should focus on broadcasting for the public good. He clearly forgets that all shows broadcast by the BBC, whether commercial or informative, are for the public good. The two cannot be separated because commercially successful programmes help to fund world-class documentaries that are viewed across the globe. My Opposition colleagues and I will do everything in our power to ensure that one of our most treasured institutions is protected, continues to drive creativity in the 21st century, and is accessible to all.

Going back to Peter Kosminsky, he also said in his acceptance speech at the BAFTAS:

“It’s not their BBC, it’s your BBC.”

Never have truer words been said about our BBC. We need to defend it at all costs from the damage that this Government wish to inflict upon it. Our NHS and BBC
Jake Berry: Does the hon. Lady agree that the BBC is uniquely able to tackle difficult issues such as controlling abuse? She may have been following the recent story in “The Archers” relating to Helen Titchener, which showcases the BBC at its best. If the hon. Lady goes on to the “Free Helen Titchener” JustGiving page, she will see that the BBC has been involved in helping to raise £130,000 to support women’s refuges across the country.

Mrs Hodgson: I am so pleased that I allowed that intervention, because it was excellent. I thank the hon. Gentleman for that, and I do agree with him.

The NHS and the BBC are cherished institutions, providing an essential public good. They are the very best of British. The proposals are a damning indictment of this Government’s attitude towards our country and those two great institutions, of which I believe the whole of this Government’s attitude towards our country and the best of British. The proposals are a damning indictment of this Government’s attitude towards our country and those two great institutions, of which I believe the whole country is immensely proud. That is why we cannot allow them to be dismantled or diminished in stature or performance. On the day that the NHS was founded, Nye Bevan said: “The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it.”

His words apply equally to the BBC in this context, as much as he intended them for the NHS. We need to have faith now, and we need to fight for both of them before it is too late. Otherwise, the NHS and the BBC, which our grandparents’ generation so proudly created, will no longer be there for our grandchildren, who will never forgive us.

6.52 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). I also place on the record my appreciation of the memorable maiden speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss). The connection between those two hon. Members is that I look forward to visiting their football teams next season and not having to suffer attending St James’ Park.

The Queen’s Speech contained some 21 Bills. I do not intend to refer to all of them in the time available to me, but I want to mention some and to express my views about some that appear to be missing. It is almost de rigueur to discuss the EU referendum in our speeches, and I look forward to the Government needing to bring forward legislation to disentangle us from the European Union once we, the British people, have set ourselves on the path of freedom and democracy.

As for today’s debate, I particularly want to talk about the national health service and not only some of the key issues contained in the Queen’s Speech, but some things that do not require legislation. The Bill to ensure that people who do not pay taxes in this country have to pay their way when using the NHS should be welcomed across the House. We all recognise that the NHS requires additional funding and needs resources, but it is a national health service that the people who live, work and play in this country rely on for their health; it is not an international health service to treat the rest of the world. I hope that that Bill will receive support right across the House, including from the Opposition.

I congratulate the Health Secretary on achieving an end to the negotiations with junior doctors that paves the way for a proper seven-day NHS. I went looking around my constituency at the weekend on behalf of constituents who want a weekend GP service, but no GP surgeries were open at all. That is the reality. GPs widely advertise as being open Monday to Friday, but no GP service is available in my constituency on a Saturday or a Sunday. If someone is ill or needs medical treatment, there is no choice but to attend A&E, leading to increased pressure on the emergency services. Equally, it is important that the Health Secretary negotiates terms with GPs that ensure that a service is available for people needing routine medical procedures at the times of day and on the days of the week when people want the service to be provided and not just when it is convenient for GPs.

The NHS’s cumbersome investment decision-making process must also be disentangled. The Royal National Orthopaedic hospital, which I am proud to champion, has been making a case for its rebuilding for some 30 years. Six years ago, we received confirmation from the coalition Government that money was available to do exactly that. However, despite draft outline business case after draft outline business case and so on, we are still waiting, six years on, for the business case to be signed off. It is ridiculous in this day and age that our NHS is spending more money on management consultants to make decisions than on consultants to deliver medical treatment. I hope that our health team can resolve the problem without the need for legislation by ensuring that we cut through red tape and enable decisions to be made—a business-like approach to running the NHS without introducing any form of privatisation whatsoever.

I warmly welcome the proposed sugar tax, because it is a great means of driving behaviour. For most people, the sugar content of many drinks is masked, which is clearly unhealthy for people of all ages, young people in particular. The change is a sign of the way things are going. Something that seemed to pass without too much celebration last week was that we finally got clearance to introduce standardised packaging of tobacco products when the court case brought by the tobacco companies collapsed in the High Court. That is good news. I was also pleased by Axa’s decision to remove the £1.7 billion of its policyholders’ money that was invested in the tobacco industry. It quite rightly said that investing in tobacco products was destroying its customers’ health and it then had to pay out on insurance claims to support those customers. That shows the way things are going. I hope that the Chancellor will consider not only the sugar tax, but a levy on tobacco companies through increasing the cost of a packet of 20 and then ensuring that all the money raised goes directly to funding local health initiatives to stop people smoking and to prevent them from starting.

I also welcome the digital economy Bill. For the unawares, I had the honour of working for BT for 19 years before being elected to this House. Back then, I promoted the idea of BT having a universal service obligation to provide superfast broadband. In fact, broadband full stop would be a start, and speed could be increased thereafter. My constituency is on the edge of London, yet it has a series of housing estates, built more than
Bob Blackman

20 years ago, in which it is impossible to get broadband—that is outrageous. We have people who work in the City of London, in very responsible jobs, who would like to work from home but are unable to do so because BT fails to provide broadband of a reasonable speed. In this day and age, it is outrageous that they should be deprived of that fundamental service, on which we all rely. As we ask more and more people to work from home, so that they do not congest the roads and do not have to travel to an office to do their work, they should have the facilities to be able to work from home, if they so wish. I look forward to that becoming more and more a focus of attention for the Government.

I also welcome the neighbourhood planning Bill. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, we need to build more houses in this country for people to live in. I strongly supported the Bill that became the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which creates the environment in which houses can be built. The neighbourhood planning Bill clears up the issue and prevents the process whereby plans are clogged up and development is prevented from taking place. We should set out our plan, and I support the Government’s plan to generate more and more housing for younger people to be able to purchase and so get their foot on the ladder of property ownership.

One of the most fundamental local services is refuse collection. Although localism is welcome, it cannot be appropriate that, right across London, and probably across the country, people who move, probably every six months, because of private rental arrangements suddenly find that the refuse collection systems and the colours of the bins are totally different depending on the borough. They are therefore totally confused as to what should happen. As a fundamental service to people, we should seek to ensure that we have a sensible waste-collection service in this country; we should sort out who pays for it and how it is collected. At the moment, it is one area where local decisions can be made but clearly there are vast differences in the quality of services being provided.

I am also pleased that the education Bill will be coming forward, and I am glad that the Government have wisely dropped their decision to force schools to become academies. I welcome academies being created, but forcing schools to do that would be the wrong thing to do. Finally, I will just mention the counter-extremism and academies. I welcome academies being created, but dropped their decision to force schools to become academies. I welcome academies being created, but

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): A theme has been emerging during the debate; it is the apparent “lack” or “poverty” of ambition in Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech. That theme has come from speakers on both sides of the House. When the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) was talking rubbish—or was it refuse collection? [Interruption.] I knew he would not wish. I look forward to that becoming more and more a focus of attention for the Government.

With that in mind, I wish to focus my comments on the following promise:

“Legislation will be introduced to establish a soft drinks industry levy to help tackle childhood obesity.”

The Minister for Community and Social Care, who was before the House earlier today, promised that there would be a full package of measures to address childhood obesity, but we have seen that that package is in fact a single action: putting in place a new tax. I commend the Government for wishing to tackle childhood obesity, but I have yet to be convinced that a tax or levy on soft drinks will achieve that. If taxation was indeed the way to tackle bulging waistlines, Her Majesty’s Government would have found the holy grail, but it is important that the Opposition test this measure before blindly following it, saying, “It sounds good. It looks good. It seems to be a positive measure. Let’s support them in it.”

The over-taxation of products does not lead to reduced consumption, as we have seen with cigarettes and alcohol; consumption does not drop dramatically, although it might be controlled, and the root cause is not addressed. When taxation has been introduced at the highest levels possible, we have seen crime associated with those products increase. Let us just say that I am sceptical about a levy on sugar. It is one of those policies that sounds good and catches the headline, but it has no sound evidential base. Public Health England and the McKinsey Global Institute, in 2014 reports and studies, state that portion size, the reformulation of products, exercise, education on nutritional values and parental control have a greater impact on obesity than any taxation policy. The one country where this policy has been introduced is Mexico, where it has not worked at all. For children, the actions of their parents probably do more to improve their lifestyle than a tax on their parents’ weekly shopping cart. This sugar tax is a stealth tax dressed up as a health measure, and the Government should not be pursuing it.

The target of the tax is the soft drinks companies, but they are already taking steps to follow the evidence, through the reformulation of some of their drinks. In fact, soft drinks are the only food and drink category where sugar intake is falling year on year, and that has been the case since 2012. I therefore have a number of questions and I hope the Government will attempt to address them, either this evening or when they try to introduce this measure later in the year. Did they formulate their tax plan on 2012 evidence or on evidence since then? Do they intend to direct this tax at other higher sugar content products, in order for us to see what the Minister said earlier about the full package of measures? Where, therefore, is the real ambition of this policy?

Why have the soft drinks companies been singled out, when the evidence shows that they are already reducing sugar content in their drinks? Soft drinks are not even in the top 10 for calories contributing to the UK diet. Other products—for example, confectionary—are far higher up that list in terms of sugar content. Soft drinks form the only category of food and drink where the amount of sugar in take-home products is being reduced, and that has been the case since 2012. That fact is backed up by the 2014 Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs food survey—a Government survey—which showed that the switch to a diet drink from a regular sugar content drink has now taken place and that more of those drinks are now being drunk. If the Government intend to tax something, why put a levy on something that is already reducing the sugar content? They make all these promises about how they are going to spend the money, but that money is going to run out. They may promise that the money they raise will go on schools, but the figures that I have before me show that the commitment of £285 million to fund extended school days will cover only 25% of our secondary schools. If the Government pursue this tax, in five, 10 or 15 years from now, they will cover even fewer schools, so why pursue the tax at that level? The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that the levy will raise less money year on year, but the Government have yet to set out how they will meet their commitment if that prediction is borne out.

I have tabled a number of written questions on this matter, and I have had some answers back from the Chancellor. Some of my questions were also to the Department of Health. No cost has been given for the policing or implementation of the levy. We have been promised a wide consultation, but we have had little apart from a sugary and sweet soundbite. The Opposition should challenge this a lot harder, because there is not the evidence to put it in place.

7.10 pm

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): There are 21 Bills in the Queen’s Speech, and I could talk quite a lot about most of them, but I want to focus predominantly on the digital economy Bill. The announcement of that Bill will resonate in my constituency, because it creates the right for every household to have access to a high-speed broadband facility. I represent a very rural area, where people will be watching this with interest.

We use the phrase “a digital economy”. It is a nice slogan and a nice catchphrase, but in a world that is more reliant on the internet and mobile communication—as I look around the Chamber, I see that many colleagues have their iPads and their mobiles with them, and we are all using the internet—I argue that there is no other form of economy. Without the internet, we will struggle, and it is the rural economy in the High Peak that I am concerned about.

When we came into office six years ago, only 45% of the country had access to superfast broadband. To date, we have provided superfast broadband to 90% of the UK—an extra 4 million homes and businesses. By the end of next year, we will have reached 95%. That is the result of a huge investment by the Government, local councils, devolved Administrations and BT, which totals some £1.7 billion. That is no mean achievement. However, we cannot stop there; we need to continue working to connect significantly rural areas such as the High Peak. The progress made since 2010 is welcome, but the rurality of the High Peak makes it crucial that we continue to drive this forward. We cannot rest on our laurels thinking, “Aren’t we clever?” and congratulating ourselves on a job well done.

There are many advantages to living and working in the countryside, and particularly in the High Peak. We have fabulous countryside, outdoor pursuits, clear air and breathtaking scenery. The area could be called the playground of England. However, there are challenges, and some might say that there is a price to pay for all those benefits. Things that many urban areas take for granted are not as readily available in rural areas. When I was elected to this place six years ago, I was struck by the fact that when I leave the flat to come to work, there is a bus every five or six minutes. In rural areas, we get one every half hour or every hour.

Some things are very different in rural areas, and fast, efficient broadband is one of those things. It is crucial to a successful business. No matter how beautiful the surroundings, how breathtaking the scenery or how clear the air, if a business cannot operate profitably and successfully, all those wonderful things pale into insignificance. Rural areas such as mine need businesses. We need them to be successful, so that they can create jobs and support the local economy. We have a fantastic tourism industry, but in the winter we need other businesses to support our local economy.

Although we have made great strides in rolling out faster, better broadband, the last 5% that we talk about is just as important as the first. A new broadband universal service obligation that gives all citizens and businesses the legal right to a fast broadband connection is something that I would welcome with open arms. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) mentioned it. He used to work for BT, so he will have greater knowledge of this than I do, but I agree with everything he said.

I have said in this Chamber and elsewhere on many occasions that, in my view, broadband is now the fourth utility. Many years ago, we had a small business based in my home village of Chapel-en-le-Frith. In those days, we used to advertise in the Manchester Evening News and the Exchange and Mart, and the phone number was the main thing that people looked for. The phone number at the time started with 0298—it was before the number started with 01629. “They are just down the road,” although actually we were miles away. Things have changed hugely since then—as, I suspect, have most of us. Businesses that want to start up or relocate look for different things, but one of the first things that people look for. The phone number at the time started with 0298—it was before the number started with 01629. “They are just down the road,” although actually we were miles away. Things have changed hugely since then—as, I suspect, have most of us. Businesses that want to start up or relocate look for different things, but one of the first things that they consider nowadays is the availability and speed of internet access. Existing businesses have also contacted me to express their concerns about broadband provision. This is about not just attracting new investment and new businesses to rural areas, but retaining the businesses that we already have.

There is an industrial estate in Buxton, in my constituency, called Tongue Lane. Several companies trade on the estate, employing many local people between them. I want to focus on two briefly. Bells Shoes exports hundreds of pairs of shoes around the world. Over the years, it has grown from a high street retailer—it was started in 1982. Things have changed hugely since then—as, I suspect, have most of us. Businesses that want to start up or relocate look for different things, but one of the first things that they consider nowadays is the availability and speed of internet access. Existing businesses have also contacted me to express their concerns about broadband provision. This is about not just attracting new investment and new businesses to rural areas, but retaining the businesses that we already have.

Otter Controls—everybody in this room probably uses one of its products—makes thermostats. It was started after the second world war, when the founder of the
company devised the bimetal strip to enable the temperature to be controlled in electrically heated flying suits for the Royal Air Force. That, in itself, is a fantastic story, but we are time-limited today, so I cannot go into it. The company operates on Tongue Lane industrial estate and employs many local people.

Both companies, and others on the estate, have contacted me recently about the inadequate broadband provision. The estate was not originally included in the Digital Derbyshire scheme, but because of savings and advances in technology, it now will be. That is good news, not only for the companies but for the many local people that they employ. As both companies are significant exporters, it is also good news for UK plc.

There will be a discussion about what is termed “fast”: how fast will it be, will it be fast enough and can it be made faster? The initial commitment, as part of the universal service obligation, is 10 megabits per second, but we need to be sure that that is future-proofed. As more and more services are provided online as time progresses, it must be possible to speed it up. I am sure that those finer details will be explored during proceedings on the Bill. I welcome the fact that Ofcom will be given the power to review the speed to ensure that it remains sufficient for the needs of the day.

We need to ensure that that commitment is matched by delivery. The last 5% will be, by its nature, the most difficult. It will be a challenge, and it will not be easy, but if we give people the legal right to such broadband, we have to be able to deliver it. What is more, it must be available at an affordable and competitive rate. I recently met BT and Digital Derbyshire in the village of Chinley, where a new fibre-enabled cabinet has been fitted. That is a welcome move, but there are still areas of the village of Chinley that will not be served by the cabinet. In other areas of the High Peak, Councillor Sarah Helliwell, who was newly elected last year, is already dealing with requests from her residents in the Hope valley who are desperate for faster broadband. Other constituents of mine, such as Andy Byford and Steve Ottby, who has corresponded directly with the Minister, are eager for a faster, better and more viable internet connection. Although we are getting better and faster connections in the High Peak, they are by no means universal. The coverage is still varied and patchy. The word that has been used is “universal”, and the coverage must be just that. As I have said, to achieve that will be difficult, challenging and, in places, expensive. I stress again that as well as being universal, it must be affordable.

I have great confidence in the ability of the Minister and the Government to deliver this huge commitment. I look forward to the day when I can tell prospective exporters, it is also good news for UK plc.

There is much else to talk about in the Queen’s Speech, but I will leave it there on the digital economy Bill, because other colleagues want to speak and I am conscious of the time. I congratulate the Government on the measure and I look forward to its being delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible.
NHS waiting times in England are longer, with more than 3.5 million people on waiting lists. A&E has seen the worst performance figures on record, with patients waiting longer to be seen. There are also longer waiting times to see a GP. Cuts to older people’s care have seen delayed discharges from hospitals reaching a record high. Cuts to nurse training places have led to staff shortages, and also created a massive financial hole as agency staff have had to be hired to cover the vacancies.

There are fewer police and fewer firefighters. Social services are under strain, and social worker vacancies are on the rise. Sure Start centres have closed. Teachers and doctors are leaving the professions. Museums and libraries have been decimated, leaving children and families without basic educational resources to supplement their schooling. House building is at its lowest since the 1920s, and homelessness in London has leapt 80% since 2010. These are not just figures, but personal stories of anguish. We are seeing a real impact on lives, on jobs, and, ultimately, on life chances. That is the real story of Britain under Conservative rule.

I must praise the valiant efforts of councils, especially Labour councils, to try to keep things running. They are innovating, but with the financial squeeze—a 25% cut in budget during the last Parliament and an 8% cut set for this one—and the policies of this Government, it is becoming ever more difficult to do so. That is the rub: the Government have the wrong priorities. Who supports what is happening in the NHS—the unnecessary reorganisation and the attack on junior doctors? It is certainly not the patients or NHS staff. The NHS is a prized national asset and provider of collective health security. The Government’s approach is more about the prejudices of the former Health Secretary and the bunker mentality of his successor. I am glad that there has been some backing down, but it is simply not enough.

Who supports the Government’s plans for the BBC? Looking at my postbag, it does not seem to be the licence fee payers, the actors or the programme makers. What benefit is it to Britain to run down the BBC, a prized national asset with a global reputation? The action seems to be more about the prejudices of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. There has been a background bullying, but it is not enough.

Who supports the forced academisation of all schools? It is not the teachers, the parents, the pupils, or even the Tory councils. What does it solve to force good schools to concentrate on unnecessary reorganisation? It is more about prejudices relating to state schools. There is little consideration of the real issues of falling school budgets, chronic teacher shortages, not enough good school places and children being left to fall behind. There has been another backing down on academisation, but why the need for so many U-turns, and why is the Bill even in the Queen’s speech? Those are just some examples of the wrong priorities; there are many more.

A long time ago, the Prime Minister said: “We will trust the professionals.” How little we hear of that now. The Government’s approach is riven with contradictions. The devolution agenda offers a real opportunity for improved services. I am talking about the opportunity to bring services together in localities and to use new technologies and ways of delivery. We also have new leadership. I am delighted that Sadiq Khan was elected Mayor in London and Marvin Rees in Bristol. There is a real opportunity there, but devolution is going hand in hand with a raft of Government cuts. It is the political interference that is having a lasting effect. The Government are driving the destruction of the sense of public value, public services, and public assets and the principles of collaboration and excellence. I plead with Ministers and Government Members to be a little more honest. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), freed from the shackles of Cabinet responsibility, admitted when he resigned that there is a lack of fairness and compassion. He said that the disabled will be impacted by the Government’s policies, which have been “enacted in order to meet the fiscal self-imposed restraints that I believe are more and more perceived as distinctly political rather than in the national economic interest.”

This Queen’s Speech is not about the challenges that are facing Britain. It is not an honest conversation about how public services can be improved and reshaped to meet the needs of all of us in the 21st century. Sadly, it is a missed opportunity from a Prime Minister who is running out of time to prove that he can leave a positive legacy for our public services and indeed for our country.

7.29 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate on the Gracious Speech. There is always a theme in these debates on the Queen’s Speech—a list of goals that are not present, a list of what should have been in there that was not, and what people do not like about it and what they do like about it. What has struck me is that the common theme from the Opposition is that they do not think that there is much in the Queen’s Speech, and yet, as we have just heard, there are 21 separate Bills. There is quite a lot in there.

It takes me back to 2010, when I first became an MP, because this Queen’s Speech is all about why I wanted to come into politics in the first place. Looking back to 2010, I see that on my website I described myself as the fresh-faced MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys. That is no longer true—I look in the mirror now and see that the lines are slightly deeper, the eyes slightly more sunken; I am on the wrong side of 40—but one thing has not changed: my belief that I got into politics to stand up for the people who are directly under the state’s care who have no one to stand up for them. They include the patients in hospital, whom we discussed in opening today’s debate; the young people in care waiting to be fostered or adopted, who the Prison Reform Trust told us today are over-represented in the youth justice system, not just by a small amount but by an absolutely massive amount; and the prisoners in our prisons who are not being educated properly or rehabilitated, which has a direct impact on the number of victims there will be if we do not reduce reoffending. Getting that right has to be the right thing to do.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the radicalisation, both Islamist and neo-Nazi, that takes place in prisons? Is there not a need for the Government to tackle that? People are going into prison with some sort of innocence in terms of religious belief and coming out with a radical opinion. There has to be something done.

Paul Maynard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He tempts me to indulge in a nine-minute disquisition on how we balance the presence of faith in
our prison system with the need to safeguard against radicalisation. I agree with him broadly, but I do not want to go down that path, tempting though it may be. I would much rather focus on the fact that what brings all this together—standing up for those who have no one else to stand up for them—is this idea of life chances, which is the theme behind the Queen’s Speech.

The Whip should listen carefully now: although I hate the phrase “life chances”, he should not write that down in his little black book, because to my mind what we are really talking about is social justice. Like Ruth Davidson, I am proud to say I am a John Major Conservative. I believe in equality of opportunity. I do not believe in equality of outcome because it cannot be guaranteed, but I do believe that part of achieving social justice is taking ownership of the consequences of our policies. We have to have some regard for the outcomes.

That can be hard to justify when we look only at globalised national statistics. They do not give us the granular narrative detail of individual lives. Many times in this Chamber we have debated how we measure child poverty, what the best indicators are, what they mean, and how we tackle child poverty. We can disagree constructively on what those indicators are and how we utilise them, but I believe we need to go down another level. A good example is an article I urge everyone to read that appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine last month about the proportion of Americans who, if landed with an unexpected bill for $400, would not be able to meet it out of their earnings. Shockingly, some 47% of Americans would not be able to pay that bill for $400 without recourse to either borrowing from others or payday lending. I shudder to think what the figure is in this country. No doubt a sociology department somewhere is preparing a research funding request as we speak to find out that information. We need to burrow down so much more into the detail to get a true understanding of how to improve life chances.

Think about the connection between social isolation and ill health—the number of lonely elderly people in my constituency who probably do not speak to anyone day in, day out, and the younger people with serious health conditions who may feel socially isolated. Social isolation is the key predictor of future ill health and therefore future demand on the health service. That has to be taken into account. Think also of children. I visit many primary schools and I know that in the more deprived parts of my constituency there is a major problem with the number of children arriving at school aged four who are uncleaned. Think of the burden that places on the staff in toilet training them, taking them away from the educational aspects of their job.

Another wider issue for older children perhaps, those who are eligible for free school meals, is how many of them are not fed properly during the school holidays. I know the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) is deeply concerned about that. Although all that is difficult to measure, it gives a different dimension to the story of life chances from the national global figures for whether child poverty is going up or down in any particular set of years we all focus on. We need to be much more creative in our approach.

I had hoped that by talking for an extra five minutes, my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy would have returned to his seat to hear what I am about to say about Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues. I know he has to wind up the debate and I was hoping to help him. He published an excellent culture White Paper just before the Queen’s Speech—the first since Jenny Lee’s ground-breaking document in the 1960s. The key element of the latest White Paper is about broadening participation. I had not really thought about it in those terms, but I was invited by a constituent, James Nash, to a concert by the National Youth Orchestra at the Liverpool Philharmonic hall a few weeks ago. James plays trumpet at grade 8—grade 8 is a requirement to play in the National Youth Orchestra. He is very proud of his participation and thoroughly enjoying the experience. He went to a local comprehensive and is very musically talented so this is a fantastic opportunity for him, yet that orchestra is a charity, supported by the Arts Council.

I had the pleasure of hearing Thornton Cleveleys Brass Band the Sunday before last. For the first time ever, it has won a regional division of its national brass band competition at the fourth tier, which will soon compete in Cheltenham in the national competition. That band is looking for funds and it will be going to the Arts Council, which now supports brass bands thanks, I believe, to the Minister’s intervention. That broadens participation by so many young people who enter music through the local brass band.

There are many ways in which culture is broadening horizons, but unfortunately in Lancashire there is one way in which those horizons are narrowing rapidly—through the very sad decision by Lancashire County Council to close so many of our local libraries. Almost half of Lancashire’s libraries are being shut. I am losing Cleveleys library, which has a children’s centre attached, and Thornton library, which is just over the constituency boundary but I feel I have a share in it with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace). We all recognise that councils have to make savings. What I find so frustrating is that when others have come up with solutions to help to keep libraries open and make the savings, Lancashire County Council will not sit down and listen.

Wyre Borough Council wants to convert all Wyre’s libraries into a community interest company, thereby forgoing many of the business rates and other associated costs that make them so expensive to run for the county council. By doing that, it can save the money the county council wants to save and keep every single library open, but shockingly the county council will not even sit down and talk about it. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) rightly praised councils that innovate. Please could she have a word with Lancashire to persuade the council to innovate? Many other councils of all stripes have rethought how they do library provision. Why can Lancashire not do the same? Does it want to make a cheap political point? I desperately hope not, because that would be a tragedy.

I remember back in 2008 the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) taking the visionary step of calling a public inquiry because Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council had chosen to close so many of its libraries. I attended that public inquiry. I know he is not here, but I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy will
agree to meet me to discuss whether Lancashire’s plans are enough to justify another public inquiry under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The council has an obligation to provide a “comprehensive and fair” service. My concern is that what Lancashire is planning is not fair—I know that is a subjective term—and it is certainly not comprehensive.

My constituents, who have been accustomed to going to Thornton and Cleveleys libraries will now have to go further afield, to Fleetwood and Poulton, shortly after seeing all their bus connections to such areas slashed by the county council. That is doubly frustrating. I urge Ministers at least to arrange for me to have a conversation with my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy to discuss those issues.

On a wider point, whenever I come here, I desperately try to believe that all of us are here for the right reasons—we all want to make things better for the people we represent in our constituencies. Some of us hide it better than others, perhaps, by our conduct in this place. Some are more bolshie, some are ruder, some cat-call me from a sedentary position and some chunter away, but I always try to find something positive in what the other person is saying, and I urge all Members to try to do that.

Whatever we think of the phrase “life chances”, the issues that it covers are surely the reason why we came here today. I urge all Members to look for the positives in what this Government are trying to do. I know that the Opposition have to scrutinise us, but I hope they will open their hearts occasionally to find the good stuff that we are doing and help us to do it better still, rather than just criticising us for being anti-public sector, anti-everyone and anti-everything.

7.40 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): In that vein, I will try to be constructive, but I need to point out the current situation. I want to challenge the Government on their assertion that they will “deliver opportunity for all”, as the Prime Minister put it last Wednesday, or extend life chances for all. All the evidence indicates the contrary.

We are one of the most unequal countries in the world and under this Government that is set to get worse. In the UK 40 years ago, 5% of income went to the highest 1% of earners. Today that income figure is 15%. The Institute for Fiscal Studies forecasts indicate that between 2015 and 2020 the 90:10 ratio—that is, the ratio of income at the 90th percentile of the household income distribution to income at the 10th percentile—will increase from 3.8 to 4.2, largely as a result of tax and social security changes. In other words, the richer people are, the more quickly they will accumulate even more income, and the poorer they are, the less income they will accumulate.

We know that that is bad for society. If we are looking for constructive criticism, there is so much evidence to show that as the gap between rich and poor widens, everybody suffers in terms of social mobility, life expectancy, mental health and crime. Everything gets worse when we become more unequal, and that is what is happening. It is not just a matter of income; it is also about wealth, as we know from the Panama papers, which revealed that the richest are keeping their assets in offshore tax havens where tax is avoided and evaded.

According to the Equality Trust, in the past year alone the wealth of the richest 1,000 households in the UK increased by more than £28.5 billion. Their combined wealth is now more than 40% of the population—that is 10.3 million families. While the wealth of the richest 1% has increased by 21%, the poorest half of households saw their wealth increase by less than a third of that figure. I could go on. This is constructive criticism. This is the effect of the Government’s policies.

The Government, like the coalition, have a regressive approach to their budgets, and it looks as though this will continue. Regressive economic policies where the total tax burden falls predominantly on the poorest, combined with lower levels of public spending, are key to establishing and perpetuating inequalities, with all the damage that I have just described. As has been pointed out, when Labour was in government NHS spending increased by 3.2% in real terms, whereas between 2010 and the present, we have seen a decrease from 6.2% to 5.9%. That has caused a financial crisis for many trusts. In my own area in Greater Manchester, where we have had the opportunity of devo Manc, we are expecting a deficit of £2.2 billion by 2020. That is the projected outcome of the unfavourable devolution of that budget.

The same is happening in education and, in my area, in social security and support for disabled people. We have seen a general decline in support for disabled people since the 1960s. I am looking critically at Labour’s record too. In 2012 3.3% of GDP was spent on support for disabled people. Now that figure is 1.1% and it will decline to 1% by 2020. It is particularly the people on low income, including the working poor, and the sick and disabled who have been hammered and continue to be hammered by this Government. As a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, 3.7 million people will have had £28 billion of cuts in support.

We have just passed the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, which will compound the cuts. We are all aware of one of those—the cut of £1,500 a year to approximately 500,000 people who have been found not fit for work in the employment and support allowance work-related activity group. That is anathema, particularly as the evidence shows that on average disabled people have extra costs of £500 a month.

That and further cuts will plunge disabled people into poverty and affect their condition. Ultimately it will affect the demand on the NHS and social care. The Government’s own data released last August show that people on ESA and incapacity benefit in 2013 were 4.3 times more likely to die, compared to the general population, which shows just how vulnerable they are. These figures were released during the August bank holiday after the Government were compelled by the Information Commissioner to release them.

Research published last November in a peer review journal estimated that the work capability assessment alone was associated with 590 additional suicides, 280,000 additional cases of self-reported mental ill health and 725,000 additional anti-depressant prescriptions. Just a week ago, when Parliament was not sitting, the Government published the peer review reports on social security claimants who had died between 2012 and 2014. At the time the former Secretary of State denied that the Government held any records on people whose deaths may have been linked to the social security
system. We now know from those reports that 10 of the 49 claimants had died following a sanction, and 40 of the 49 deaths were the result of a suicide or suspected suicide. That has occurred throughout the country. The heavily redacted reports highlight widespread flaws in the handling by Department for Work and Pensions officials of claims by vulnerable claimants.

Last week I called for a statement to be made on those reports, but the Leader of the House refused, so I am putting on record the questions to which I want answers. What action has been taken to address the recommendations from those reports? Will the Government review the recommendation from the Select Committee’s sanctions report last year to establish an independent body to review the deaths of social security claimants? Will they agree to an independent review of sanctions and stop the rollout of the current pilot on in-work sanctions? Finally, given the links of those deaths to the work capability assessment, will the Minister recognise that that process has lost credibility, and will he make the fresh start that we want to see?

In 2009 we became signatories to the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Government promised a White Paper on employment to set out how they intend to halve the disability employment gap by 2020. Where is that dealt with in this Queen’s Speech? The Prime Minister said last week that the Government were reducing the disability employment gap. No, they are not. The evidence shows the contrary—that it is up from the previous year to 33%. Only 124 employers have signed up to the Disability Confident campaign. Last year 37,000 disabled people benefited from Access to Work, out of 1.3 million. That clearly will not cut it.

On education and training, why is there such a delay in children being assessed for education, health and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to higher education mean for disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeships available to disabled people? What and care plans? Why are we not increasing the number of apprenticeships available to disabled people? What will the shifting of the disabled students allowance on to apprenticeship
the national health service, I hasten to add, not on the Secretary of State—since we know from last week’s data that there is a £2.5 billion deficit that involves two thirds of trust’s being in the red. That is set to endure, since we have a real issue in reconciling the money going into the national health service, welcome though it is, with the extra demands being put on the health service all the time through the demographic changes that I mentioned.

We are now 18 months into the five year forward view, and the £22 billion in savings looks challenging, to put it mildly. Those savings are predicated on a number of assumptions—in particular, a continuing input into public health—and yet, necessarily, the local government grant has been squeezed this year. According to the Health Foundation, we also have a £6 billion social care cost funding gap. All this impacts on health generically. Simon Stevens made his prognostications based on continuing spend on public health and on social services, both of which have been squeezed. I make no criticism of the Government on that, since it is absolutely necessary to deal with the economy, as I said in my opening remarks. It has happened, nevertheless, and therefore, I am afraid, undermines much of what Simon Stevens had to say. We need to bear that in mind when we assess how realistic is the £22 billion figure, which, by his own admission at the time, required what he described as a “strong performance” by the national health service.

“Five Year Forward View” talked of a “radical upgrade” of public health and prevention, stating that public health was its first priority. Many of us can remember the Wanless report by the late Derek Wanless, which said that improvements in public health and prevention were absolutely essential if his “fully engaged” scenario was to be enacted. The recent Carter review showed a considerable unwanted variation across our national health service. In this, there is some hope for squaring the budget, since if there is such a wide variation across the national health service, there must surely be capacity to improve practice across the service and thus generate efficiencies. However, it appears that Carter has stalled, and we need to have a proper plan for the future on how the differences may be dealt with and, we hope, erased. Beyond some useful sharing data, it is not clear that Carter has been progressed in the way that we might want. I fear that if we do not give it a bit of oomph, there is a risk that it will go the same way as Wanless, which would be a great pity.

I very much support the seven-day-a-week national health service. As I have said in the past, I am not terribly convinced by the mortality data that underpin it. I am much more persuaded that we need to look at items of clinical service to underpin the argument for a seven-day NHS. I am thinking particularly of things like palliative care services. I am thinking about the fact that there are no routine endoscopy lists on a Saturday and a Sunday. That has huge implications for people who have had an upper gastro-intestinal bleed on a Friday, for example. The upper gastro-intestinal endoscopy example is a good one, since it touches on Bruce Keogh’s standards 5 and 6, which recommended endoscopy within 24 hours of a bleed. That is not happening in many of our acute hospitals. A lot of the remedy has to do with considering how to network hospitals, and perhaps our national health service is not in a position in order to ensure that when people are acutely unwell they go to a unit that is capable of managing their healthcare needs in the most efficient and effective manner and ensuring that they have the very best chances of leaving hospital in good order.

We are faced with the reality of a healthcare system that is working at full tilt, and of which we are enormously proud, but delivers healthcare outcomes that could be better by international standards. Part of the reason is that we do not spend enough on healthcare. The reason I do not envy the Secretary of State for Health is that he is going to have to grip the reality that in this country we spend very much less than countries with which we can reasonably be compared—8.5% of our GDP compared with 11% in the Netherlands, Germany and France. I have no easy solution for that, but I do suggest, ever so gently, that we need to look a little more broadly at potential solutions. We could think, perhaps, of having a non-partisan commission that may grapple with this extraordinarily difficult and complex matter, because one thing is for sure—the institution that is held most closely in the public affection is our national health service, and we must fund it properly.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I am afraid that I will have to lower the speech limit to eight minutes to ensure that everybody can get in. I call Paul Blomfield.

8 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I will endeavour to meet that demand, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Salisbury (Dr Murrison), who made a very measured speech. I came close to agreeing with his last point, if not his earlier criticism of our Front Benchers, because this Queen’s Speech provided an opportunity to tackle the funding crisis in the NHS. Sadly, however, it did not take that opportunity; nor did it tackle the crises in social care and, indeed, the impact of the disproportionate cuts on local government. Instead, the Government are turning their ideological fire on two areas of hugely successful public provision—the BBC and higher education. The hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) made the point that we should not be ideological in the public versus private debate. He is right; what matters is what works.

In that context, what is the BBC White Paper all about? If the BBC were some colossal failure, plumbing new depths in unpopularity, there might be cause for reform, but we all know it is not such a failure. The BBC is the envy of the world. It is hugely popular in the UK, as we know from the overwhelming support it received in the Government’s own consultation. It is fair to say that the Government’s plans are not as bad as some of the leaks made out. I hope that that is an indication that the Government are listening. It is probably the tried and tested strategy of leaking something really bad so that, when they publish something that is simply bad, everybody breathes a sigh of relief and thinks it is okay.

Although the plans are not as terrible as was feared, there are still serious concerns. Underlying the proposals appears to be the idea that the BBC is bad for the market and therefore has to be reshaped in line with the views of the Murdochs because it is too popular, too
successful and too good at what it does. The Government want to add new distinctiveness criteria to the BBC’s mission statement, which they say should be “discernibly different in approach, quality and content to commercial providers”.

In so much of what it does, the BBC is already different, so what is this about?

The proposals could stop the BBC competing on a level playing field with commercial providers in producing popular and successful programmes. This Government believe in markets to drive up quality, so why are they interfering in this market to handicap the most successful player? They want the charter to make it clear that the licence fee is not solely for the use of the BBC, and they want to establish a contestable fund for which commercial rivals can bid. What is that about?

Why is there a requirement for the BBC to recruit 150 local reporters to feed news content to local newspapers? We all support local newspapers, and we should debate their future, but quietly top-slicing a block of public funds for that purpose without a full debate sets a dangerous precedent. The proposal for Ofcom not just to become the BBC regulator, but to have a brief to assess the market impact of “any aspect of BBC services” sends a worrying signal, as does the plan to undermine the BBC’s independence by allowing the Government to appoint as many as half of the non-executive directors to its new all-powerful board, which will have responsibilities for editorial direction and programming.

What is it all about? Is it that successful public services challenge the Government’s world view that only the private sector can deliver quality, or is it just that the Government do not like the BBC? In 2008, the Prime Minister wrote that the BBC has a “left-wing bias”, is “instinctively pro—Big State” and has become “oversized and over-reached itself”. His one-time hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has called the BBC “statist, corporatist, defeatist, anti-business and”—of course—“Europhile”.

Perhaps most revealing is the Culture Secretary’s comments that the BBC’s approach to impartiality drives him “insane” and that its ceasing to exist is a “tempting prospect”. I must say that those comments actually make him unfit for the post he holds. Prejudice is no basis for good policy, and I hope that the Government will think again.

I hope the Government will also think again about the higher education White Paper. We have one of the best university systems in the world. It is good for UK students, and, despite the best efforts of the Home Office, it is good at attracting students from all over the world, bringing in over £10 billion of export earnings, so we should take care about meddling in it.

The higher education White Paper proposes a teaching excellence framework. I agree that a focus on teaching excellence is a good thing, but if we get the measurement of teaching quality wrong, we will create perverse and unintended consequences. That concern was expressed by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, when we looked at the proposed metrics, which also risk damaging our reputation internationally. Our universities are known around the world for the excellence of our independent quality assurance. If we move from the current system of quality assessment to the proposed three tier ratings, we will immediately send out a message internationally that not all our universities are outstanding.

A system of ranking might be okay if it were part of an internationally agreed approach, but if we take a unilateral stand on dealing with quality assurance within our university system, we will be sending out the message that our system is not quite good enough, which will damage our brand and deliver students into the hands of our competitors. As I have said, the Home Office is already spectacularly effective at doing that.

There is also a risk in opening up the sector to new providers. We do not need to look very far to see that risk in practice. We simply need to look at the United States, on which the model is based. Universities operate there on a business model in which unscrupulous providers milk the publicly funded loans system and recruit students to substandard courses: the public lose, the public purse loses, students lose, and the companies pick up the profits. In recent years, more than two dozen companies running for-profit colleges in the United States have been investigated or sued by state prosecutors. Together, the 152 schools under investigation received about $8.1 billion in federal student loan and grant payments in the last fiscal year, according to an analysis in The New York Times. Some of those companies are already operating in the UK and are looking for the opportunity, which this higher education White Paper provides, to extend their operations. As with the BBC, it seems that the Government are not making decisions on the basis of what works and are putting ideology before the evidence. On both these matters, I urge them to think again.

8.7 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) in this debate on the Queen’s Speech. In the time afforded to me, I want to focus on the defence of three key public services—the NHS, schools and the BBC.

On the first, 28% of my constituents in Bexhill and Battle are over the age of 65, versus a national average of 17%. There are forecasts that the national average will reach 25% by 2050, which is a cause for great celebration. However, as a result of an ageing population, my constituency has the highest rate of dementia in mainland Britain. East Sussex has the highest percentage of over-90s in the United Kingdom, while mainland Britain. East Sussex has the highest percentage of over-90s in the UK, and is predicted to be able to make the same claim for the over-75s and the over-85s in the years to come. Accordingly, the state of the NHS is of particular importance to my constituents—not just those who rely on it in their older age, but those who need to access it across the age spectrum.

I have ruptured, and this week re-ruptured, my Achilles tendon, so I have been something of a drain on NHS resources. It has, however, given me the opportunity to witness, at first hand, the NHS and the first-class people who work in it. I want to say a huge thank you to every clinician and employee for what they do for my constituents. Their clinical expertise, dedication and care make me incredibly proud to be British and equally determined that we should listen to their ideas for and concerns about the NHS.
The decision by our junior doctors to call the first ever all-out strike was a deeply depressing outcome of the nearly year of the contract negotiation. On the day of the strike, I went to the picket line to meet the junior doctors who had looked after me following my first Achilles tendon rupture. I spent an hour listening to the concerns of those junior doctors. Some concerns were linked to their personal circumstances and their feeling that it was unfair, in their position, to have only the same rights as a fixed-term employee when it came to the unilateral imposition of contract terms. Other concerns were about their workplace and their ability to do their best in the face of increased demand from patients.

On that day, I was asked whether I would write to the leader of the BMA and the Secretary of State for Health and pass on those junior doctors’ desire for talks to resume and a negotiated settlement to be reached. I duly did so and was delighted when talks were subsequently held and a resolution was reached. I hope that the junior doctors will consider the settlement negotiated by the BMA a fair compromise that is worthy of acceptance, and I thank the Secretary of State for going the extra mile.

It is clear to me that, once the contract is finally negotiated, we should have a grown-up debate about the future of the NHS. Can we expect it to meet the needs of an ageing population, carry on purchasing ever more expensive drugs, deliver innovative treatment and cope with an increasingly obese population when we as a nation only put 8% of GDP towards health? In the French and German model, it is 11% of GDP.

Inflationary patient demands on the NHS equate to a 4% increase per annum, yet the increase in spending, welcome as it is, is running at 2%. This Conservative Government have spent record amounts on the NHS, but does the current situation make it reasonable that those who fail to take individual responsibility, or who waste the time of our doctors or nurses or disrespect them, should pay towards their care or be denied it? I welcome the Government’s decisions to introduce a new Bill to tax sugar content and to strengthen existing rules to ensure that all health tourists from abroad pay for their treatment. However, we could also look closer for purpose or those that are no longer of a viable size.

That is not to say that becoming an academy is not a good idea for a school that wants to. I have just spoken of junior doctors’ desire to take control of their career and their destiny, and it strikes me that we now have a generation of headteachers who are no longer willing to be told what to do by their LEA but want to make their own decisions about how to run their school and whether to expand. It comes down to choice, which drives up standards. I hope that my local schools will consider making their own determination on expansion.

Tristram Hunt: The “Educational Excellence Everywhere” White Paper, published in March, states that every school will become an academy. Is that choice?

Huw Merriman: The choice to become an academy will be there for every school that wants to take it. As has been made clear, if the LEA is no longer fit to deliver and is not functioning properly, a school will be required to do so. [Interruption.] I see that the hon. Gentleman is now having a separate conversation having asked me that question, but I have done my best.

Somewhat unusually, I have a high proportion of Church of England and Roman Catholic schools in my constituency. For academisation to work in my community, a local cluster of schools forming a multi-academy trust looks the most feasible idea. I welcome the Department for Education’s guidance to help the Church to become a part of that, and I look forward to working with my diocese to ensure that it is able and willing to do so. Without it, the advantages of academisation will be hard to deliver.

Overall, I am incredibly excited by the proposals contained in the White Paper, which will deliver fairer funding to a rural constituency such as mine, where our spend per pupil is almost half of that in parts of London. They will also give headteachers more freedom to train and recruit, which is a particular challenge in a rural constituency such as Bexhill and Battle.

In the past 12 months I have visited a school a week in my constituency and have been fortunate enough to spend time with my brilliant local heads and teachers.

I welcome the Government’s ring-fencing of schools spending, but I am conscious that schools are addressing a funding gap following increased national insurance and pension contributions and the advent of the national living wage. The more power my local schools are granted to determine how to spend their budget, the better they will deliver education. I look forward to playing my part in helping the education Bill become law.

I confess that I am a happy and enormous supporter of the BBC. The programme for its future that the Government are seeking to deliver is intended to promote social mobility and empower people from all backgrounds to succeed to their true potential. Having failed my 12-plus exam and attended a secondary modern school, I found that much had passed me by in the years between 12 and 16. It was only when I went to a further education college for my A-levels and experienced independent thought and working that I discovered a love of learning. Having the BBC as an additional source of learning and inspiration was essential in getting me to university. This rarely comes up in debate, perhaps because many in positions of influence had the benefit of a more rounded education, but for those of us who have had to grab every opportunity to better ourselves, the BBC has been an essential rung on the ladder in the advancement of social mobility. Having got involved in discussions on the details, I am delighted that the Government’s charter renewal will preserve and improve the BBC, and I thank them for that.

The programme that the Government outlined in the Queen’s Speech is evidence that they will fight to defend public services, not just by preserving all that they do well, for instance through the BBC’s charter renewal, but by introducing reforms that enable more innovation and provide more power for decisions to be taken locally, such as through the education White Paper. I look forward to supporting the Government when difficult decisions on reform have to be made for the benefit of my constituents in Bexhill and Battle.

8.17 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who came to the debate from the viewpoint of people on the frontline. That is to be commended, because what they do on behalf of us and our constituents is most important. We should never move far away from focusing on that.

I want to speak about what the Queen’s Speech offered my constituents on the two biggest issues of concern to them: local health services and the future of our steel industry. Local health services are severely challenged. We were told last week that NHS trusts nationally had reported a deficit of £2.5 billion in 2015-16. When I asked the Secretary of State earlier whether he could rule out the books not being balanced at the end of the year, he was unable to do so. Some 121 of 138 acute trusts ended 2015-16 in deficit, so there is a real problem with the finances. Members on both sides of the House have echoed that today.

In the Scunthorpe area, our whole health economy is severely challenged financially. Balancing the books is a long-running problem for the clinical commissioning group and the local hospital. That raises the question, which hon. Members have asked today, of whether there is enough cash in the system to allow local health services to do the job we expect. There are wonderful people working in the system in the Scunthorpe area and elsewhere in the country, nurses, care workers, porters, doctors, paramedics, administrators and many others. They go to work every day determined to do a good job, but as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) said, the system is at full tilt—or we might say at full stretch.

There have been challenging evaluations of our local health services during the past six months, and we have received poor Care Quality Commission reports for mental health, hospital and some care services, and most recently for ambulance services. People are not going to work to do a bad job, but there is strain in the system and that is reflected in issues of quality and delivery. Disproportionate cuts to social care are adding to the strain on the system.

Locally, there has been an ongoing review of health provision, “Healthy Lives, Healthy Futures”, and there is a general recognition that the way forward is to move resources into the community and closer to patients. That is the theory, but managing to deliver it is challenging because the acute demand at the secondary care end of hospitals, and people turning up at accident and emergency, does not get any less. How do we turn off the tap at that end so as to invest where we know it is needed?

As many Members have said, the real challenge is the ageing population. The Secretary of State said that there will be 1 million more people over the age of 70 by the end of this Parliament, which illustrates the challenge to the system. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), many other Members and I are wearing badges from Dementia Friends, which is a reminder of the growth in demands on mental health services, particularly with an ageing population. Despite the excellent work done by the Alzheimer’s Society and others, much more is needed to deliver what needs to be done.

There are massive challenges, and it would be good if it were easier for local services to develop their local workforce, so that healthcare assistants can be translated into nurses, and other innovative things can be done to meet local needs. Given the importance of community services, pharmacies are being challenged by the Government’s desire to take away £170 million of pharmacy funding. That is not a huge figure, but it seems to run counter to the desire to recognise pharmacies as deliverers of community services, particularly for older people who are close to the community, or those who suffer from mental health problems. Why challenge pharmacies in that way? The other week I was proud to present in this Chamber a petition signed by more than 800 local people that said, “Look after our local pharmacies.” As we consider the challenges to health services, we will see that much can be done intelligently to work with the situation and make it better.

I was disappointed that there was nothing in the Queen’s Speech—just as there was nothing in the Budget—to support the steel industry at its time of great challenge. A real industrial policy would make a difference to setting a strategic path, and give confidence
to all players, be they employers, trade unions or other stakeholders in our manufacturing industry, especially our steel industry. The Government have been slow to respond to the challenges facing our steel industry, and I hope that in a week Tata long products will move into new ownership, and there will be a new and positive chapter for the future. Today is the closing date for expressions of interest in the ownership of the other part of the Tata empire from across the steel industry in the UK.

The fact that such things are happening does not mean that the Government can go to sleep. They must wake up and do more, including on business rates. When Tata invests in a new blast furnace at Port Talbot, or a reconditioned blast furnace at Scunthorpe, it is ridiculous that that capital investment should mean an increase in its business rates. That is the economics of madness. We should have a system to encourage investment in further production, not penalise it.

We must do more on procurement. The Government’s procurement policy has positive aspects, but when businesses such as DONG Energy develop the North sea wind farm, the test is whether they use UK steel or not. We need action against Chinese dumping, to address the lesser duty rule, and we must stop dragging our feet and stopping the European Union carrying out measures that would support our steel industry.

In those two big challenging areas—the local health economy and the steel industry—the Queen’s Speech does not offer a great deal at the moment. However, this debate, and contributions from across the House, can allow it to be developed into something much better.

8.25 pm

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who as always represents his constituents with great passion.

I intend to focus on matters in the Queen’s Speech that relate to communications and the digital economy. In her Gracious Speech, Her Majesty spoke of legislation to be introduced to “improve Britain’s competitiveness and make the United Kingdom a world leader in the digital economy”.

I wholeheartedly support that aim, and a great deal has already been achieved. Britain must be a nation where technology continuously transforms the economy, society and government. The UK has embraced digital transformation, and it is one of the most advanced digital economies on the planet. The internet as a UK industry sector has surpassed manufacturing and retail, and represents the second-biggest economic sector. That has come about as a result not just of the Government’s policies, but from the entrepreneurial efforts and passion of British businesspeople.

According to the Centre for Retail Research, UK consumers will spend an average of £1,372 per person online this year. Online retail as a percentage of total retail is 23% in the UK, which is more than double that of Germany and three times that of the US. A key driver of that is the underlying strength and sophistication of the UK’s financial services industry, and consumer confidence in the security of credit card and financial information online. That is not the case in many other countries, and lack of confidence in the security of online financial data has inhibited the development of the digital economy not only in the developing world, but across many countries in Europe. UK consumers’ online habits are so strong that, when asked what other lifestyle habit they would give up for a year instead of giving up the internet, 78% said they would rather give up chocolate; 21% said they would give up their car; alarmingly, 17% said they would give up showering; and most alarmingly of all, 25% said they would give up— I am not sure how to phrase this, Madam Deputy Speaker—intimate relations.

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): Can you elaborate on that or give an example?

**Nigel Huddleston**: Later on, perhaps, but I will spare my blushes now.

Digital is a UK success story. At 12.4% of GDP, the UK internet economy is the largest of the G20 countries—it is double the size of the US internet economy, three times that of Germany and nearly four times that of France. I have said this many times in the Chamber but it is often overlooked: the G20 average is 3.5% of GDP.

The digital economy employs more than 1.5 million people and is growing at more than double the rate of GDP growth. Clearly, we are already in a leading position in the world. The issue is not so much about becoming a world leader in the digital economy, but retaining and further strengthening our leadership position. Broadband plays a key role in that. We have made huge progress—superfast broadband of at least 24 megabits per second is available in 90% of homes and businesses in the UK, up from a mere 45% in 2010. Ofcom statistics show that business connections sometimes lag behind domestic connections, and companies such as BT Openreach need to do much more to get businesses connected and to improve customer service overall, particularly in remote and rural areas.

The broadband market remains confusing to many consumers and businesses. Research commissioned by Ofcom found that around half of small and medium-sized enterprises found that information about suppliers and tariffs was difficult to compare. I am therefore pleased that the Government are making progress to improve competition, particularly by making the switching process clearer and easier in both the broadband and mobile markets.

On the specific digital measures announced in the Queen’s Speech, I very much welcome the digital economy Bill, which will deliver on the manifesto commitment to roll out universal broadband and increase competition. The new electronic communication code will make it easier and cheaper to build mobile and superfast broadband infrastructure. We must protect and support our digital industries, which is why the introduction of equal penalties for infringements of online and physical copyright is so important. I warmly welcome the proposals to protect children with age verification for accessing online pornography.

The BBC has played a key role in shaping how we are educated, entertained and informed in the UK, via radio, TV, print and online. The BBC iPlayer is one of the most-used digital content sites in the UK. According to last year’s annual report, in January 2015 alone, 264 million iPlayer requests were made. Similarly, more than 27 million unique users in the UK went to BBC News online each week in the first three months of 2015. Those numbers will be higher now.
The BBC has clearly played and will continue to play a key role in the future of the UK digital economy. I therefore welcome the proposals in the recent White Paper to secure the BBC’s future. Many people have been in contact with me about the future of the BBC, expressing suggestions and concerns. I am glad that many of those fears were allayed in the White Paper. Contrary to the predictions of some, there was no wholesale destruction of the BBC, no abolition of the licence fee, no meddling with TV schedules and no instruction not to make popular programmes. Instead, there will be a longer charter, clarity on funding, improved governance, and opportunities for more commercial exploitation of the BBC’s hugely valuable content library.

The simple fact of the matter is that the BBC will be in a stronger not weaker position as a result of the recommendations in the White Paper.

There is much to be praised in the Queen’s speech, and I am confident that the focus on the digital economy and technology will have long-lasting consequences that will benefit the UK economy for decades to come.

8.32 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The title of the debate before the House is “Defending Public Services”. Last week, I listened carefully to the Prime Minister’s speech following the Queen’s Speech and heard the phrase “life chances” repeatedly used in such a way as to suggest that meaningful and fundamental measures to militate against inequality were announced in the address. Indeed, a life chances strategy was set out.

“The Government cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, we hear the incessant banging of the drum for austerity, and on the other we have rhetoric that is supposed to convince us that the appalling life chances of too many of our citizens and our children are being addressed. The Government seem content to see children living in poverty with all that that means. That is not consistent with a life chances strategy, or with a social justice agenda.

I have spoken before in the Chamber, as have so many others before me, about what poverty really costs. It costs families their hope and their motivation. It robs children of the confidence and the self-esteem that would enable them to reach their true potential. Poverty robs those subject to its vagaries of their physical and too often their mental health. Quite simply, it puts people into an early grave after a lifetime of suffering. Children in poverty are more likely to self-harm, and young men in poverty are twice as likely to commit suicide.

What is the response of the Government, who say they are committed to a life chances strategy? They slash support for disabled people and cut support for the working poor. What is required is a credible plan to look at the rising costs facing low-income families. It would be laughable if it were not so ridiculous and painful that we have a Government who seek to send parents to parenting classes but fail fundamentally to address the fact that far too many parents are finding it extremely difficult to put food on the table.

What this programme for government cannot hide, despite the strategies and platitudes set out last week, is that the watchword for this Government has been and continues to be austerity. This austerity is defined by cuts to the public sector across the board, hitting, as it always will, the most disadvantaged, stripping workers of their rights and reducing the working poor to using food banks.

Our Prime Minister has told us: “you can’t have true opportunity without true equality…I want us to end discrimination and finish the fight for real equality in our country today.”

If he is really serious about helping working families who are struggling hard, he must look again urgently at the impact of the austerity agenda on working and low-income families. We are heading for an even more confirmed position, where generations are glued to the bottom rung of the ladder of opportunity. This, of course, will be blamed on a lack of moral fibre or even poor parenting, but the real cause is a lack of opportunity to access employment, a decent income, proper childcare and suitable housing. We are all aware of the Government’s scrapping of legal commitments to tackle child poverty in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, a cutout of legislation that introduced new measures of poverty that, bizarrely, did not include income. Measuring poverty is not enough—we know it exists. The cruel changes in support for families will put too many families under intolerable pressure. If the Government are serious about ending poverty and increasing the life chances of all children, the narrative that suggests a person will be living in poverty as a result of a decision made by that individual needs to change. Low income is not merely a symptom of poverty, but a direct cause of reduced life chances. Any life chances strategy has to recognise which factors militate against people’s life chances. If it does not do that, it is doomed to fail.

The four-year freeze on working-age benefits, including child tax credits, working tax credits and jobseeker’s allowance, will see families lose up to 12% from the real value of their benefits and tax credits by 2020. How does that improve the life chances of those living in poverty? How does that help the nearly 4 million people who experienced persistent poverty for two out of the past four years? It is a shocking state of affairs when most children living in poverty today in the UK have at least one parent in work. There needs to be some creative thinking about how to tackle the lack of reliable work that pays enough for families to make ends meet. Any new approach must complement, not replace, current efforts to measure and tackle child poverty. Measuring incomes and providing safety nets for the vulnerable and those in need should be our priority.

Absolute child poverty is projected to increase from 15.1% to 18.3% by 2021 as a result of planned tax and benefit reforms. Disabled lone parents with young carers are set to lose £58 a week as a result of the loss of the disability premium under universal credit, placing additional care burdens on young carers. If the much heralded life chances strategy is to mean anything, it would benefit from being guided by the Scottish National party’s proposed social equality Bill, which would strengthen social security entitlements by restoring work allowances for low-income workers and single parents. It would actively pursue ways to break down barriers to employment for disabled people and address the gaps in support that have been created by slashing support for disabled people.

None of this is rocket science. All it needs is a recognition that poverty is a scourge we must eradicate and that all that is required is political will—political
choice. Warm words and talk of strategies will not lift families out of poverty and neither will empty rhetoric. Universal credit has failed: it has not incentivised work; it has punished those on low pay. Any system of welfare must be based on need, compassion and respect. Those principles should also guide any strategy that seeks to improve life chances for all. The Government should reflect on that today, if they are serious about tackling the corrosive and life-limiting effects of poverty.

8.39 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson).

I want to talk about protecting and supporting vulnerable people, particularly children and young adults, which is a theme that emerges strongly from the Government’s legislative programme, and focus on life chances. On 31 March 2015, there were 69,540 looked-after children, and according to Adoption UK, as many as 61% of them were looked after by the state because of abuse or neglect. Only 5,330 looked-after children were adopted during the year ending last March, which was a welcome improvement, proportionately, on previous years but still far too few.

I therefore welcome the ambition in the Children and Social Work Bill to provide more children with stable and loving homes through long-term adoption. Stability, security and permanent affection are central to enhancing life chances, and the new commitment to extend the right of care leavers to a personal adviser up to the age of 25 is central to that mission, and I warmly welcome it. The assumption that a young person will be ready to face the world at the age of 18 became old fashioned long ago and was never really the case for people in the care system.

When it comes to looking after the nation’s young people, an increasingly important issue is harmful sexual behaviour. Child abuse gets a lot of coverage but harmful behaviour between children does not. I am currently chairing an inquiry with Barnardo’s into support and sanctions for children who display and are victims of harmful sexual behaviour. We have heard harrowing testimonies from young people with experiences ranging from the use of sexual language inappropriate for a particular age to the sharing of explicit images, online grooming and sexual acts themselves. The risk is increased for children in care.

This issue is rarely tackled because it is tough and uncomfortable to do so, but it is important that both perpetrators and victims have the chance for their experiences to be heard and that we in Parliament act. One young person was looked after from the age of 12. She had an abusive family background and parents with mental health difficulties and was a victim of child sexual exploitation while being looked after in a local children’s unit. She was described as naive, keen for affection and vulnerable to coercion and was exploited by men whom she believed to be her boyfriends.

In such circumstances, we must make sure that the duty of care, which should be shared by everyone—parents, foster parents, carers, teachers, social workers, medical practitioners and police forces—is indeed shared and that there are no gaps or loopholes. I hope that Ministers will take issues such as harmful sexual behaviour into account when considering the precise measures in the Bill, particularly around foster care, the role of schools, police training and standards for social work. I will be highlighting our inquiry’s recommendations to the Government when they are announced within the next few months.

I turn now to the counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill. As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, I take a particular interest in this area, but I am sure that Ministers recognise that tackling extremism is not just a home affairs issue. It is a challenge for our justice system; within education, it is a duty-of-care issue; it is a foreign policy and defence concern; it is an equalities matter; it involves social media; and, above all, it is a life chances issue. It cannot be tackled in isolation as just a home affairs issue, because the causes, the consequences and the challenges are global and multi-dimensional. I know that Ministers will closely consider how Departments across Government can be brought together to make the Bill as effective as possible.

Members of the Muslim community are fighting for the survival of their families and communities, seeking to challenge divisive and hateful views, and deserve our support and encouragement as they challenge those ideologies on their own doorstep. The ideologies that this extremism, increasingly rife, are like an invasive species. The Islam that came to this country with the communities that have settled here since the second world war is not the Islam now taught in some Muslim schools or practised in certain mosques. Wahhabi Islam is not the faith of my parents and does not reflect the cultural richness of the Muslim communities of the subcontinent, from which most of our diaspora come. Rather like an invasive species, Wahhabism has driven out many of the traditions that make my faith a spiritual rather than a political journey. It represents teachings that interpret Islam as a narrow stone age rulebook intolerant of modern society’s norms or indeed much of the basic human decency that we take for granted.

The fight against extremism is not one that should be fought just from Westminster using Westminster’s tools. As the Prime Minister noted in a reply to me last Wednesday, we must empower Muslims to challenge intolerant and hateful ideologies. It takes a huge amount of courage to speak out against organisations when there are self-appointed leaders who groom the young and impressionable. To tackle extremism and to protect vulnerable young people from being attracted to it, we have to challenge it both at source and later on in its journey. We need to think about the establishments, groups and forums where some of these divisive ideas are coming from. I hope the Bill will look at how we can prevent religious or educational establishments from receiving overseas funding if they are unwilling to sign up to an agreed set of tolerant principles that their own society considers acceptable. We already have rules that funders of political parties and unions must adhere to, so why not have them for these other institutions, too?

Safeguarding children from extremism requires powers to take action in any education setting where vulnerable children may be at risk of grooming and indoctrination. Grooming a child for sexual exploitation was once misunderstood; now it is rightly a cause for extreme action and punishment. The same should be the case for educators and youth leaders who teach hate, including those at the centre of events in Birmingham’s “Trojan
horse” schools. We should never allow those individuals back into the classroom or to have any leadership role with children.

On integration and life chances, I have been very encouraged by my conversations with Louise Casey about her review of relations within and between communities, and I am sure that the Government will look to incorporate some of her central recommendations into this and other legislation.

Modern challenges in modern times need modern and bold legislation. Being cautious is not the job of a responsible Government who are effective at taking on those challenges. So I warmly welcome the proposals set out in this Queen’s Speech, and the values and aims that thread through them. When each of these proposals is taken forward, I urge the Government to stay the course and to continue to be ambitious in tackling the challenges they have rightly prioritised as needing our attention and focus.

8.46 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani), who gave a powerful speech about child sexual exploitation, extremism and Wahhabi ideology. I am glad that she sits on the Home Affairs Select Committee. She also mentioned the Trojan horse affair; if she looked into it in detail, she would realise that the speed and nature of the Government’s academisation programme increased the risk to children, as Peter Clarke laid out in his report to the Government. I urge the hon. Lady to read it if she has not already done so.

To deliver the Gracious Speech, we were told that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II required a lift to get up to the relevant Floor in the House of Lords. That strikes me as a rather suitable metaphor for the Queen’s Speech, which needs a fork-lift truck to make it relevant, effective and indeed challenging for the modern era. This is, contrary to what the previous speaker said, a rather tinkering set of measures, setting out the narrowness of the current Tory vision, especially on public services.

Today’s debate is about “Defending Public Services”, but I am more interested in the reform of them. What was missing from this Queen’s Speech was that we were told was the guiding principle of this Parliament—productivity. Absolutely no mention was made of the kind of wealth creation and productivity we need to pay for the public services that we all rely on. Productivity has already gone from this Government’s agenda. If we want to move away from the low-wage, low-skill economy, which my new hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) highlighted in her wonderful maiden speech, and find a way through secular stagnation, we need a focus on productivity. There was nothing in this Queen’s Speech about it.

Let me turn first to education and schools policy. In March, the Government White Paper on schools policy came out. It said that “every school” would become “an academy”—and I thought the Conservatives believed in that. It said that “by the end of 2020, all...schools will be academies”. We now know that this policy has been junked in a series of U-turns on education policy. What was once one of the intellectual strengths of the Conservative party—education policy—has now collapsed. We have had the stats fiasco and the free school fiasco, where even Toby Young has revealed that the policy he sought to pioneer was doomed from the beginning. We have had the term-time holiday fiasco. We have had a Conservative Government trying to ban parent governors from schools. What could be more un-Conservative?

We have also had a U-turn on mass academisation. The Government have devalued the policy on academies: what was a pioneering Labour programme to help the most disadvantaged schools—those suffering the most difficulties—has become “one size fits all” policy, which is not working. My local secondary schools in Stoke-on-Trent are academies, and their conversion from local authority status has not altered the challenges.

I must put on record my horror at the sponsorship of St Peter’s School in Stoke-on-Trent by the Woodard Corporation. It has betrayed the prospects of those children. We have seen a regional schools commissioner fail to step up to deliver change, and we have seen Ministers let five years of education collapse under the Woodard Corporation. The fact that the corporation runs any schools in England is, to my mind, totally shocking.

When it comes to schools policy, we know what matters: strong leadership, well-motivated, well-qualified teachers, and a faculty that is committed to change. It does not matter whether we are talking about a local authority school, a free school, a university technical college or an academy. However, the Government’s “every single school an academy” policy—maybe it comes, maybe it goes—is not the right approach.

I support the policy on national citizenship service, and I think that the Government should make it a vehicle for more effective teaching of citizenship. I look forward to the proposals on the national funding formula. As for reform of the university sector, I think that the Minister has listened to some of the concerns that have been expressed, but I oppose the fee hike. British students—English students—are among the most indebted, if not the most indebted, in the world, and now we want them to pay even more. If we want more money to go to our universities, it should come from general taxation rather than the pockets of students.

The liberalisation of entry to the university market is another issue. Universities can play an important regeneration role, and I respect that, but we must also protect the brand of Universities UK and its success around the world, which can be lost quite quickly. I think we need some reassurances about that.

At this point I should declare an interest, as a university lecturer. I am in favour of rigour in teaching and the teaching excellence framework, but I must urge Ministers to beware of the bureaucracy that surrounds that. University teaching is currently subject to a great deal of quality control. We certainly need more transparency and quality, but the creation of ever more regulations, and perhaps a new Ofsted, requires careful judgment.

One continuing theme is planning for the northern powerhouse. I am a supporter of combined authorities and of metro mayors, and I hope that our Front Bench will be more supportive of those policies, because I think that they demonstrate the capacity of the Labour party and what it can do in office. However, I should...
like them to go further. I think that, in creating combined authorities, we have missed an opportunity to reform public services. I should like to see more decentralisation of finance, and more liberalism allowing combined authorities to raise and spend taxes locally. I should like to see the commissioning of schools taken away from Whitehall and given to combined authorities, so that we can have real local control over schools policy. I should like to see a much more innovative programme for local utilities and the provision of local power in combined authorities.

One of our greatest public services is the BBC. It is bizarre that—just as with universities—a great global force for Britain should spend half its time trying to prevent Her Majesty’s Government from undermining it. In most other countries in the world, the Government would be supporting an institution like the BBC. We need reassurances from the Minister, who I know takes these issues very seriously, about appointments to the new unitary board: will that mean more jobs for the Conservative boys and girls? We need reassurances about the five-year review: will that mean an ability to restrain influence? We also need reassurances about the ratchet of distinctiveness.

I do not know the lift in which Her Majesty rose to give her gracious address, but something tells me that, rather like Her Majesty herself, it might contain German elements. That is a symbol of the great debt that we in this nation owe to Europe. If we vote to leave Europe, everything in the gracious address that the Government want to do will be lost.

8.54 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): On the Monday of last year’s Queen’s Speech debates, at almost exactly this time, I made my maiden speech. Twelve months on, I am delighted to see legislation being brought forward to implement so many parts of the manifesto on which my colleagues and I were elected. This Queen’s Speech is about improving life chances for all. It is about securing our economy so that we can provide the excellent public services on which our constituents, and we ourselves, depend. It is about delivering a truly seven-day NHS and about making our promise on parity of esteem for mental and physical health into a reality.

I depend on the national health service, as do my family. When we needed it most—when my children were born and when my wife was taken ill—the NHS was there for us. I am proud of, and will always be grateful for, the fantastic care provided in our health service, but I have also seen how the level of healthcare available varies depending on when you have to go into hospital. My daughter turned eight a few weeks ago. When she was born, there were complications during labour but, as this was in the early hours of the morning, everything in the gracious address that the Government wish to do will be lost.

The Conservative manifesto promised to ensure that people could access good quality healthcare seven days a week in our NHS. This was a key commitment and I am pleased that legislation is being brought forward to allow for it to be delivered. People will be able to see a GP in the evenings and at weekends to suit modern life. Making it easier to see a GP should relieve pressures on other parts of our national healthcare service. While those patients who need urgent or emergency hospital care should have access to a similar level of consultant-led assessment, diagnostic tests and treatment seven days a week. Under the new proposals, they will be seen by a consultant and have diagnostic tests available, and the most critically ill patients will be seen within the hour.

This can be done only because of the extra money that is being invested in the NHS, and that is achievable only because of our strong economy. The chief executive of NHS England said on “The Andrew Marr Show” yesterday that when the economy suffers, the NHS suffers. However, this Government have put rebuilding the economy and protecting our NHS first. In Dudley, my local hospital trust’s income last year was £64 million higher than it had been five years previously. That has allowed us to have 60 more doctors and 192 more nurses, midwives and health visitors in Dudley than there were in 2010. That is an example of a stronger economy leading to a better-resourced national health service.

That includes mental health care—a part of the NHS that has too often been viewed as the Cinderella service. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced a commitment to parity of esteem between mental and physical health, and I am delighted to see the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who did so much to bring about that legislation, in his place tonight. This Queen’s Speech includes further measures to turn that commitment into a reality for everyone in the country who needs mental health care.

In response to the mental health taskforce, the Government announced an additional £1 billion. This will fund all the taskforce’s priority recommendations. With the increased funding going into mental health services, the focus now rightly shifted from treatment to prevention. Members might not be aware that one in 10 children between the ages of five and 16 have a mental health problem. We need to intervene early, instead of simply throwing money at prescription drugs or treating the symptoms at a later stage. It is a false economy if we do not tackle problems early, before they end up becoming much more expensive and, more importantly, before they cause even more distress and human cost to the individual and their family.

While we are increasing NHS funding, we have a responsibility to ensure that the available resources are focused on services for all our citizens who depend on the NHS. It is right that people who come to Britain for elective healthcare should cover the costs of their treatment rather than expect British taxpayers to pick up the bill. This Government were the first to act to tackle health tourism and the abuse of our NHS, and I am pleased that the Government are to go further with the Bill announced last week, extending the rules on charging people who come here for non-emergency treatment.

I am proud of our NHS. Of course, it is not perfect, but the NHS provides a generally excellent service, free at the point of use. Our NHS has remained so great because of its ability to change and adapt. It has not attempted to preserve whatever was right for 1947 in aspic. Instead, it has responded to changing needs and demands. The measures in the Queen’s Speech will...
allow our national health service to continue to respond to the challenges of today and of tomorrow, offering the best chances for everybody at every stage of their life.

9.1 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who spoke with passion about the NHS, a theme to which I will return. There can be no denying that the legislative programme outlined in the Gracious Speech is thin and aimed at preserving Tory party unity in the run-up to the EU referendum rather than at tackling head on the issues that the country faces, which is a great pity. This evening, I will concentrate on an issue affecting many of my constituents that was almost entirely absent from the Gracious Speech: the appalling state of mental health provision, and emergency provision in particular, across the country.

Our NHS currently faces an unprecedented financial crisis. Under Labour in 2009-10, the NHS reported a surplus of £2 billion. In the last financial year, the NHS in England reported a record deficit of £2.45 billion. It was the worst ever performance in the history of the NHS and worse than that predicted by NHS England. The deficit is kept from being significantly higher only by a series of creative accounting steps taken in a vain attempt to reduce the number of negative press reports about such disastrous performance.

This week, my family has again been profoundly grateful for the NHS. My mother, who spent many years working in the NHS, was admitted a week last Sunday after attending A&E. She was admitted at the weekend, but there was no absence of either diagnostic tests or expert healthcare at any level of the NHS. I am grateful to the dedicated staff who cared for her, and I am glad to say that she was discharged today. Over the past week, my family have seen NHS staff stretched to the limit, including nurses working 12-hour shifts without time to eat. My mother was not in the correct ward for the condition from which she was suffering, but an overspill patient on another ward, because no beds were available. She was admitted with a physical illness, but of all the pressures caused by the financial crisis facing our NHS it is mental health provision that is one of the biggest casualties.

Since May 2010, clinical commissioning groups across the country have reduced the amount spent on mental health, and we are seeing the consequences. In my constituency, for example, funding for first episode psychosis treatment has seen huge cuts and the number of mental health in-patient beds has been reduced, meaning that people in need of mental health care are in many cases left waiting for extended periods, either at home unable to cope or all too often in A&E. My constituency is served by King’s College hospital, a home unable to cope or all too often in A&E. My constituent is served by King’s College hospital, a leading teaching hospital, and the Maudsley, a world-leading psychiatric hospital. Yet despite that combination of exceptional skills, expertise and facilities, the provision for mental health patients in A&E is simply not good enough. Despite the previous Labour Government setting aside funds for a dedicated waiting and assessment area for patients with mental health needs in A&E, it is yet to be delivered. On far too many occasions, patients attending A&E and requiring admission are unable to access a bed, because patients on the wards have yet to be discharged due to a lack of social care provision when they leave hospital.

I welcome the additional spending, although it is limited, on mental health that was announced in the Budget for tackling eating disorders, improving perinatal mental health services and providing mental health liaison services in every A&E, and the Government’s stated ambition of parity of esteem for mental and physical health. But much of the funding has previously been announced, and the overall budget assumes, incorrectly, that NHS trusts, including mental health trusts, will be able to attain unachievable levels of efficiency savings—the failure to do so being one of the main causes of the £2.45 billion deficit the NHS in England currently faces.

The commissioning of in-patient beds for child and adolescent mental health services within England is a national disgrace. Young people in urgent need are shuttled from one end of the country to another as a matter of routine. On the same day as a young person from Liverpool was placed on a ward in London, a young person from my constituency in London was admitted to a ward in Liverpool. No one would think it acceptable for a patient in cardiac arrest to be sent from London to Liverpool, and we should not accept a young person in mental health crisis being moved around the country in this way. Too many young people find themselves in hospitals dozens of miles from home, thus increasing their vulnerability, inhibiting the support that family and friends are able to provide to aid their recovery, and complicating their discharge planning.

The shortage of tier 4 CAMHS beds also means that young people frequently find themselves waiting in A&E for unacceptably long periods—often days at a time. We must see this for the scandal it is; we would not regard it as acceptable for a young person with a broken leg to spend days in A&E with only the most basic triage care, and it is just as unacceptable for someone with a mental health crisis to have to do that. The first step in achieving parity of esteem for mental health is to acknowledge these failures for the scandal that they are.

In my constituency, as across too many parts of the country, there is also an unacceptable shortage of places of safety for people who are detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. That shortage delays the help that people who are desperately unwell urgently need. It is clear that there is too little co-ordination of the planning of the provision of places of safety, with police services, A&E departments and mental health services failing to work together to address the need. In London, the Metropolitan police have taken welcome steps to work towards eliminating the use of police cells as a place of safety for people in a mental health crisis who have committed no crime, but, without adequate multi-agency planning, this unilateral decision has exacerbated the pressure on A&E, resulting in situations where NHS staff are responsible for detaining patients and keeping them safe without having the required resources or an appropriate environment in which to do so.

One of the most shocking illustrations of the lack of parity of esteem between mental health and physical health is life expectancy: people suffering from serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder...
can have a life expectancy 10 to 15 years lower than the UK average. Many mental health patients are dying early from heart attack, stroke and cancer rather than any cause linked directly to their mental health. Suicide is now the leading cause of death for men aged 18 to 49, with close to 5,000 people tragically taking their own lives in 2014. The recent Mental Health Taskforce report recommended the creation of local, area-based, multi-agency prevention plans, with a particular focus on high-risk locations and supporting high-risk groups. I urge the Government to implement the recommendations in full.

Our mental health services are failing too many people. One in four of us will suffer from mental ill health at some time each year, and all of us will know someone close to us who suffers from mental ill health. We are falling very far short of achieving parity of esteem for mental health. I find it astonishing that the Government do not seem to recognise this for the urgent priority that it is, and have failed to include any measures to address it in the Gracious Speech. The absence of significant measures in the Queen's Speech to tackle these important issues speaks volumes about the priorities of this Government and how out of touch they are with the day-to-day needs and concerns of so many of the people I represent.

9.8 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). Coincidentally, my mother, like hers, has been taken into hospital over the last week, and I can only echo her praise for the dedication of the NHS staff who have been providing the treatment. My hon. Friend made a number of powerful points about mental health services, which is a cause close to my heart, and I entirely agree with what she said in her very good speech.

I am pleased to speak in today’s debate on public services, at a time when hospitals, schools and other public services are facing cuts, unnecessary change and unfunded giveaways. My constituents in south Manchester will be surprised to hear the Prime Minister label this Queen’s Speech a continuation of his Government’s life chances strategy. Manchester City Council has seen more than £350 million-worth of cuts over the past six years, resulting in cuts to leisure centres, libraries, road repairs, community mental health support and social workers. This is a statistic I have used in this place before, but if Manchester had our fair share of cuts—I am talking not about being protected from cuts, but about having our fair share—we would be £1.5 million a week better off, which would pay for a lot of public services. We have not had our fair share. We have been hit, as have so many deprived northern boroughs, very unfairly.

Not only that, but my constituents have suffered from the bedroom tax, from unfair sanctions and from cuts to the benefits that help them to get by in life. For many people in south Manchester, it will be hard to accept the contention that the Queen’s Speech has quality-of-life concerns at its core when so many of the local services that make up the fabric of our communities are being stripped away. That is the context in which we discuss the Queen’s Speech today, sitting as we do in an institution that is at the heart of British culture and tradition.

There are two other great British institutions that, more even than anything in this place, make me feel proud to be British, and they both face big challenges. Our NHS, still reeling from the unwanted top-down reorganisation, is in a crisis of rising demand for services paired with massive financial deficits in NHS trusts. For patients, the latest statistics confirm a worrying trend. The proportion of patients being dealt with in A&E within four hours of arrival decreased to 87%, against a 95% target. In March, performance against the key target of patients starting treatment within 18 weeks of a GP referral reached its worst level since the target was introduced.

My constituency is home to many of the 5,000-plus medical and healthcare students in Manchester universities. With the attack on student nurse bursaries, the Government are asking them to do more with less and to work long hours with no help. That, at the same time as the junior doctors’ dispute, has hit the morale of the staff who form the backbone of our NHS. A survey by the healthcare professionals network showed that four out of five healthcare workers had considered leaving the NHS in the last year, and that stress has become the single greatest cause of sickness for doctors. That is the legacy of a Tory Government for the NHS. Similarly, the BBC faces an uncertain time, overseen by a Secretary of State whose commitment to it is questionable. The Government’s concessions on scheduling and finance were welcome, but in the Labour party we believe that any final proposals must protect the BBC as a financially and editorially independent public service broadcaster.

I do not want to be entirely negative. There are some measures in the Queen’s Speech that I agree with, if they are done properly. I certainly support reforms to adoption processes, and reforms to support for young people in care and care leavers. If they go along properly funded social workers and adoption staff, they could help to tackle what I think is one of the biggest problems in society, namely, that we fail too many of our people in care and we fail them when they leave care, with devastating consequences for their future and for our society. I also welcome the potential of the local growth and jobs Bill to make a difference. I have always argued for local authorities to retain business rates growth, so I am interested to see the detail of the plan for councils to keep 100% of business rate revenue. The devil will be in the detail, however, and there will have to be some kind of floor-and-ceiling redistribution mechanism to ensure that the poorest areas, such as Manchester, are not hit hardest. Similarly with the new school funding formula, it is vital that the areas that need additional funding most are not hit.

Perhaps of most immediate interest for the people of Manchester is the prospect of a buses Bill in this Parliament. Finally, there is the prospect of Manchester being given the powers that London has had for so long—powers to franchise a bus system that better serves the people of Greater Manchester. We have been calling for that for years, and it is time the Government acted. A deregulated bus service has failed Greater Manchester, and if the Chancellor is to revive the northern powerhouse initiative, this is a good place to start.

Too often, an inefficient marketplace produces unbalanced bus networks. I see that 100 yards from my house on the bus route through Wilmslow Road in
Withington. Popular routes are being flooded with different providers, and other routes in my constituency have to go without services because the profits of companies come before a good service to the public. The public purse still provides 40% of the revenue that goes into bus services in Greater Manchester. We need to be able to make that money work more effectively. The buses Bill is a vital first step towards the flexible and interconnected transport system that Greater Manchester so desperately needs, but it must be implemented properly. I look forward to working with the Government on this where possible and to the Bill moving forward.

Although there are some good proposals in the speech, there are plenty of underwhelming measures, and some bad and dangerous proposals, too. The proposed British Bill of Rights is, as a policy, as confused as it is unnecessary. The Human Rights Act 1998 that we have today is a modern-day Bill of Rights that has repeatedly protected the vulnerable. Let me quote Liberty:

“Day in, day out, the Human Rights Act is used by ordinary people—including victims of crime, those with physical disabilities or mental health problems, and children—to achieve protection, truth and justice. It is one of the cornerstones of our modern and diverse democracy.”

If the Government really are going to listen to consultation, they should listen to the many voices across the country who say that they should think again, recognise the indispensable protections that the Human Rights Act offers and drop these proposals.

Ultimately, there is a lack of vision and ambition in this Queen’s Speech. It is a missed opportunity to tackle the inequality and insecurity in our country. There is the failure to address homelessness, the lack of an industrial policy, the misplaced focus on ensuring that good and outstanding schools have to become academies, instead of on producing the high-quality teachers of the future, and the lack of measures to link up health and social care. This Government are not addressing the most pressing issues in our public services.

This Queen’s Speech will give little hope to my constituents, who are hoping to see an ambitious Government aware of the struggles that they face. Although I welcome some of the Bills planned, the Government have shown that they are not prepared to fund public services properly. This Queen’s Speech will be forgotten quickly. However, the painful legacy of this Government on public services will not be.

9.16 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be called to contribute to this debate on the Gracious Speech. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), who talked about how our public services are under pressure, and that is a subject to which I should like to return in my contribution.

This Government’s record on protecting public services is woefully inadequate. Unfortunately, I have read little in the Queen’s Speech to suggest that their performance will improve any time soon. Whether we are talking about policing, the NHS, fire services or local government, the story is the same—cuts and more cuts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) stated earlier, the Government seem to suggest that the public sector is bad, and indeed there does appear to be a constant push to privatise public services. We have yet another example of that with the desire to privatise the Land Registry.

We know that the Government have used the global financial downturn as a reason for implementing the most severe financial austerity that our country has ever seen. On the one hand, they have found the money to reduce inheritance tax, capital gains tax and the rate of tax for the highest earners from 50p to 45p, and on the other, they have made huge cuts to the income of working families and to welfare for disabled people, and created significant hardship across the public sector.

I have spoken on a number of occasions in this Chamber about the cuts to policing and the impact that those cuts have had on police services, most notably on neighbourhood police services. Today, I wish to concentrate on council services. As someone who spent 20 years as a county councillor before coming to this place, I have seen at first hand the many excellent examples of locally delivered, democratically accountable public services. I have also seen first-class examples of collaboration between local authorities and other public sector agencies, and in some cases with the third sector and the business sector, too. All too often in these examples, the lead is taken by local authorities because of the strategic responsibilities and overview that they have. In my view, that role is unique and should be protected.

Unfortunately, in my last few years as a councillor, I witnessed the consequences of Tory cuts. It reminded me of when I was first elected as a councillor in 1995 when, for the first two years under the last days of the Major Government, times were tough. I remember millions of pounds being cut from council budgets. Following the election of a Labour Government in 1997, a commitment to local public services was restored and funded properly. Unfortunately, that funding reverted to form in 2010. Since then, the budget for the Welsh Government has been cut by around 10%, and that has impacted hugely on local public services in Wales. I pay tribute to all local authority staff across the sector who, despite the odds and having to do much more for less, still try to deliver key public services as best they can.

Despite a significantly reduced budget, the Labour Welsh Government have led the way in tackling poverty and deprivation. The Jobs Growth Wales programme has been hugely successful, supporting 15,000 young people with job opportunities. That scheme is continuing with £25 million of European funding and will support the creation of 8,955 new job opportunities for 16 to 24-year-olds. The success of Jobs Growth Wales is yet another example of why the UK needs to remain in the EU.

As right hon. and hon. Members will know, local government in Wales is devolved to the Welsh Government. That was hugely beneficial to Welsh councils because in the first years of Tory austerity the Welsh Government under Carwyn Jones protected councils from the severity of the cuts for as long as they could. I remember saying at the time to local government colleagues in England, who were hit hard by austerity, and comparing our situation with the huge difficulties that they were having in delivering services.

Many people in the communities I represent rely heavily on the services provided by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and, on the Rhymney valley
side, by Caerphilly County Borough Council. Both authorities have worked hard in recent years to protect front-line services as best they could in the face of unprecedented financial cuts. Both councils pay the living wage to their employees—and I mean the proper living wage as suggested by the Living Wage Foundation, which specifies an hourly rate of £8.25, to take people above the poverty line. It is not the pretend national living wage that this Government introduced, which is clearly not a living wage.

Two key services delivered by local authorities that are also statutory services are education and social services, and they utilise the lion’s share of the budget, despite significant pressures. Many of the other services provided by councils are discretionary services, but are hugely valued by the public none the less. They include highways, leisure and community centres, youth services, libraries, arts and tourism, to name but a few.

I think that councillors across our country have done an excellent job in a very difficult situation. This Government are making significant cuts to public services, and that is placing local councillors in an impossible situation. We know that large organisations such as councils should always look for ways to be as efficient as they can be, and efficiency savings are a good way of reinvesting in front-line services, but what this Government have done is more to do with an ideological dislike of public services and than with encouragement and support for vital local services.

To balance their reduced budgets, councillors are having to cut services to local communities. When we see our libraries having to cut their hours, our youth clubs being reduced and our potholes taking longer to repair, we must recognise that that is a direct result of this Government’s actions and their complete disregard for local public services. Cuts have consequences, and this Government must recognise that.

Another example of the Government’s attitude to public services is their treatment of the BBC. The BBC is respected around the world for its high-quality programmes and is one of the UK’s greatest cultural organisations. It is an excellent example of a great British public service. Any attempt to scale back the BBC would have a devastating impact on the UK’s creative industries—the fastest growing sector of the UK economy. I have received many emails from constituents across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney expressing their support for the BBC. We know that the Government have been forced to backtrack on many of their more extreme proposals, but as my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary for Culture, Media and Sport said recently:

“There are still real concerns that the Government will seek to influence the BBC’s editorial decision making”.

That must be avoided. The independence of the BBC remains of paramount importance. We must continue to celebrate the BBC as one of the UK’s great economic success stories.

Finally, while we are discussing defending public services, I would like to mention the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. There is widespread concern that this trade agreement, currently under discussion between the EU and the US, would be detrimental to the NHS. Reassurances have been given, notably by EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström last year when she said:

“Member states do not have to open public health services to competition from private providers, nor do they have to outsource services to private providers. Member states are free to change their policies and bring back outsourced services back into the public sector whenever they choose to do so”.

Labour’s 2015 manifesto stated that we would ensure that the NHS is protected from the TTIP treaty and I am pleased to support any amendment that reinforces this.

9.24 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am one of many speakers in this debate who feel that in significant ways this Queen’s Speech falls short of addressing some of the big challenges of our time in this country. I want to address two of those.

The NHS and the social care system face an existential challenge. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who says that it is not just about money. The system often seems to be completely dysfunctional as a result of the inappropriate divide between health and social care, between physical health and mental health, and between primary care and secondary care. This must be addressed so that we can shape care around the needs of patients.

There is no escaping the fact that there is a financial issue. It makes no sense that between now and 2020 we are projected to spend a decreasing percentage of our national income on the health and care system, at a time when demand is rising rapidly. There are consequences from that trend. I believe the Secretary of State for Health when he says that he cares passionately about patient safety, but as the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) pointed out so effectively, the underfunding of mental health services in our country has massive consequences. As we heard last week, there has been an increase in the past year in the number of people who are shunted around the country in search of a bed. That is a scandalous practice. We know that it is associated with an increased risk of suicide, yet it continues to happen in increasing numbers.

When the pressure increases, crisis management takes over. We cut preventive services in order to prop up acute hospitals, and the services that we cut are the very services that prevent people from going into hospital in the first place. It makes no sense and it needs to change. I have two proposals which the Government need to consider.

I repeat again that I think this is the time for a 21st-century Beveridge report, bringing the parties together to come up with a new long-term settlement for the NHS and, critically, for the social care system. Also, we should consider the case for a dedicated health and social care tax. That has been proposed by people from across the political spectrum. It is the only area of public policy where there is an inexorable rise in demand, yet by protecting the NHS we disproportionately cut other areas of public service. It therefore seems to me that there is a very strong case for carving health and social care out and introducing a dedicated tax. Lord Patten on “Any Questions?” last week made the case for it. Lord Finkelstein for the Conservative side has also argued for it, as has the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field).

We are losing pace with other European countries in our spend on health and social care, and there are consequences from that. I know, as I have said, that the
Secretary of State cares about patient safety, but the safety of patients is being put at risk by the financial pressure that the NHS faces.

Finally, I want to address the prison reform Bill. I welcome the reforms in it, but something much more fundamental is needed. I encourage the Secretary of State for Justice, with his reforming instincts, to go further. A fundamental failure of public policy is reflected in the number of people in our prisons with mental ill health, learning disability and autism, and the number of people in prison in connection with drug addiction or offences relating to the criminal market in drugs. We are seeing a spike in the number of suicides in our prisons, which should horrify all of us. We need to do something about that.

The Secretary of State needs to go beyond the civilising proposals that he has for our prisons and look at radically reducing the number of people who end up inappropriately in our prisons. Germany and Finland imprison about half the number of people that we do. Those are not lawless countries, yet they manage to adopt a much more civilised approach. There should be a presumption against short sentences. We know that people leave prison and reoffend in vast numbers. That does not protect the public. There should be a much greater use of mental health treatment orders as an alternative to putting people in prison, and a renewed focus on restorative justice to address the causes of crime.

There needs to be the long overdue declaration of an end to the war on drugs, which has failed so fundamentally internationally. It criminalises vast numbers of our fellow citizens. Every year in our country, it puts billions of pounds—about £7 billion—into the hands of organised crime. It is associated with extreme violence in our communities. This makes no sense, and too many people end up in our prisons as a result of this misplaced policy. Just as many states in the United States are now moving towards a much more rational policy, and just as Canada has now committed to legislating to regulate the market for cannabis rather than leaving it in the hands of organised crime. I believe that in this country we should follow the same route, with a rational, evidence-based policy that does not criminalise people inappropriately for doing exactly the same as many members of this Government will have done in their youth. Instead, we need to take money away from criminals and collect tax revenue to spend on our essential and vital public services. It is time for a more rational approach. I hope that at some point this Government recognise that if they are to address the problems of crime in our society, ending this futile war on drugs is one of the steps that they must take.

9.31 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). I refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests and my position as chair of the Public and Commercial Services union parliamentary group.

There is a slight disagreement between me and two Labour Members as to the best “Game of Thrones” characters to compare with the Government. Let me offer the Lannister family as perhaps the most accurate description of the current predicament in the Conservative party. The Government are the Lannisters and the Conservative party is the rest of King’s Landing. Like the Lannisters, the Government are being overrun by zealots and fanatics who are ensuring that they cannot get things done because they are more interested in purity. I will leave it to others to identify the High Sparrow, although it would be fair to say that today there has appeared to be more than one candidate for that post. In the circumstances of the current season of “Game of Thrones”, the comparison with the Government is uncanny.

This programme for government fails to address the many problems and major issues that society is facing. There is nothing for those who regularly require the services of a food bank, which represent the largest growth industry in the United Kingdom. Who would have thought that we would be in an era where that was the case?

Where is the legislation to crack down on the abuse of companies not complying with paying the national minimum wage? How does that square with the madness of closing 90% of HMRC offices and making HMRC staff redundant? We now know, through the National Audit Office, that some 209,000 people in the past year have not been paid the national minimum wage—a doubling of those who are not being paid proper wages. Those who are owed arrears in payment of the national minimum wage now number 58,000, compared with 26,000 in the previous year.

Where is the legislation to abolish employment tribunal fees, which are blocking access to justice for many workers and are so expensive that people will not pursue their claims because the fee is larger than the wages they are owed? Where is the legislation to aggressively go for tax avoidance? We now know, through written answers to questions, that some 3,765 workers in the Department for Work and Pensions are chasing alleged benefit fraud of £1.2 billion, and at HMRC 320 employees are chasing tax avoidance of £70 billion. If there was more investment in HMRC to tackle tax avoidance, just imagine how much money that could bring in.

I want to raise the issue of public sector workers who have had what is in effect a pay cut. In the past year, many have been paid a 1½% increase in wages, but have seen that go in the 1.4% increase in national insurance contributions. That is in effect a cut for many public sector workers, and the Government have not suggested anything to deal with that problem, or indeed to help the real genuine wealth creators—the low-paid who work for long hours to keep the economic wheels turning.

It continues to be an unacceptable part of the Government’s programme to take the “Devil take the hindmost” approach to social security and to pursue sanctions in a sanctions regime. That goes even further, because I now know from my constituents that they have to pay for expensive telephone calls to the Department for Work and Pensions to pursue their claims. There is a free helpline for making a claim, but if there is a mistake—for example, if someone has not received their money—they have to pay for the call. That recently happened to a constituent of mine, and the phone call to pursue their claim cost £9. For someone who has not been paid any money and is waiting for money to go into their bank account, that is completely unacceptable. I am asking the Government to do something about that during the coming year.
I want to raise the very important issue of industrial relations in the public services, particularly the attitude of the UK Government. They keep viewing the trade union movement as the enemy. The trade unions are being ignored when they should be listened to. They are ignored when Departments make announcements, as was the case when the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills decided to close its Sheffield office. Trade unions have been locked out of employee-management one-to-one meetings to discuss an employee’s future, as is the case in Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. Such actions will only stir up resentment towards the Government from trade unions and public sector workers, who often go way beyond their job descriptions to ensure the delivery of public services.

The programme for government does not address the major challenges affecting our society. I hope that the Government will take cognizance of early-day motion 47 in my name, which calls for a full public inquiry into the scandal of blacklisting in the construction industry. I want to praise the trade unions and the Blacklist Support Group for pursuing employers in court recently on that very issue.

If there is not a change in attitude by the Government—if they do not invest in public services, if they decide against delivering what I believe should be world-class public services, with motivated staff—it will only cost more in the long run. The biggest casualty of cuts will be the public services themselves, and further strain will be put on them. It will then be passed to another generation to build an equal society without poverty.

In the coming year, I pledge to my constituents to pursue the major issues and problems we need to face as a society. I fear that the Government are not up to such a task while they are pursuing economic illiteracy.

9.38 pm

*Maria Eagle* (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I welcome the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy to his place and look forward to hearing what he has to say, but it is extraordinary that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport could not be bothered to turn up to wind up his part of the debate on the Gracious Speech at the very beginning of this new parliamentary Session. What a dereliction of duty. Who knows whether they will accept an amendment to the Humble Address, which I have tabled? Or whether the Government will take cognizance of early-day motion 47, which calls for a full public inquiry into the scandal of blacklisting in the construction industry. I want to praise the trade unions and the Blacklist Support Group for pursuing employers in court recently on that very issue.

If there is not a change in attitude by the Government—if they do not invest in public services, if they decide against delivering what I believe should be world-class public services, with motivated staff—it will only cost more in the long run. The biggest casualty of cuts will be the public services themselves, and further strain will be put on them. It will then be passed to another generation to build an equal society without poverty.

In the coming year, I pledge to my constituents to pursue the major issues and problems we need to face as a society. I fear that the Government are not up to such a task while they are pursuing economic illiteracy.

**John Redwood:** Could the hon. Lady give us an up-to-date view on how the Labour party is getting on with the arguments on unilateralism and the nuclear deterrent?

*Maria Eagle:* Certainly not in 10 minutes.

The Government’s extraordinary decision to announce that they will accept an amendment to the Humble Address if necessary, clarifying that the NHS will be exempt from arrangements in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, is highly unusual, not to say humiliating for them. That major concession before we have even got to the end of the debate on the Gracious Speech shows how desperate the Prime Minister is to avoid being defeated on the Floor of the House by his own Brexit-driven rebel Back Benchers, at least 25 of whom have signed the amendment—enough, along with all the rest of us, to defeat the Government. Without that retreat, this would have been the first vote on a Gracious Speech lost by a Government since 1924.

That also shows how willing Tory Brexit rebels are to inflict such a defeat on their own Prime Minister. Indeed, some reports over the weekend suggested that it would be followed by the rebels going on strike to block Government legislation after the referendum unless some of their number were promoted—extraordinary state of affairs. Meanwhile, one pro-remain Minister is reported...
to be demanding that the rebels should all be kicked out of the Tory party, a Tory “Game of Thrones” indeed. No wonder this legislative programme is so slim. The Prime Minister will be spending all his time after 23 June on party management. I can only congratulate the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, who spoke to his amendment with great cogency, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on causing such Government turmoil. My hon. Friend has now secured Government concessions on both the Budget and the Queen’s Speech—she is really getting the hang of how this place operates.

I am sure the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) will be glad to hear that the Opposition agree with the aims behind some of the legislation that has been announced. In the case of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, how could one object to the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill, which will implement the Hague convention to which the UK has been a signatory for many years? We support it wholeheartedly. We also welcome the aims behind the digital economy Bill, as did the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Members for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for High Peak (Andrew Bingham), for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry).

We particularly welcome the proposed introduction of the universal service obligation for broadband, automatic compensation for customers deprived of good service, and enhanced transparency for consumers to make an informed choice. We will look carefully at proposals to introduce a new electronic communications code, protect intellectual property rights online, and introduce age verification for pornographic websites. It is extremely disappointing that the Government will break their promise to automatically roll-out broadband to all households, so perhaps the Minister will spell out the additional costs that many households and businesses will need to bear to get connected, and give us the total number that he expects will be adversely affected.

Despite their desperate efforts to appear uncontroversial in this legislative programme, the Government pose an underlying threat to all our public services—many of my hon. Friends referred to that during the debate. The Government seem to know the price of everything and the value of nothing, and their obsession with marketisation as a prelude to privatisation leaves them with a tin ear to the value of the public service ethos. As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) said, they seem to believe that the public sector is automatically bad, and the private sector automatically good.

Unfortunately, the Government are developing that theme across Departments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), for West Ham (Lyn Brown), and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) said, the Government seem unable to accept the fact that public service broadcasting and the public service ethos—as exemplified by the BBC—makes a hugely positive contribution to our society, boosts the UK creative industries and creative economy, and is successful and massively popular, providing great value for money for licence fee payers and high-quality broadcasting for us all. Channel 4 fulfils its remit without any input from the taxpayer or licence fee payer.

However, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has shown himself to be utterly committed to denigrating and diminishing the BBC, which he recently described as no more than “a market intervention of around £4 billion by Government”. He wants to privatise Channel 4—he said so just last month, although I notice that there is no Bill for that in this legislative programme.

The constant assumption that the private sector is better, and that the public sector should be diminished or sold off, is based on ideology, not evidence, and is out of step with public opinion. Just last week the BBC announced that it would start to do what the Secretary of State said he wants, which is to cease activity that duplicates what can be done in the private sector—something he calls “distinctiveness”. The BBC announced that it would remove its online recipes. The huge public outcry was instructive, and the Government should take note. So far 195,000 people have signed the petition asking the BBC to keep that trusted resource. The Secretary of State immediately said that the plan was nothing to do with him, but we all know that it was.

Some of our debate has been about the national health service—our most loved public service—and I tell this House and the Government that the Labour party will not stand by and watch the health service be denigrating, reduced or cut. This legislative programme will do nothing to deal with the real challenges facing our public services, whether our NHS or the BBC. We know the value of our public services, and we will make it our business to speak up for and defend them.

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mrs Dowden): I am pleased to respond to this debate, and I apologise that I slipped out for a while to attend the Oscars—I refer, of course, to the fantastic Oscar’s book prize, which was started by the journalist James Ashton and his wife, Viveka, in honour of their son, who sadly died at a young age. It is a prize for children’s literature and picture books, and I am pleased that the award went to the fantastic Spanish author, Gemma Merino—are we not pleased that in this country we are able to award a prize to a Spanish author, one of our European brethren?

The winning book was called “The Cow Who Climbed a Tree”. I have not read the book, but I do know that it features a cow that does something unusual—it climbs a tree. That reminded me of this debate, which has been a bit topsy-turvy. A former Trade and Industry Secretary condemned a trade treaty with the United States, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) called for more investment in public services and not for tax cuts, and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who is not in the Chamber, recommended that hon. Members read The Sunday Times, a Rupert Murdoch paper, and in particular columns by Max Hastings, to get a real taste for the truth in public policy.

This is a special day, and I want to mark two important occasions. First, it is the Chancellor’s 45th birthday, which was mentioned in the debate. Secondly, I may be the first to congratulate the leader of the Scottish...
Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, on her engagement. Many others have congratulated her on eclipsing the Scottish Labour party and on the fact that she is breathing down the neck of the Scottish Nationalist party.

The debate has very much been about football. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) was not wearing his scarf but still managed to mention his championship-winning team—a team that wins rather than a party that loses, such as the SNP.

Ian Blackford: The SNP won the election and increased its share of the vote—it got nigh on 47% of the vote. The Tories got 22% of the vote, which is less than they got when Thatcher was in power. If the Minister calls that breathing down the neck, I do not know what he would think about a real challenge.

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Gentleman doth protest too much, and he certainly spoke extensively. As well as Leicester, we heard mention of Sheffield Wednesday, and I wish them the best of luck in the premier league play-off. The hon. Gentleman is a fan of Hibernian, so he obviously had a good weekend. We also had a brief mention of West Ham, who are ably led by the Conservative peer Karren Brady.

Before I mention individual speeches, may I reject the persistent criticism from the Opposition about this being a thin Queen’s Speech? We focus on sugar-free drinks and the sugar tax, but the Queen’s Speech is packed with fantastic nuggets. My Bill will push forward the digital economy. The Department for Transport will focus on autonomous vehicles and on spaceports. We have a commitment to 1 million more homes; the devolution of business rates to give more powers to local councils; rigour for our universities; much needed changes to adoption rules; greater freedom for headteachers and teachers; prison reforms; and a focus on skills and apprenticeships.

We have heard formidable speeches, but I hope hon. Members forgive me if I single out the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss). It was a fantastic speech, and particularly poignant for the fact that it came within a year of the maiden speech of her late husband Harry Harpham, who is sadly missed from the House. She talked about skills, housing and libraries. I may not agree with the hon. Member for Huddersfield extolling the virtues of the Murdoch press—dared to suggest that we were somehow shaping our approach to the BBC at the behest of Rupert Murdoch. I tell you this, Mr Speaker, with utter sincerity and truthfulness that the only organisation that has ever lobbied me to clip the wings of the BBC is The Guardian.

Mr Speaker, I know you well enough to know that you may not know what The Guardian is. It is a left-wing newspaper and website that has been going through some interesting changes recently in terms of its chief executive and the chairman of its trust. It comes to me regularly—quite legitimately, I have to say—to say that it is trying to make a living, as it were, digitally in the digital world. It has been opening websites. It opened an office in Australia and came to complain about the presence of the BBC in Australia taking talent from The Guardian in Australia and paying too much. It also lobbied me about the presence of the BBC in the US, where The Guardian also wants to have a presence.

The serious point is that we have to be aware not just of the fantastic virtues of the BBC, but that it is seen by other media groups, such as The Guardian, as a competitor. We have carried out much needed reform of the BBC. We have put its regulation on a proper footing—it will be regulated by Ofcom, with a unitary board. We have emphasised, in deference to The Guardian, the importance of the BBC being distinctive. We have strengthened its independence by ensuring that it can appoint half the members of the unitary board, and we have put in place a mid-term review so that the BBC can keep pace with technological change. That is only right and proper.

The other important aspect of the Queen’s Speech is the digital economy Bill, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) and for Salisbury (John Glen), my right hon. Friend the Member for Basildon, my hon. Friend the Members for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel...
and South Downs (Nick Herbert), and my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) and for Harrow East. This is an important point. The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) asked me to talk about the universal service obligation we are bringing in to make it a right to get superfast broadband, and what the extra costs might be for people applying for it. She well knows that if one applies now for a telephone landline under the universal service obligation, one has to make a contribution if the costs exceed a certain level. Of course, that level is many, many thousands of pounds, so it is not as if we will be asking many people, if any, to make a contribution. We will consult after we have legislated for this important right. I hope the hon. Lady will make a contribution to that consultation and perhaps advise us on what level she thinks any threshold should be set at.

I welcome the hon. Lady’s welcome for the cultural protection Bill in relation to The Hague convention. The Bill should have been passed by the previous Labour Government. In fact, I was the Opposition spokesman at that time—as you know, Mr Speaker, I was made Opposition spokesman in about 1874. I was ready and willing to take it on as my first Bill as an Opposition spokesman, but have had to wait eight long years to take it through as a Minister.

This is a Queen’s Speech packed with passion, packed with aspiration and packed with ambition. It is a one nation Queen’s Speech that focuses on the life chances of those who are hardest to reach. This has been a vigorous and important debate. I have to say with utter sincerity that it has been an absolute pleasure to listen to hon. Members on both sides of the House and to hear the passion and the principles that they bring to these issues. Their knowledge, expertise and independence of mind are everything that makes this House of Commons and everything that makes this country great; a great country and a great member of the European Union. [Interruption.] I am just trying to match the rhetoric.

10 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)). Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

NOTICE PERIOD FOR AMENDMENT TO PUBLIC BILLS

Resolved,

That this House notes the recommendation of the Procedure Committee in its Fourth Report of Session 2015–16, Programming: evaluation of the trial of new arrangements for tabling amendments (HC 823).

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, notices of amendments and new schedules and new clauses to be considered in Committee of the whole House and Public Bill Committee and at Report stages of programmed and unprogrammed public bills should be given no later than three sitting days, calculated in accordance with Standing Order No. 12(3) (House not to sit on certain Fridays), before the sitting at which they are to be considered—(Dr Thérèse Coffey.)
qualifications and work practice, as was acknowledged in the ruling. Yet Dr Burns-Hill is held up by the ASA as a misleading advertiser, and is even referenced in the CAP advice and guidance.

Dr Burns-Hill refused to comply with this ruling, as she felt that the proposed remedy was still inconsistent with established conventions of listing academic qualifications and served only to justify the ASA’s initial ruling. In response, the ASA imposed sanctions on her, including taking out Google adverts claiming she was a misleading advertiser, which she claims has damaged her business and reputation in what is a narrow and specialist field. She also contends that, as a means of persuasion or sanction, the ASA is itself in breach of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. She was also advised that to pursue the case through judicial review would cost at least £20,000—a prohibitive cost by any estimate.

Since first speaking to Dr Burns-Hill about her case, I have been in contact with the ASA and have been very grateful to have had an in-depth phone conversation just before Christmas last year. I subsequently received a detailed letter from Craig Jones, the director of communications at the ASA. None the less, my constituent still feels aggrieved, as she feels that the underlying issues surrounding her case have not been adequately addressed or remedied.

First, there are legitimate concerns about the transparency of the ASA in terms of its processes and in particular with regard to its status and relationships to trading standards. I have looked into the legal framework within which the ASA operates, and I realise that it will always be complex for a self-regulatory body with a legal backstop. I understand that the ASA is recognised by the courts and the Government as the “established means” for the purposes of section 19(4) of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. Judicial review is therefore possible because the ASA is recognised as a public body. However, the advertising codes it enforces are not enshrined in law; it is funded by industry and its council is appointed by industry, so it is also a self-appointed, regulatory body. I do not doubt that the legal status of the ASA is sufficiently robust, but it is extremely complex, and was certainly opaque to my constituent, a well-educated professional.

In preparing for this debate, I have even heard differing views from the ASA and from the House of Commons Library on the ASA’s legal position and authority, which I think suggests that there is unacceptable and misleading uncertainty. This has fuelled Dr Burns-Hill’s sense that the ASA is not operating legitimately and is not accountable in the way that statutory bodies are.

I am aware that similar concerns about the ASA have been raised previously in the other place by Baroness Deech. My constituent also feels that the recent South African High Court judgment against ASA Ltd reflects some of these concerns, and I understand that barrister Richard Eaton is raising questions with regard to the Competition and Markets Authority and its relationship to the ASA. I believe that there are some genuine transparency concerns here. The reasoning of the independent reviewer is not publicly available, nor are the details of any original judgments that have been subject to revision, although it is noted when a judgment has been revised.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I, too, met the ASA in relation to a case raised in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are inconsistencies regarding transparency in the ASA? One of the challenges is that where complaints have been made but not upheld, parts of the investigation are still published online, yet other evidence is not published and is withheld from the public.

John Glen: I am grateful for the hon. Lady’s intervention. She raises other issues, which I hope the Minister will pick up on in his response.

To return to my case, after the independent review process, the only avenue remaining is expensive judicial review. Dr Burns-Hill was referred to trading standards in January this year, three and a half years after the ruling, but only heard from trading standards today—as a result, I believe, of the tabling of this debate. That referral is only on grounds on non-compliance, despite my constituent asking to be referred since the original ruling in 2012 and reiterating that request to them in January and September 2013. Would the Minister consider an option for an advertiser to require a referral to trading standards after independent review, who would then conduct their own investigation?

Secondly, I am concerned about the depth of the ASA’s technical expertise. In October 2015, Lord Smith of Finsbury, the chair of the ASA, said in the other place that in 2014 the ASA had used expert support in only 16 out of 900 cases. My constituent strives to reach the highest professional standards, and is a member of several professional bodies. Because of her significant experience in the healthcare sector, she is well aware that individuals with PhDs can call themselves “Dr” without having to qualify expressly that they are not medical doctors. That is true even in hospital settings, where, for example, holders of PhDs in public health and psychology often work.

I believe there is a concern that the ASA did not pay sufficient attention to established academic practice, and, indeed, to the codes of professional healthcare bodies. I was told only recently that it consulted such bodies. That fact appears nowhere in the public ruling, and the evidence from the consultations has not been published. My constituent was put in the invidious position of respecting the authority of those bodies in relation to how she presented her professional and academic qualifications, and being confronted with the opaque authority of the ASA, which initially demanded that she use a completely non-standard way of conveying her qualifications and did not use the title “Dr”, as was her right.

An advertiser without the tenacity of my constituent would probably have passively accepted the substandard—and subsequently adjusted—ruling of the ASA, the suggested remedy for which was to include the phrase “doctorate in healthcare” throughout her website and on her business cards. If the ASA did consult on the established professional and academic conventions for displaying qualifications, why was the evidence of those consultations not made available and cited specifically in the judgment? If the ASA is not seen to make use of readily available expertise in such an important area as academia, it is difficult for it to retain its full credibility as a self-regulating body.

Will the Minister require the ASA to publish when it has drawn on external advice,
what that advice is, and by whom it was provided? That would surely be a sensible step to improve the authority and credibility of the ASA in such specialist matters.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising what is clearly an important personal issue in his constituency. Many of us have had cause to have dealings with the ASA, and, all too often, have seen it go far beyond the reach intended for it. No doubt it does good work in rooting out misleading advertisers, but are there not occasions on which it goes too far? I hope that the Minister will assure us tonight that it possible to achieve a balance between credibility and responding to constituents’ concerns. If we can achieve that balance, we can do better.

John Glen: The purpose of this debate is not to undermine the ASA—obviously, I am raising a very specific case—but I believe that its credibility is at stake, and that there are sensible steps that it can take to improve the transparency of its decisions and the way in which it represents them.

For my constituent Dr Burns-Hill, it is too late. She is left feeling aggrieved, because she had an uncertain basis for action given the opaque authority of the ASA, which required a remedy that did not fit her understanding of established academic and professional conventions. It is very difficult for her to have confidence in the ASA, given its apparent lack of relevant expertise in its dealings with her. I recognise that there is a difference between the academic recognition of a qualification and the implications of the marketing of that qualification to lay prospective consumers, and I recognise that the ASA’s role is to examine those matters. However, my constituent does not recognise the right of the ASA unilaterally to require an individual to adopt a non-standard use of post-nominals, when someone could work in a hospital and use the title “Dr” without the need to qualify it, if they were the holder of a PhD.

I am grateful to the ASA, and in particular to Craig Jones, the communications director, for their engagement with me and my constituents and for their detailed responses to date. They have sought to answer my questions and address the case as far as possible. However, I have raised this matter today on the Floor of the House as my constituent still feels aggrieved and besmirched. I want to give satisfaction to my constituent on this matter and I sincerely hope that the Minister will be able to address the specific points I have raised. I would also be grateful if he would use the authority of his office to facilitate a meeting between the ASA and Innovate, the first set of constituents. I very much look forward to hearing his response.

Advertising in the UK is worth some £13 billion. It is the second highest contributor to our economy in the creative industries sector, and it has doubled in value over the past five years. It employs around half a million people, if we take into account everyone employed in the wider advertising industry. It is also crucial to our economy in other ways. Without advertising, brands cannot make their mark in the marketplace. It also helps to stimulate competition, innovation and expansion. The UK has some of the most awarded ad agencies in the world.

At the heart of the industry lies great creativity but, as I said earlier, there must also be a system of regulation to enable consumers to trust advertising, whatever its nature, from the multi-million pound broadcast on ITV to the simple, straightforward advertising in a local newspaper. No one is arguing that the industry should not be regulated, and one of the questions raised by this debate is how that regulation should work. As a matter of principle, this Government would prefer effective self-regulation wherever possible, rather than statutory regulation. We support the system of co-regulation and self-regulation for broadcast and non-broadcast advertising that is enforced by the Advertising Standards Authority. We believe that this regulatory system has worked well for consumers and advertisers. Indeed, an assessment carried out in 2013 held up the ASA as an exemplar of successful self-regulation. As you can imagine, Mr Speaker, we therefore take the concerns raised by hon. Members in tonight’s debate very seriously indeed.

The current system should provide an easy one-stop shop for the public and for advertisers. It should be flexible and allow the ASA to take on different responsibilities. For example, online advertising barely existed 10 years ago. The system does not cost the taxpayer anything, so it is cost-effective, and it should in most cases allow for harmonious decision making. Clearly, however, the circumstances raised by my hon. Friend and alluded to by other hon. Members show that the system has not always worked as well as it might. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific case of Innovate that my hon. Friend raised, because I am not familiar with the details, but I will use what he referred to as the authority of my office to facilitate a meeting between the Advertising Standards Authority and my hon. Friend so that they can discuss that case. Let me turn to the issues relating to the second case that he raised, which took up most of his speech.

My hon. Friend raised issues of transparency, for example. Whatever the whys and wherefores of the points under debate, my strong advice to the ASA is that if hon. Members are prepared to come and debate its workings late into the night, it should listen well. It is sometimes the case that hon. Members do actually have something effective to contribute, so I hope that the ASA will take their points on board, meet all hon. Members who have taken part in this debate and reflect on whether it can take forward some of the judiciously put critiques of how it has worked in relation to their constituents.

As it stands, the ASA is meant to publish the full outcome of formal investigations and to indicate the number of cases that it has resolved informally. It should publish all its research and reports, guidance for advertisers, compliance reports and factsheets on current
hot-topic themes. Information about the number of complaints and cases received and resolved are in the annual report, of which there is an archive going back to 1961. It has a long-established practice of material exchange and disclosure with parties in cases, which has been consistently upheld by courts as fair, proportionate and reasonable. However, I noted that the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) indicated that she felt that only part of an adjudication had been published, not the full context, so that is exactly the sort of point—the case of the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury is another—that the ASA should take into account. I hope that it will sit down with both hon. Members to talk through how it can increase transparency in order to embed greater trust.

My hon. Friend also raised the relationship between the ASA and trading standards departments and suggested that the latter might conduct their own investigations into cases after the ASA had concluded its own investigation. I must make it clear that it is not the role of trading standards officers to approve ASA processes or to follow up on ASA rulings. Trading standards departments act as the ultimate legal backstop in cases in which consumer protection laws have been breached, and they act under business and consumer protection regulations. I am unsure whether my hon. Friend’s suggestion would work in this case, but I am obviously happy to put it to the relevant trading standards department. He did, however, indicate that trading standards officers had been in touch with his constituent today.

My hon. Friend asked whether the ASA could be required to publish when it has drawn on legal advice and the details of that advice. It is true that the ASA engages external expert advice on a case-by-case basis when claims are capable of objective substantiation. It assesses its need to bring in external advice, but it also has an amount of in-house expertise. It should be the case that the ASA’s published rulings make clear when it has received external advice and that it publishes the details of that advice, and it should be clear from its assessment what influence the advice has had on the ruling. Advertisers subject to rulings should also be told who the expert is and what their credentials are, and they should receive a copy of the expert’s report.

My hon. Friend also raised concerns about the severity of the sanctions imposed by the ASA on his constituent, and he detailed those sanctions in his excellent speech. The ASA can deploy sanctions of varying degrees of severity on advertisers that it regards as non-compliant. There could also be an ultimate referral to a trading standards department if there has been a breach of consumer protection law. It is appropriate for the ASA to consider stronger sanctions when advertisers persistently break the code or ASA rulings. I hasten to add that I am not saying that that is the case with his constituent; I am talking generally. It is important to stress that the enforcement team’s main aim is to bring about compliance with the advertising code, not simply to punish.

Finally, my hon. Friend also commented on the legal status of the ASA, and it is important to emphasise that it is independent from the advertising industry. Its council, which decides whether advertising has breached the advertising code, is an independent jury. Its chairman, and two thirds of council members, are independent of the advertising and media industries. Members are appointed through an open recruitment process, with all positions advertised, and an independent member is appointed by the chair to participate in all council members’ recruitment.

It is true that the ASA is funded by the advertising industry, through levies on advertising spend, but funds are collected at arm’s length by the Advertising Standards Board of Finance and the Broadcast Advertising Standards Board of Finance. That ensures the system’s independence, and that ASA decisions are not influenced by those who may or may not be funding the system. In terms of its legal status, the ASA’s regulatory system is not based on quasi-judicial processes; it is not a court of law and does not seek to emulate the courts through its own processes. The system was deliberately set up as an alternative to the courts, with all the attendant benefits from being a more nimble and agile regulator. Judicial reviews of ASA rulings have endorsed the processes that the ASA goes through.

As with any regulatory regime, there is always room for improvement, and I am told that the ASA would welcome suggestions on how its procedures might be improved. Once again, I make the serious point that Members of this House are experienced; many different constituency cases come across our desks or are raised in meetings. We tend to use our judgment when we want to raise cases in a more high-profile fashion, such as in a debate. Any organisation, particularly one such as the ASA, which has such an important role to undertake, should take note of the fact that three Members of this House have chosen to participate in this debate, with others also sitting in the Chamber. I hope that the ASA will meet them and take on practical suggestions as to how it can improve its processes.

I have no doubt that the ASA is an extremely responsible and effective regulator, and I have praised it in the past for being an exemplar of self-regulation. But, as has been said, there is always room for improvement and the opportunity to refine and improve processes. Given the process that my hon. Friend’s constituent has gone through, which sounds pretty gruelling, it would potentially be satisfying for her at least to see that some of the processes that she underwent might be refined and improved should others find themselves in a similar situation. As I say, we are dealing with an effective regulator, although I of course treat with the utmost seriousness the points that all hon. Members have made tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

10.28 pm

House adjourned.
Mr Hammond: I regret that I have to say to my hon. Friend that it is a long haul of maintaining pressure on Russia—through isolation from the international community and through maintaining the EU sanctions that are in place. At the moment, we have no other tools that are likely to prove effective.

Neil Parish: I very much understand the need for sanctions because of Russia’s aggression towards the Ukraine, but one problem is that milk and other dairy products are very much involved in those sanctions, and that is having a dramatic effect in terms of the downward price of dairy products. Is there any way that the food and dairy side of these sanctions can be taken away?

Mr Hammond: The sanctions my hon. Friend refers to are in fact Russian counter-sanctions that have been imposed against EU producers. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that, despite the sanctions measures Russia has taken in retaliation against EU agricultural producers, agricultural exports from the European Union in 2015 were up by 6%, showing that our producers—Europe-wide producers—are able to address the challenge of Russian sanctions and to find alternative markets elsewhere.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): On the Ukraine, does the Secretary of State accept that Russian bombing of Syrian civilians to provoke refugees and possibly to tilt the balance in favour of Brexit is part of a strategy to fragment European resolve on Ukraine? He is frowning—as obviously he has not thought about that.

Mr Hammond: There is definitely a Russian strategy to try to fragment European resolve. It is probably a step too far to suggest that Russia’s engagement in Syria is designed only to apply pressure over Ukraine. Russia has important and historical equities in Syria and is seeking to defend its interests there. But, overall, Russia’s behaviour in Syria and Ukraine gives us deep cause for concern about the established security settlement that we have been used to living with for the last 25 years.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Did the Secretary of State read the Max Hastings article in The Sunday Times this Sunday, in which he expresses deep concern about the threat from Russia and about the way Russia is now preparing to use cyber-methods against Europe and our allies? Will he take action to make sure that this country of ours is prepared to match up to those threats, and will he seek succour from the European Union in doing that?

Mr Hammond: I did not read the article in The Sunday Times that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but I am very familiar with that author’s views on this subject and very familiar with the problem. We are taking action to strengthen our cyber-defence and, as I announced three years ago when I was Defence Secretary, to create an avowed UK offensive cyber-capability. We are still the only nation that has publicly declared the fact that we are developing an offensive cyber-capability for retaliatory purposes if we are attacked.
Friend’s rhetoric. Russia appears to be strategically stuck in its position in the global naughty corner of international relations. Do we not need to be thinking about ways in which we might get Russia out of this position, even if it is only a substantial investment in people-to-people links, Chevening scholarships, cultural relations and everything else?

Mr Hammond: I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that although our relationships with Russia are in a very difficult phase at the moment and we have suspended most business-as-usual relations, we have maintained our cultural links with Russia and cultural exchanges do continue, including at ministerial level. Russia has its own agenda, and from the point of view of the Kremlin it is not so obvious to me that it will regard its current strategy as failing and in need of revision. Russia is ensuring that the countries that it regards as its near abroad are unable to make free choices about their futures, and I judge that to be the No. 1 priority for the Kremlin.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Foreign Secretary believe that there is any scope for expanding the EU sanctions to include the Russians involved in the murder of Magnitsky and also the Russians involved in the expropriation of $100 billion dollars-worth of shareholders’ money in relation to Yukos?

Mr Hammond: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Yukos issue is a matter that is currently before the courts, and there has been a recent decision in this case. We have looked at the options for expanding sanctions to cover other areas, but we found that the individuals who could be targeted are already either, in effect, covered by other measures or would not be affected by the kind of sanctions that we could impose. So, as a Government, we do not see any prospect of expanded sanctions.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Returning to the original question by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), does my right hon. Friend agree that there can be no question of EU sanctions or Council of Europe sanctions being lifted until Nadiya Savchenko is unconditionally released, until intervention in Donbas has ceased, and until the future of Crimea is properly and freely determined?

Mr Hammond: That is our position. Of course, we need to maintain a consensus within the European Union on renewal of sanctions, and that is work that we are continuously engaged in. I am confident that sanctions will be rolled over this summer, but we have to make the case again every six months for continuing those sanctions.

Bangladesh

2. Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with his Bangladeshi counterpart on the protection of human rights in that country.

[905038]

7. Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh on violence towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in that country.

[905044]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I would like to start by expressing my condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones and homes to Cyclone Roanu over the weekend. I welcome the strong leadership shown by the Government of Bangladesh.

I raised my concerns about human rights and violence against LGBT people again this morning with the Bangladeshi high commissioner. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), raised this with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh during his visit there in August 2015.

Simon Danczuk: With extra-judicial killings, disappearances of political opponents and fraudulent elections, Bangladesh is quickly becoming a failed state. Does the Minister not think that it is time to start applying some form of sanctions to try to get Sheikh Hasina to hold a proper general election as soon as possible?

Mr Swire: Like all those in this House, I was absolutely appalled by the senseless murders of the LGBT activists Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy, and we call on the Bangladeshi Government to bring those responsible for the killings to justice. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Extremist-related murders of members of minority religious groups and those whose views and lifestyles are contrary to Islam have increased in Bangladesh since February 2015, and we are discussing this regularly with the Government of that country.

Alex Cunningham: The Minister has said that he has talked to the Bangladeshi Government, but does he really think that that Government are taking sufficient steps to tackle the issue of violence against LGBT people?

Mr Swire: Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, giving £162 million in 2015-16—so our voice has some influence there. In the past year our human rights and democracy programme has provided safety training for bloggers, and we have also funded a project promoting the rights of LGBT groups in Bangladesh, but there is a huge amount more to do. We are not shy of pushing the Government of Bangladesh in the right direction, but sometimes it takes a little bit of time and persuasion.¹

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): The human rights of secularists in Bangladesh are threatened. Last month, Nazimuddin Samad, a law student in Dhaka, was killed for blogging. “I have no religion.” Will my right hon. Friend raise this with his Bangladeshi counterparts and ensure that secularists’ rights are also protected in Bangladesh?

Mr Swire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There was not only the Daesh-claimed killing on 9 April in Dhaka of Nazimuddin Samad, but the murder on 23 April of Rezaul Karim Siddique in Rajshahi, in the east of the country. This is becoming an all too familiar occurrence in Bangladesh. There is a disagreement: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina blames the opposition

¹[Official Report, 26 May 2016, Vol. 611, c. 1MC.]

[905038] [905044]
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Britain and other countries have been appalled by Daesh’s internships against Yazidis and other minorities in northern Iraq. It has prompted us to join other countries in taking action through the formation of the international coalition against Daesh, which now includes more than 60 countries.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: As the Minister will know, many Yazidi women and girls who suffered sexual slavery at the hands of Daesh experienced severe trauma, but they struggle to access the support they need. What steps have the UK Government taken under their preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative to promote access to mental health care for all those victims?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to point to the importance of the support that we need to provide not just to the Yazidis, but to other minorities that have been affected by Daesh. We are the largest donor to Iraq’s humanitarian pooled fund and there are a number of programmes, including those of the Department for International Development and the human rights and democracy fund, to provide exactly the sort of assistance that is required immediately.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As the Minister and the questioner have made clear, the key threat to the Yazidi population and other religious minorities is the control of territory by Daesh. Does my hon. Friend therefore welcome the news this morning that a major assault has succeeded in defeating Daesh militarily, and make sure that we were able to provide airdrops and support to the Yazidi people in Syria and Iraq?

Mr Ellwood: Yes, we welcome that. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to do much more, both at the strategic level and at the tactical and operational level, and ensure that the international coalition we have set up through the role of the new Commonwealth Secretary-General takes action to ensure that democracy and human rights are protected in that country, which at the moment is not heading in the right direction.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: As the Minister will know, many Yazidi women and girls who suffered sexual slavery at the hands of Daesh experienced severe trauma, but they struggle to access the support they need. What steps have the UK Government taken under their preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative to promote access to mental health care for all those victims?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to point to the importance of the support that we need to provide not just to the Yazidis, but to other minorities that have been affected by Daesh. We are the largest donor to Iraq’s humanitarian pooled fund and there are a number of programmes, including those of the Department for International Development and the human rights and democracy fund, to provide exactly the sort of assistance that is required immediately.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Around 70 to 80 women and children are trafficked from Bangladesh abroad each day. Law enforcement is failing to prevent forced prostitution. What discussions is the Foreign Secretary having to press that legal systems prevail for women and girls in Bangladesh?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, although of course it is not just Bangladesh that is affected. We have done a lot on human trafficking through legislation; we have also done a lot on the supply chain, where I know there are concerns. We continue to raise the matter, not just in Bangladesh but in countries around the world. It is something we want to erase. It is unfortunately all too common and we take it seriously.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I am delighted to hear that the Minister is so concerned about the recent killings of liberal activists in Bangladesh. He mentioned the brutal murder on 25 April of Xulhaz Mannan, editor of the country’s first and only LGBT magazine, and the appalling machete attack on blogger Nazimuddin Samad on 6 April. Surely the Government of Bangladesh have been far too slow to respond to these events.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady raises an important point. Britain stepped forward, along with other countries, to make sure that we were able to provide airdrops and safe passage on Mount Sinjar, which were critical to support for the Yazidis. Her question has been debated at length in this Chamber and I very much support her views, together with John Kerry and the European Parliament, and this Parliament voted on the matter. However, it is not for us to make those judgments; it is for the International Criminal Court. We are helping to collect the evidence to make sure that when the time is appropriate, we can bring those people to justice.

Yazidi Population: Syria and Iraq

3. Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): What assessment has he made of the extent of threats to the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman asked about the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq. Do not just the Yazidi population, but all the Christian population and the religious minorities, as well as the Shi’ite population and the Kurdish population, suffer. We have made an assessment of the threats that these people face.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Does the Minister acknowledge that the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman’s point is well taken. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Britain and other countries have been appalled by Daesh’s internships against Yazidis and other minorities in northern Iraq. It has prompted us to join other countries in taking action through the formation of the international coalition against Daesh, which now includes more than 60 countries.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: As the Minister will know, many Yazidi women and girls who suffered sexual slavery at the hands of Daesh experienced severe trauma, but they struggle to access the support they need. What steps have the UK Government taken under their preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative to promote access to mental health care for all those victims?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to point to the importance of the support that we need to provide not just to the Yazidis, but to other minorities that have been affected by Daesh. We are the largest donor to Iraq’s humanitarian pooled fund and there are a number of programmes, including those of the Department for International Development and the human rights and democracy fund, to provide exactly the sort of assistance that is required immediately.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As the Minister and the questioner have made clear, the key threat to the Yazidi population and other religious minorities is the control of territory by Daesh. Does my hon. Friend therefore welcome the news this morning that a major assault has succeeded in defeating Daesh militarily, and make sure that we were able to provide airdrops and support to the Yazidi people in Syria and Iraq?

Mr Ellwood: Yes, we welcome that. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to do much more, both at the strategic level and at the tactical and operational level, and ensure that the international coalition we have set up through the role of the new Commonwealth Secretary-General takes action to ensure that democracy and human rights are protected in that country, which at the moment is not heading in the right direction.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: As the Minister will know, many Yazidi women and girls who suffered sexual slavery at the hands of Daesh experienced severe trauma, but they struggle to access the support they need. What steps have the UK Government taken under their preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative to promote access to mental health care for all those victims?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady raises an important point. Britain stepped forward, along with other countries, to make sure that we were able to provide airdrops and safe passage on Mount Sinjar, which were critical to support for the Yazidis. Her question has been debated at length in this Chamber and I very much support her views, together with John Kerry and the European Parliament, and this Parliament voted on the matter. However, it is not for us to make those judgments; it is for the International Criminal Court. We are helping to collect the evidence to make sure that when the time is appropriate, we can bring those people to justice.

Yazidi Population: Syria and Iraq

3. Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): What assessment has he made of the extent of threats to the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman asked about the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq. Do not just the Yazidi population, but all the Christian population and the religious minorities, as well as the Shi’ite population and the Kurdish population, suffer. We have made an assessment of the threats that these people face.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Does the Minister acknowledge that the Yazidi population in Syria and Iraq?
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the money that this country spends supporting refugees in Iraq and Syria can support a far greater number of people far better than attempting to relocate refugees to the UK, and that it is right that the focus of our efforts is to support people in the region?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The Yazidis as a group are endogamous and have not grown as much as other groupings in Iraq. They want to stay together and they want to stay in the area. For every one person that we are able to support in the UK, we can support more than 20 people in location—clearly, on a different standard, but it means that our money can go a lot further and we can pride ourselves on being one of the largest supporters in Syria and Iraq.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister has just repeated the arguments he made to the House on 20 April against referring the genocide of the Yazidi people to the UN Security Council, which this House unanimously rejected. The Minister’s arguments have been challenged in the other place, where the noble Lord Pannick QC pointed out that article VIII of the convention on the prevention of genocide explicitly gives the UK Government the power to make such a referral. May I press the Minister to respect the will of this House and refer the matter to the UN Security Council without further delay?

Mr Ellwood: I very much join in the spirit of the hon. Lady’s remarks, but we have to work within the mechanics of such a referral. We took the initiative to bring the situation to the awareness of the International Criminal Court in 2014. Our efforts were vetoed by two permanent members of the Security Council. That will happen again unless we are able to provide the necessary evidence, which is exactly what we are doing. We will hold those people to account, but there is an order and a process that we must honour. I entirely agree with the spirit of what the hon. Lady wants to do.

Middle East: Press Freedom

4. Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): What recent representations has he made to his counterparts in the middle east on press freedom in that region. [905040]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): We encourage all countries to respect freedom of the media. On concerns about freedom of expression in the middle east, we clearly set out these concerns in our annual human rights report, which was most recently published in April.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: It is now four years since the Saudi writer Raif Badawi was arrested. Earlier this month his wife was sentenced to 1,000 lashes for promoting her husband’s cause around the world. Given that it was British engineers who have extracted Saudi oil and built their roads, and given our massive co-operation around the world and in this country right to have expected a bit more progress than the Government have obtained so far?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman and I have debated these matters, both publicly and privately, for a long time. We have a right, duty and determination to raise those matters both in public and in private, and we make no distinction between the two. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has done that on a number of occasions, as have I. It is for the court in Saudi Arabia to follow its processes, as I have explained to the hon. Gentleman in the past. We must encourage advancement in society in Saudi Arabia, but that will not happen overnight.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): While encouraging press freedom, what more can the Foreign Office do to tackle Daesh’s misuse of the internet, to ensure that free speech is not twisted and abused?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which we have raised in this House on a number of occasions. The tool used by Daesh to exploit others and to reach every home in every corner of the globe—it will also be used by future extremists—is the internet. We need to make sure that we are able to counter those messages. Daesh is sending a false message of hope, promising a fast track to paradise. We have formed the strategic communications cell in the Foreign Office, which is bringing together expertise from around the country and, indeed, the world to make sure that we can counter the Daesh messages, whether they be on Twitter, Facebook or other websites.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): What representations has the Minister made to President Erdogan’s Government in Turkey about their action against press freedom and their suspension of parliamentary immunities, which may open opposition MPs to accusations of offences such as insulting the President? Will the Minister confirm that there are no plans to introduce an offence of insulting the Prime Minister and that a country engaged in such anti-democratic activities would not be eligible for European Union membership?

Mr Ellwood: I concur with the right hon. Gentleman’s view that a free and fair media environment makes for a healthier society. We encourage constructive debate, which is a vital component of a fair and functioning society, no matter where it happens. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has raised the right hon. Gentleman’s specific point with the Turkish Government.

Alex Salmond: On the importance of setting an example, can the Minister conceive of circumstances where, on finding that a Scottish newspaper was to publish some inconvenient information about Libya, a Minister in the last coalition Government would have tried to suppress that edition?

Mr Ellwood: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is wandering down a particular rabbit hole. We never intervene in the media in that manner, unless it is a matter of state security.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Press freedoms are being withdrawn in Turkey. Will the Minister outline the Government’s current position on Turkey’s accession to the EU?
**Mr Ellwood:** Turkey is covered by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. If I may, I will ask him to write to my hon. Friend.

**Mr Speaker:** Very prudent, especially as the question related to press freedom. It was rather naughty of the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) to seek to divert the Minister from the path of virtue, but he was not so tempted.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that press freedom in Turkey has been in decline for many years? Despite the fact that he is not directly responsible for the issue, he must know that President Erdogan has been cracking down on his opponents when they make even the mildest of criticisms of him in the press, and now that the immunity of MPs is being lifted in Turkey, human rights will decline even further.

**Mr Ellwood:** We do not want to see journalists being intimidated, the internet being blocked or people's ability to speak freely being interfered with, wherever they are in the world. We will continue to make that case from this place and in our direct communications with those Governments.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my view that the notable journalist and writer T. E. Lawrence—better known as Lawrence of Arabia—was an exponent of freedom in the middle east? Now that the Government have prevented the export of his robes and dagger, where will the public be able to see them as an inspiration for greater understanding of the middle east and to encourage greater freedom in that part of the world?

**Mr Ellwood:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on weaving in an important aspect of our history and making it relevant to this question. He is absolutely right about the importance of saving not only the robe but the dagger for the nation. They will not be leaving the country. The dagger was given to Lawrence of Arabia by Sherif Nasir after Lawrence's fantastic attack on Aqaba. On his way there—this was glossed over by the media at the time—he accidentally shot his camel, but he continued on another camel and was able to take Aqaba. He later moved to work in the Foreign Office, and I would like the garment—the gown or the robe—and indeed the dagger to be on display in the Foreign Office.

**Mr Speaker:** We are very glad that the Minister is spending his time in the Foreign Office so profitably and is becoming so learned.

**European Migration: Western Balkans**

5. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What assessment has he made of the effectiveness of recent steps to reduce migration to Europe through the western Balkans.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs** (Mr Philip Hammond): Since agreement was reached between the EU and Turkey on additional measures to control migration to Europe, we have seen a very significant reduction in the number of migrants arriving in Greece and transiting through the western Balkans.

**Karen Lumley:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the root cause of the migration pushing people through the Balkans has been the civil war in Syria? Does he agree that this country must certainly never be part of the Schengen area, which could allow people to be pushed to the UK?

**Mr Hammond:** I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's point. Of course we must not be part of the Schengen area. We will not be part of the Schengen area, and thanks to the special arrangements we have negotiated with the European Union, we are able to enjoy the benefits of membership without being forced to take part in the passport-free area.

I would say to my hon. Friend that although the Syrian civil war was clearly the immediate cause of the flow of refugees that Europe faced, primarily last year, statistics show that about 50% of those arriving in Greece are actually not from Syria or the surrounding area but come from further afield. What started as an exodus from the Syrian civil war and the Daesh occupation has become a wider movement of people.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The measures introduced by our European partners—working with other countries, particularly in the former Yugoslavia—such as the civil protection mechanism are starting to have an impact in the region. What further work can be done to share information through Europol to make sure that we really tackle the scourge of smuggling across eastern and central Europe?

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is right: sharing information between European security agencies, intelligence agencies and border police is key to breaking the business model of the smugglers. That is one of the key elements to solving this problem. Such people are being exploited by the organised criminal gangs that are taking their money, often for very little in return, and we need to nail them.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): On migration to Europe, there has been a great deal of discussion recently about potential new EU member states. Article 49 of the treaty, which deals with countries applying to join the EU, says:

“Holders of public office should be truthful.”

It is therefore clear that each existing member state has a veto. However, this weekend a serving member of the Government went on national television and denied this. One of the seven principles of public life is:

“Hold office should be truthful.”

Will the Foreign Secretary therefore take this opportunity to confirm the correct position, as the Prime Minister has already done on Sunday?

**Mr Hammond:** Yes, I am very happy to do so. As we have said ad nauseam, everyone single member state has a veto on the accession of any new member state. In our case, any proposal to expand the European Union
would require the approval of this House. I can assure
the House that those safeguards remain in place and are
undiluted, and all my colleagues in the Government
should be fully aware of that situation.

Palestinian Territories: Radicalisation

6. Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): What
recent assessment he has made of the extent of radicalisation
in the Palestinian Territories. [905043]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I condemn
all violence and all efforts to incite or radicalise people
to commit violence in the middle east. During my most
recent visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories in
February, I raised this issue with the Palestinian Authority
and urged them to do more to tackle this issue and
make clear their opposition to violence.

Craig Tracey: Last week, the Fatah party in Palestine
described the terrorist who killed 26 people and wounded
more than 80 in a shooting attack at a Israel's main
airport in 1972 as a “hero” and said it was
“proud of every fighter who has joined our mighty revolution”
against Israel. Does the Minister agree that the success
of the two-state solution that we all want rests upon the
President Abbas condemn statements such as that when
he has received on the case of Sombath Somphone in
Laos.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth
Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I raised Sombath's disappearance
with Laos’s then Foreign Minister, now Prime Minister,
Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, when we opened the new Lao
embassy in London in November 2014. Sombath’s
disappearance was raised at the annual EU-Laos human
rights dialogue in October. We will continue to highlight
our interest in this particular case.

Jeremy Lefroy: I thank my right hon. Friend for his
reply. In addition to the disappearance of Sombath, the
whereabouts of three students arrested in 1999 and
another nine arrested in 2009 are still unknown. Can
my right hon. Friend update the House on what the UK
is doing more generally about discussions with Laos on
human rights?

Mr Swire: Indeed I can. We have an annual EU-Laos
human rights dialogue; the last one was held in October
2015, and the next is scheduled for the final quarter of
2016. The Laos Government agreed to establish a thorough,
transparent and impartial investigation into Sombath’s
disappearance following a British recommendation in
Laos’s universal periodic review of human rights last
year. We will not cease in pursuing this particular case
and the others to which my hon. Friend alludes.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes an important
point about peaceful coexistence. It is important that
President Abbas condemn statements such as that when
they are made. I have noticed a disjunct between the
elderly leadership and the youth, who feel disfranchised
and so are taking matters into their own hands. I looked
into the particular claim that my hon. Friend has raised;
I understand that it was placed on Facebook and so was
not attributed to a particular Minister, as has been the
case in the past. Nevertheless, it should be condemned
and removed, as my hon. Friend indicated.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does
the Minister agree that people's expectation that they
will be able to carry on living in their own homes would
not normally be regarded as a sign of radicalisation? He
will know that in the past he has received a number of
parliamentary questions from me and others about the
fact that more than 90 Palestinian Bedouins, mostly children, have lost their homes in the village of
Jabal al-Baba. He has said in his written answers that the
Foreign Office condemns that but also that it has
not raised that specific case with the Israeli authorities.
Is it not time to do so, not least because the demolished
structures are EU funded?

Mr Ellwood: I fully concur with the spirit of what the
hon. Gentleman has said. I have visited one of the
Bedouin camps. I should make it clear that that situation
is different from the situation for those based in the
occupied Palestinian territories; some are being removed
in green line Israel, as well. These people are reliant on
farming and so need space, so there is the internal issue of
making sure that they are given the same amount of
space if there is a requirement for them to be moved.

Sombath Somphone

8. Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What recent reports
he has received on the case of Sombath Somphone in
Laos.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The past
couple of years have been long and difficult for
Yemen, so I very much welcome the cessation of hostilities
that began on 10 April and the UN-led talks that began
in Kuwait on 21 April.

Keith Vaz: Yesterday, a suicide bomb in Aden killed
45 people who were trying to join the Yemeni army.
What steps can we take to stop that beautiful city in
Yemen, where I and other Members of this House were
born, being destroyed by the civil war going on between
the various forces?

Mr Ellwood: First, I pay tribute to the right hon.
Gentleman for raising these matters regularly. He has
huge expertise on Yemen, and I am pleased that he is
able to hold the Government to account on what we are
doing in this important area of the middle east. He is
right that events are taking place because hardliners
want to throw the talks and the cessation of hostilities
off track. We encourage both sides to stay firm in their
commitment to a political solution, not least because of
the humanitarian catastrophe taking place.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):
A series of serious allegations were made yesterday
by Amnesty International about the alleged use of
UK-manufactured cluster munitions against civilians in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition. Did the Minister, or any UK personnel operating in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, have any knowledge that those cluster munitions were being used? If so, what action has been taken?

Mr Ellwood: That is probably more a question for the Ministry of Defence, but from my understanding—my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has just confirmed this—we are not at all aware of this. Let me make it clear that the munitions that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned are almost three decades old. They are probably past their sell-by date, and it would be dangerous for anybody to go anywhere near them.

### Iran: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

10. Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the joint comprehensive plan of action with Iran. [905048]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The International Atomic Energy Agency’s most recent report on Iran’s nuclear activities concluded that Iran is complying with its obligations under the JCPOA. We have been working to help British businesses take advantage of new commercial opportunities, and to ensure that Iran benefits from sanctions relief, including seeking to address barriers within the international banking system to both objectives.

Mr Burrowes: Since the signing of the nuclear deal, a religious minority still suffers from systematic persecution. Baha’is and Christians are routinely harassed, arrested and detained, and have received sentences totalling 193 years for simply manifesting their faith. What will the Government do to ensure that the new dawn in relations shines a light on Iran’s human rights abuse of religious freedom?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Iran’s human rights record remains shocking, as does its record of interfering in the affairs of its neighbours in the Gulf. The JCPOA, to which he referred, is a narrowly targeted agreement designed to shut down Iran’s capability to produce a nuclear weapon, and it has been effective in delivering that outcome. We will continue to make representations—I spoke with the Iranian Foreign Minister in Vienna only last week on some specific human rights cases that affect dual nationality British citizens, and we will continue to make such representations.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary referred to Iran’s interference in the affairs of neighbouring countries, and he mentioned the Gulf. Will he say something about our Government’s attitude to Iran’s interference in other countries in the region, particularly its role in Iraq and in helping Assad in Syria?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right. Iran is a significant player in the politics of Iraq, although generally not in a way that is helpful, and it is a significant backer of the Assad regime in Syria, with Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ground forces taking part in action in defence of the regime. Iran is also a member of the International Syria Support Group, and as such it is incumbent on it, as well as on Russia, to apply pressure on Assad to deliver on the commitments made in the Vienna forum.

### Middle East

11. Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the effect of the recent activities of Hamas in Gaza on the middle east peace process. [905049]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The recent activities of Hamas in Gaza, including attempts to rearm and rebuild tunnel infrastructure, undermine efforts to improve the situation in Gaza and harm prospects for the middle east peace process. Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza must permanently end rocket fire and other attacks against Israel.

Mrs Ellman: In April, two new terror tunnels built by Hamas to launch attacks on Israeli civilians were discovered. Does the Minister believe that Hamas is planning new attacks on Israel?

Mr Ellwood: As I said earlier, I believe that is a worrying development, and we seek to place pressure on Hamas, and all those close to it, to recognise that it will take us back to where we were two years ago, unless there is a direction of travel.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Does the Minister place any significance on the founding charter of Hamas, which is clearly, or to a large extent, a stream of the most visceral anti-Semitism, and even includes approving references to the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”?

Mr Ellwood: I have many conversations about that situation and the challenges we face in the middle east, not least in Gaza and the west bank. A number of commentators have said, “You need to speak to Hamas; you need to get them to the table”, but until Hamas changes its constitution, in which it clearly does not recognise the state of Israel, it will be impossible for us to move forward.

### Departmental Estate: Rodent Eradication

12. Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): What steps he is taking to eradicate rodents and other vermin in his Department’s Whitehall estate. [905050]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The FCO facilities management contract covers pest control activities. However, the continued presence of mice in the FCO main building has given my officials “paws” for thought. After careful consideration, we appointed Palmerston the cat last month as chief mouser to the FCO to complement the work of our contractor. I am pleased to report to the House that he has settled in “purr-fectly” and is performing his duties more than satisfactorily.

Mr Speaker: I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on following my excellent example in Speaker’s House, where for five years we have had a first-class cat who has done the necessary. Its name, of course, is Order. [Laughter.]
Mr Simpson: I am sure the whole House will welcome the Prime Minister’s statement, and also the arrival of Palmerston, the FCO’s rodent killer, but there is a serious point here. May I ask my right hon. Friend whether Palmerston has been security cleared or not? He may recall that the Chancellor’s cat, Freya, had access to the Foreign Office and No. 10 Downing Street, and it was thought that she might have been “got at” by a foreign power. May I ask him: has Palmerston been positively vetted by the security service and scanned for bugs by GCHQ? Can my right hon. Friend assure the House, and the more paranoid element of the Brexeters, of Palmerston’s British provenance and that he is not a long-term mole working for the EU Commission?

Mr Hammond: He is definitely not a mole and I can “cat-egorically” assure my right hon. Friend that Palmerston has been regularly vetted. As for being a sleeper, he is definitely a sleeper—I am told very often in my office. But unlike Freya, who went missing for two years, his attendance record has been 100%. My experts tell me that pretty much rules out the possibility of him being a Commission employee. I should also tell the House that while Palmerston has so far caught only three mice, his Twitter account, “Diplomog” has attracted 8,158 followers, with a rate of growth that implies he will overtake me by the summer recess.

Egypt: Human Rights

13. Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions has he had with his Egyptian counterpart on the human rights situation in that country.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Ministers and senior officials regularly raise human rights concerns with our Egyptian counterparts. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed these issues with President Sisi during his visit to the UK in November. I regularly raise our concerns with the Egyptian ambassador, most recently on 17 May.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Ibrahim Halawa, an Irish national who has been in custody now for 1,000 days, faces a possible life sentence. He may recall that the Chancellor’s cat, Freya, had access to the Foreign Office and No. 10 Downing Street, and it was thought that she might have been “got at” by a foreign power. May I ask him: has Palmerston been positively vetted by the security service and scanned for bugs by GCHQ? Can my right hon. Friend assure the House, and the more paranoid element of the Brexeters, of Palmerston’s British provenance and that he is not a long-term mole working for the EU Commission?

Mr Ellwood: He is definitely not a mole and I can “cat-egorically” assure my right hon. Friend that Palmerston has been regularly vetted. As for being a sleeper, he is definitely a sleeper—I am told very often in my office. But unlike Freya, who went missing for two years, his attendance record has been 100%. My experts tell me that pretty much rules out the possibility of him being a Commission employee. I should also tell the House that while Palmerston has so far caught only three mice, his Twitter account, “Diplomog” has attracted 8,158 followers, with a rate of growth that implies he will overtake me by the summer recess.

Topical Questions

T1. [905027] James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): My priorities for 2016 are the campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, managing our relations with Russia and Syria, and protecting human rights. We will continue to work with our partners.

James Berry: Last year, after the Prime Minister’s historic visit to Jaffna, the UN Human Rights Council passed a consensual resolution on accountability and reconciliation, following the atrocities at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war. When the resolution comes back before the UN in June, will our Government do whatever they can to ensure that Sri Lanka lives up to its promises? Progress to date has been slow to non-existent.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I start by offering my heartfelt condolences to the people of Sri Lanka affected by the terrible floods and landslides that have hit so much of the country. I expressed that message personally to Foreign Minister Samaraweera last week.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights will give his assessment of progress at the next meeting of the UNHRC in Geneva in June. Before then, I myself will visit Geneva to discuss with him how we can encourage and support the Government to deliver fully against their commitments. We recognise that there is still much more to be done, and the UK will continue to support and encourage the Sri Lankan Government to deliver fully against their commitments.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Amnesty International reported this week that unexploded British-made BL-755 cluster submunitions have been found in Hayran, Yemen. We know what these weapons can do, especially to children, who mistake them for toys. Amnesty also reports that on 1 March two children near the
village of Fard were herding goats when they found some other cluster bomblets. They played with them until one went off, killing the eight-year-old and severely injuring the 11-year-old. Does the Foreign Secretary regard the use of cluster bombs in civilian areas as a breach of international humanitarian law?

Mr Philip Hammond: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the UK has long since given up the use of cluster munitions. Their use or supply is illegal under British law. As the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), said earlier, the weapons described were manufactured decades ago, but the Ministry of Defence is urgently investigating the allegations, and I believe there will be an urgent question on this subject shortly.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful for that reply. As the House knows, we are a signatory to the convention banning the use of cluster munitions, but sadly Saudi Arabia is not. It is alleged that this particular type of BL-755 was designed to be dropped from one specific jet—the UK-manufactured Tornado used by the Saudi air force. Under the cluster munitions convention, member states should “make...best efforts to discourage States not party to this Convention from using cluster munitions.”

What steps has the right hon. Gentleman taken to discourage the use of British-made cluster munitions mounted on British-made jets by Saudi Arabia—an ally with which we have extensive military co-operation—and will he now commit to suspending arms sales to Saudi Arabia and to making the strongest possible representations that it must cease the use of cluster munitions in this conflict?

Mr Hammond: We need to be careful. There is no evidence yet that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions. The right hon. Gentleman is right that Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the convention banning cluster munitions, but nor is the United States. We have always made it clear to the Saudi Arabsians that we cannot support the use of cluster munitions in any circumstances, as to do so would be unlawful for Ministers and officials in this country. We believe we have an assurance from Saudi Arabia that cluster munitions have not been used in the conflict, but as I said earlier, the MOD is urgently investigating the allegations. I am sure that my ministerial colleague will have more to say in response to the UQ.

T3. [905029] Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): What specific commitments can the Government make to support Burundian civil society organisations in their peace-building efforts in light of the need to foster and strengthen social cohesion among Burundian communities from conflicting political, ethnic and social groups?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): Through the conflict, stability and security fund, we are seeking to reduce the impunity and address the causes of conflict. We are working with the Burundians in general and with the international community, the country’s human rights commission, the truth and reconciliation commission and the court system. I met human rights organisations in private in Bujumbura in December to hear their detailed concerns, and I addressed the UN Security Council in March. I am pleased to report that the Arusha talks have now started under the chairmanship of former Tanzanian President Mkapa. I look forward to hearing reports about how they are going.

T2. [905028] Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Last year, Nepal suffered a major earthquake, which badly injured the country’s spirit. In the meantime, the world has contributed hugely to rebuild the nation. At the same time, Nepal has adopted a new constitution. What support have the Government given to Nepal to help with the implementation of its new constitution?

Mr Swire: The February amendments to the constitution were a significant moment for Nepal, as I think the hon. Gentleman would agree, and a step towards resolving long-standing differences. We continue to encourage peaceful dialogue and compromise to reach a political situation that meets the concerns of all Nepali citizens. I discussed this most recently with Nepal’s deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kamal Thapa, in London on 27 April.

T6. [905032] Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What assessment has the Minister for Africa made of the International Monetary Fund’s regional economic outlook and the opportunity of the result to tackle extremism in the region?

James Duddridge: As a region, sub-Saharan Africa has seen uninterrupted economic growth over the last 20 years. The IMF regional economic outlook for sub-Saharan Africa projects a growth rate of 3% on average across the continent. Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Senegal are all expecting to grow well in excess of double that figure, with the Ivory Coast growing from 8% to a potentially staggering 10% growth annually. Africa clearly continues to offer some great investment opportunities for UK business.

T4. [905030] Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): What recent representations has the Minister made to his counterparts in the Nigerian Government on the continued detention of the British citizen Nnamdi Kanu of the indigenous people of Biafra? Is the Minister confident that Nnamdi is receiving all his rights under international law?

James Duddridge: I have continued representations with the Nigerian Government on Biafran and other issues and I will continue to do so. I have met a series of Members of Parliament who have constituency interests in Biafra, and I am happy to continue to do so. The British Government recognise Nigeria as a geographic area that holds together as one country, not as separate countries.

T7. [905033] Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): The 26th of June will mark one year since the attack on holiday makers on the beach at Sousse, resulting in the loss of 38 lives, with 39 people wounded. What is the Minister doing to assist families in marking this anniversary in peace? What are the Government doing to assist the Tunisian Government in promoting security and the country’s economy?
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): My hon. Friend is right to raise the devastating impact of this attack on the Tunisian economy. We are working very closely to provide support to the country’s policing in order to secure its borders. We are doing all we can to support the Britons affected by the bombs—whether it be the families of the bereaved, those who were injured in the attack or even those who saw what happened and need psychological support. We held a commemoration service in April.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): As “Project Fear” reaches dizzy new heights, the Prime Minister and certain members of this Government are making clear on a daily basis the potentially disastrous consequences of Scotland and the UK leaving the EU. Given that, will the Secretary of State confirm why this Government have taken our country into such a precarious position?

Mr Philip Hammond: If the hon. Lady is asking why we are holding a referendum, it is because the British people are entitled to have their say on this important issue. For 40 years, their voice has been ignored, and because we have a Conservative Government, they will now have their say on 23 June. I hope that we politicians will listen to what they say and will accept their verdict.

T8. [905034] Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for the Philippines, may I ask my right hon. Friend to join me in congratulating President Rodrigo Duterte on his victory, wishing him well, and finding a mutually convenient time to meet him?

Mr Swire: I congratulate the Filipinos on their vibrant show of democracy. Mayor Duterte has received a strong mandate from the electorate, who want greater prosperity and security in the years ahead. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the Philippines in January, and plans for further ministerial visits will be made after the new Government take office on 30 June.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Secretary of State tell us how remaining in the European Union gives us stronger control in finding solutions to issues such as population migration, which are often caused by conflict and the results of climate change?

Mr Philip Hammond: Working with our partners in the European Union on such complex and long-term issues clearly reinforces our ability to have effect. In my nearly two years as Foreign Secretary, I have visited more than 70 countries in six continents, and in none of those countries has anyone ever suggested to me that Britain’s voice would be more influential if we were outside the European Union. Quite the opposite: being in the European Union means that our influence is augmented, not diminished.

T9. [905036] Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): In 2010, the Prime Minister said:

“I am here to make the case for Turkey’s membership of the European Union and to fight for it.”

In 2014, he said:

“In terms of Turkish membership of the EU, I very much support that.”

Is the Foreign Secretary really claiming that we should take it from those words that the Government intend to veto Turkey’s accession to the EU—and, if there is no remote prospect of its joining the EU, why is so much taxpayers’ money being spent on preparing it for accession?

Mr Hammond: Turkey applied to join the European Union in 1987, and, as the Prime Minister observed—I think—yesterday, given the current rate of progress it will be decades, if not longer, before it gets anywhere near EU membership. However, there is a benefit for us in seeing Turkey on a European-facing path, and thus under pressure to improve human rights and compliance with the rule of law. If we do not keep that path open, we shall not have that leverage.

Ultimately, though, we have a veto. [Interruption.] We have a veto over the terms and conditions on which any applicant country is able to join the European Union, and we have made it absolutely clear that there can be no question of further accessions and access to free movement within the European Union until an applicant country has reached the average level of GDP per capita across the European Union. That means no more poverty gradient in the EU. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: I think we all know that the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) cannot be vetoed. He never has been, and he never will be.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Earlier questions have referred to the middle east, and to deploring extremism wherever it may be found. Is it not a matter of grave concern that the new Israeli Defence Minister is extremely right-wing and ultra-nationalist? He said last year that what he described as “disloyal” Israeli Arabs should be beheaded. Does that not illustrate how far the Israeli Government have gone in their extremism and their rejection of any idea of a two-state solution, and should that not be condemned?

Mr Hammond: It is a matter of grave concern. The polarisation of views in Israel/Palestine makes it less likely that we shall be able to achieve the two-state solution that the House and most of the world so ardently crave, and harder for us to do so.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): In answer to a written parliamentary question from me, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury reported that on 16 January £657 million of frozen Iranian assets had been unfrozen, and therefore returned to Iran or Iranian citizens. What are the Government doing to monitor those funds and ensure that they are spent correctly, rather than being handed over to terrorists or funding action against British troops?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend asks two separate questions. First, we are committed to the unfreezing of Iranian assets. Some who were opposed to the joint comprehensive plan of action—JCPOA—agreement with Iran suggested that up to $150 billion would flow back to Iran in short order, but to date we think that the process has managed to achieve about $11 billion. Secondly, there are of course international agreements in place to
monitor and prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorist organisations, and those apply to Iran as much as to any other country.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): What is the Foreign Secretary’s assessment of the growing violations of press freedom in Tunisia?

**Mr Ellwood:** As I said earlier, Tunisia is going through a difficult period at the moment. It has been subjected to a number of terrorist attacks and attempted attacks. We have almost doubled the size of our embassy there, and we are doing our best to ensure that we provide support during this difficult period. I would be happy to discuss in more detail some of the challenges relating to freedom of the press with the hon. Lady outside the Chamber.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to disappoint colleagues, but we must now move on.
Yemen: Cluster Munitions

12.35 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on reports of new evidence that UK-manufactured cluster bombs may have killed and injured civilians, including children, in the conflict in Yemen.

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne): The United Kingdom last provided BL755 cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia nearly 30 years ago; the final delivery was in 1989. We ratified the convention on cluster munitions on 4 May 2010 and we no longer supply, maintain or support these weapons. We have not done so since we signed the convention in 2008. Based on all the information available to us, including sensitive coalition operational reporting, we assess that no UK-supplied cluster weapons have been used, and that no UK-supplied aircraft have been involved in the use of UK cluster weapons, in the current conflict in Yemen.

We are aware of reports of the alleged use of cluster munitions by the coalition in Yemen. We have raised these reports with our allies, and have been clear that the role of the United Kingdom’s supply, maintain or support these weapons. We have said already, we have not supplied any such munitions over the past decade, and it is unclear from the evidence provided thus far that the munitions came from the current conflict.

As for the other issues mentioned by the hon. Lady, we have been clear that the role of the United Kingdom’s advisors to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s armed forces in this conflict is not operational. We welcome the ceasefire and the negotiations that are under way and have been for the past six weeks or so. We want them to be successful so that the cessation of hostilities continues to result in no further conflict in Yemen.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I am the Government’s special envoy to Yemen and have been there many times over a period of 30 years. I have more recently been to Saudi Arabia, where the Yemeni Government are based. I have also been to the operational targeting headquarters of the Saudi-led coalition and have seen for myself the high professional standards being set by that operation. Notwithstanding the passion of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), which I think it is fair to say is driven much more by non-governmental organisation briefing than by any kind of personal experience—

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: How insulting.

Sir Alan Duncan: It is not at all insulting to suggest that experience of the country matters. I make a plea to the hon. Lady: would it not be wise for the House to appreciate that the current cessation of hostilities and the peace talks in Kuwait are in an absolutely critical phase? The future of the country entirely depends on the talks, so it would also be wise not to inflame any kind of opinion that could jeopardise those talks, empowering those who would rather them fail than succeed.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who speaks with considerable experience on matters Yemeni as the Prime Minister’s envoy to the country, along with its neighbours, more often than most other Members. I gently remind Opposition Members who are rightly concerned about the impact of certain munitions in this conflict that, were it not for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia establishing the coalition following UN resolution 2216, it is highly likely that Yemen would have been entirely overrun and would be in a state of continuous chaos.
areas that they are hanging off the trees, and of young children herding goats and picking up the bombs, thinking they are toys, with all-too-familiar results. Anyone who read those reports will be asking questions today and will be rightly concerned about the Minister’s lack of answers.

We need to know whether the Saudi military has used British planes to drop cluster bombs. What is the extent of British involvement in the conflict, and what precisely is it designed to achieve? Today’s Los Angeles Times reports a US State Department official as having said that the United States has reminded Saudi Arabia of its obligations regarding the use of cluster bombs and encouraged it “to do its utmost to avoid civilian casualties”.

Will the Minister confirm whether he has also raised such concerns with his Saudi counterparts? What response has he received? In the face of all the mounting evidence, we have the absurd spectacle of the Saudi spokesman, Brigadier General Ahmed Asseri, insisting that the coalition is not using cluster bombs. Does the Minister believe the brigadier general? If not, what is he going to do about it, and when?

Mr Dunne: We regard the reports as serious. We are seeking to investigate, through our discussions with the Saudis, any further evidence to substantiate the allegations that have been made. I can categorically reassure the hon. Lady and this House that no British planes have been involved in this coalition effort at all, let alone in dropping cluster munitions—that is the potential allegation. There is no British involvement in the coalition in targeting or weaponising aircraft to undertake missions.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who deals with Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who deals with Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who deals with Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who deals with Commonwealth Affairs, and evidence from Saudi Arabia, to the Committees as soon as it becomes available?

Mr Dunne: I ask the hon. Lady to consider her last remarks. There is no suggestion—none whatsoever—that the United Kingdom or our forces are involved in breaches of humanitarian law in this conflict. The humanitarian aid provided by this country to refugees as a result of the crisis in Yemen is second in the ranking of countries around the world. We have a proud record of supporting the humanitarian cause of people disturbed by this crisis. As she will probably be aware, the UN estimates that some one fifth of people in need around the world as a result of conflict are in Yemen. We are committed to supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Arms exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent years have primarily been about providing capability to cope with incursion by foreign powers. These exports support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s contribution to the anti-Daesh coalition, in which they play a vital role. The hon. Lady has to look at the challenges in the round in the region and at the role that Saudi Arabia plays in providing continued security to the region.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Doubts have been cast on the validity of the Minister’s remarks. There is no suggestion—none whatsoever—that the United Kingdom or our forces are involved in breaches of humanitarian law in this conflict. The humanitarian aid provided by this country to refugees as a result of the crisis in Yemen is second in the ranking of countries around the world. We have a proud record of supporting the humanitarian cause of people disturbed by this crisis. As she will probably be aware, the UN estimates that some one fifth of people in need around the world as a result of conflict are in Yemen. We are committed to supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that this is a very volatile country that has played host to a number of international terrorist organisations, including al-Qaeda. I agree that it is desirable for more countries to sign up to the cluster munitions legislation, as the UK already has?

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that this is a very volatile country that has played host to a number of international terrorist organisations, including al-Qaeda. I agree that it is desirable for more countries to sign up to the cluster munitions convention on cluster munitions. We have encouraged our friends in Saudi Arabia to do so on several occasions.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Doubts have been cast on the validity of the evidence produced by Amnesty and others, but I and other hon. Members have seen a series of photographs and evidence that suggest that cluster munitions are being used in Yemen. Amnesty has told us that it was impossible to obtain more information because three of the de-miners were killed in a cluster munitions incident while carrying out their work, which itself suggests that cluster munitions are being used. Will the Minister explain whether he has seen all the evidence from Amnesty? Will he commit to reviewing it independently, and not just relying on Saudi assurances?
Has the Minister had any answers to the series of other serious allegations that have been made not just by Amnesty, but by Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, Human Rights Watch and other organisations about attacks on civilians and humanitarian facilities, which the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), admitted he had not had satisfactory answers to when he appeared before the Committees on Arms Export Controls?

Mr Dunne: I am not casting doubt on the photographic evidence. The challenge is to determine where and when the munitions were laid, and by whom. There is very little evidence at this point. We are taking this matter up with the Saudi authorities. We are particularly concerned about the potential evidence of any UK munitions that might have been used in this way. As I have indicated, if we find any evidence, we will pass it on to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, on which the hon. Gentleman sits. In relation to the questions that he posed to me and the other people who appeared before the Committees the other day about the extent of the investigations into other matters that we are reviewing and on which we are seeking information from the Saudi authorities, I am not aware that any further information has been forthcoming since we met the Committees a couple of weeks ago.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question to the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh)? This is a very serious matter and I am glad that there will be an investigation of the serious allegations that have been made by Amnesty International.

We are involved in Yemen because we are peacemakers: we want to see peace restored to a country that is bleeding to death because of the involvement of so many countries. Of course, we needed the support of the Saudi Arabians to restore the legitimate Government of President Hadi because of the actions of the Iranians. However, it is important that they now stop and support the ceasefire. These kinds of allegations undermine the work that has been done by the coalition. Will the Minister ensure that the Saudi Arabian ambassador is called to see the Foreign Office Minister so that we can reinforce the message that these kinds of allegations undermine the peace process, which we need to make sure is maintained?

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has taken a consistent interest in Yemen for many years, for pointing out that the coalition effort in Yemen began at the invitation of President Saleh—

Keith Vaz: President Hadi.

Mr Dunne: Sorry, President Hadi. It is therefore a fully legitimised operation. The right hon. Gentleman is right that the primary aim of the efforts of the United Kingdom Government is to ensure that peace is restored to the country. To that end, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), meets the Saudi ambassador routinely. He last saw him last week and continually impresses upon him the importance of the negotiations in Kuwait. We are seeking to assist those negotiations to the extent that we can.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): In his earlier reply, the Minister mentioned that we have not supplied munitions for a long time. Will he clarify the date when we last supplied munitions?

Mr Dunne: In my response to the urgent question, I made it clear that 1989 was the last time we supplied any BL-755 munitions.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Government are digging a very deep hole for themselves. I have exchanged many letters with Ministers on this subject and have been informed that the UK Government have concluded that the “Saudi-led Coalition are not targeting civilians” in Yemen. How can the Government draw that conclusion when the Saudis have stated that whole cities—Sa’dah, where UN Security Council experts identified that hospitals, schools and mosques had been attacked, and Marran—are military targets; when the Saudis are apparently using UK-made cluster munitions; and when 93% of the casualties from air-launched explosives are civilians, according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs? Will the Government finally acquire a backbone, accept that Saudi Arabia is in flagrant breach of international humanitarian law and halt weapons sales to Saudi Arabia until it cleans up its act?

Mr Dunne: This is a civil war and in civil wars, difficult things happen. This is a very complex environment. Actors use whatever is available to them, in respect of the terrain that is there, to adopt positions. It is not a nice, straightforward, clinical exercise like a training event. Therefore, accidents do happen. As a result of our relationship with the Saudi Arabian armed forces, we are in a position to exert some influence on the coalition and, in particular, its leadership in respect of investigating accidents when they occur and allegations of incidents such as those that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned. We are putting that pressure on the Saudis and they have given us undertakings that they are undertaking those investigations, and we are awaiting the outcome.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Thanks to a Labour Government, we have the Export Control Act 2002, which provides this country with a robust mechanism for arms exports not just to Saudi Arabia, but to other nations around the world. Will the Minister tell the House what pressure is being put on the Iranians to stop not only exporting weapons to rebels, but using them as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia?

Mr Dunne: The hon. Gentleman, who is experienced in these matters, will be aware of the coalition’s efforts to intercept matériel that foreign Governments, in particular Iran, are seeking to supply to rebels through the waters surrounding Yemen. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the Iranian chargé d’affaires last week to raise that specific issue. We will continue to put diplomatic pressure on the Iranians to cease their support for the rebels.
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, thank the Minister for his response. Along with the Chair of the Defence Committee, I attended the Committees on Arms Export Controls, where there was a robust exchange of views, as the Minister will recall. The use of British-produced cluster bombs was mentioned in that evidence session, and he has referred to that. In his response to the Committees, the Minister stated that if evidence was produced of British-produced cluster bombs being used, there would be sanctions and the Government would stop arms exports to Saudi Arabia. More evidence has been produced today and I ask the Minister the same thing. Will we take action today to ensure that the exports to Saudi Arabia stop, because the evidence clearly shows the use of British-produced cluster bombs?

Mr Dunne: Again, the hon. Gentleman has taken a consistent interest in this subject and plays an important role on the Committees. I repeat what I said to the Committees, which is that we at the Ministry of Defence provide advice to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which is the entity within the UK Government that provides arms export licences. Our advice will be shaped by the circumstances at the time. At present, we have an allegation of the use of a UK munition. Until such time as we have established whether that munition has been used by a member of the coalition as part of the current conflict, we will not be in a position to speculate on what might happen to future licence applications.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have a detailed investigation of exactly what was dropped and when, because we all know that munitions can come to light many years after conflicts? For example, we are still finding bombs from the second world war in Britain. Does he agree that such an investigation is also important because this is a close ally acting in self-defence of a Government that are entitled to run the country? It is therefore not a straight matter of condemnation.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for pointing out that munitions have quite a long shelf life. As I indicated, it is quite possible that the munitions have come to light many years after conflicts. For example, we are still finding bombs from the second world war in Britain. Does he agree that such an investigation is also important because this is a close ally acting in self-defence of a Government that are entitled to run the country? It is therefore not a straight matter of condemnation.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned the investigations the Saudi Government have agreed to undertake into strikes in civilian areas. Could he give us a timetable for when he expects to hear the result of those investigations?

Mr Dunne: We are looking at all the allegations made by the various bodies mentioned in the Chamber, and we have the opportunity to indicate to the Saudi military that these incidents are worthy of investigation. This is an ongoing process, and we have had opportunities to encourage the Saudis to speed up their investigations. However, at this point, I am afraid that I cannot put a timetable on it.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is clear that these munitions are old, but they are falling now, and they are affecting families and others living in Yemen. Does the Minister not agree that the Government have a responsibility—certainly a moral responsibility—to provide training and resources to the services on the ground in Yemen that are trying to de-mine these areas so that people can live in safety without having to fear for their children’s lives?

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady referred to munitions falling. We do not know at this point when, where or how the munitions referred to in the allegations were delivered. It is that kind of information that will help to inform the investigation and what is then done about it. In relation to clearing up the munitions that clearly do exist in northern Yemen, we are supporting a number of non-governmental organisations by providing resource and training to encourage them to undertake this very important work.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I earnestly hope that the hon. Lady was here at the start of the statement.

Dr Mathias indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: That is good enough for me.

Dr Mathias: Following on from the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), will the Minister tell me what happened to the existing UK-manufactured cluster bombs when the UK signed the convention on cluster munitions?

Mr Dunne: I can help my hon. Friend. The last munitions were supplied to Saudi Arabia in 1989. The convention was signed in 2008; at that point, although it did not come into effect until May 2010, we ceased supplying or supporting those weapons any further.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) on bringing the Minister to the Dispatch Box to answer this urgent question. The fact that these cluster munitions seem to have been modelled and designed in the 1970s underlines the historical defence relationship between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Over that time, possibly thousands of UK personnel have found
themselves advising the Saudi Arabian armed forces or leaving the United Kingdom services to take up a role in the Saudi Arabian armed services. How confident, therefore, are the Government that no UK citizen has been involved in targeting, firing or maintaining these illegal weapons while in the service of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

Mr Dunne: Completely confident.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Once again, we have Ministers prepared to present the Saudi wolf in a sheepdog’s clothing. Today, we have been given a pub crawl of excusery. We have been told that the weapons were old or that there was no evidence of any cluster munitions having been used by the Saudi-led coalition. Then we were told that there was no evidence they were British manufactured. Then the Minister told us that he was concerned and that he would try to get evidence. Rather than just asking the Saudis what they have done, will the Government contact the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, which actually recovered the matériel we are talking about and has it in a de-mining depot, and look at the same evidence that Amnesty International has examined?

Mr Dunne: I would gently remind the hon. Gentleman that we are not members of this coalition. We do not have locus in Yemen to undertake direct investigations ourselves. What we are talking about are alleged violations of international humanitarian law. The correct procedure when an incident has been brought to the attention of members of the coalition is for them to undertake the investigation itself. We are able to encourage and stimulate them to undertake that investigation, because there is a long-standing relationship between our respective armed forces. That is what we are doing, and that is the right way to proceed.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): If these reports are not enough, under what circumstances would the Government actually suspend sales of arms to Saudi Arabia?

Mr Dunne: This is an allegation. There are a number of allegations of potential violations of international humanitarian law. If investigations lead to clear evidence, that evidence will have to be taken into account whenever an arms export licence is presented and where that information is relevant.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The shocking statistics referred to a few moments ago make it clear that the deaths of civilians in Yemen are not an isolated, unfortunate accident. The Saudis are, at best, being recklessly indiscriminate; at worst, they are deliberately setting out to kill civilians. Does the Minister agree that we should not hide behind the assertion that we cannot prove that British weapons have been used in this act of mass murder? Does he agree that the only way to ensure that they are not used in this way is to call an immediate halt to all arms sales to Saudi Arabia until the allegations have been proven unfounded, rather than to wait for the allegations to be proven correct?

Mr Dunne: Such a call would, of course, have no impact on the use of weapons that have already been supplied, so it would not achieve what the hon. Gentleman looks to do. The answer is that we are using our influence on the Saudi Arábians to encourage them to undertake investigations in circumstances where there has been conflict on the ground. This has been a war environment; difficult things happen in wars, and it is not possible to be absolutely certain about everything that takes place in such an environment. That is why it is important to investigate these allegations of actions that appear to be in breach of international humanitarian law.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister said that no UK-made planes had dropped UK-made cluster bombs. [HON. MEMBERS: “UK planes.”] Sorry, UK planes. Just to be clear, will he confirm whether UK planes have dropped any cluster bombs at all?

Mr Dunne: There are no UK Royal Air Force planes involved in the coalition, and there are no cluster munitions in the arsenal of the British armed forces.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Given the grave concerns raised, will the UK Government now heed the recommendation of the International Development Committee and back the establishment of an independent investigation into alleged breaches of humanitarian law in Yemen?

Mr Dunne: There is a clear process under which the Saudis, as leaders of the coalition, undertake the investigation. That is a novel aspect of this conflict. The Saudis have not done that before in previous conflicts in which they have been engaged. We think that that is appropriate, as do all other nations.
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update

1.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

With permission, Mr Speaker, I want to update the House on the counter-Daesh campaign following the December and February statements by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the International Development Secretary. Since then, the attacks in Brussels in March have reminded us of the importance of defeating this terror. Since the decisive vote to extend air strikes to Syria, we have stepped up our air campaign, and today I want to set out the United Kingdom’s contribution to military operations and our wider efforts to defeat Daesh.

We now have 1,100 military personnel in the region on this campaign. I know the House will want to join me in paying tribute to them and to their families who are not with them. The RAF has conducted over 760 airstrikes in Iraq and, since December, 43 in Syria—more than any other nation except the United States. As well as providing close air support, we have been targeting Daesh’s communications, command and control, and infrastructure, and also providing crucial intelligence and surveillance. In Iraq, we have over 250 troops who have trained more than 13,000 members of the Iraqi security forces, mainly in countering improvised explosive devices. The extra troops I announced in March have now started to deploy—22 Engineer Regiment from Wiltshire is providing bridge building training, while the MOD hospital unit from Northallerton is providing medical expertise.

The military campaign is making progress. In Iraq, Daesh is on the back foot; it has lost territory, its finances have been targeted, and its leadership has been struck. About 40% of the territory that Daesh once held has been retaken, including Ramadi; last month, Hit; and, more recently, Rutbah. Preparatory operations for the encirclement of Mosul are under way and, at the weekend, Prime Minister Abadi announced the beginning of the operation to retake Fallujah.

In Syria, the civil war, the persistence of Daesh, and Russia’s intervention have created a more complex situation. Despite the so-called cessation of hostilities, the regime has continued to hammer the moderate opposition. In Aleppo, hospitals and schools have been repeatedly shelled. On 4 May, the United Kingdom called an urgent session of the UN Security Council to highlight the regime’s atrocities. Russia, the Assad regime’s protector, must apply pressure to end this violence. None the less, even in Syria, Daesh has lost ground and has been driven from al-Shaddadi—a major supply route from Mosul to Raqqa. Coalition airstrikes have destroyed an estimated $800 million-worth of Daesh cash stockpiles, while the RAF has struck oilfields in eastern Syria—a major source of revenue. We need to build on this progress. Earlier this month, I and other coalition Defence Ministers reviewed what further support we can offer, and we are looking at what more the UK can do.

Daesh cannot be defeated by military means alone. That brings me to the wider strategy. First, on countering ideology—UK has led the creation of a coalition communications cell to undermine Daesh’s failing proposition that it is winning militarily, that it is building a viable state, and that it represents the only true form of Islam. Some in the media have criticised our proactive efforts to discredit Daesh’s perverted ideology. I say to the House that we make no apology for seeking to stop people being radicalised and stop them becoming Daesh suicide bombers or foot soldiers.

Secondly, we are supporting political reform and reconciliation in Iraq, and the ending of the civil war in Syria and the transition of Assad from power. We are helping to stabilise areas liberated from Daesh so that people can return to a safe environment. We have contributed to UN-led efforts to remove IEDs, to increase water availability to above pre-conflict levels in Tikrit, and to rebuild schools, police stations and electricity generators across Anbar and Nineveh provinces.

In Syria, long-term success means a political settlement which delivers a Government who can represent all Syrians and with whom we can work to tackle Daesh. Last week, the International Syria Support Group reaffirmed its determination to strengthen the cessation of hostilities, and set a deadline of 1 June for full humanitarian access to besieged areas. It is concerning that despite this agreement, attacks have continued, and that armed groups are on the brink of withdrawal from the cessation. We support the UN special envoy in his efforts to resume Syrian peace negotiations, the success of which depends on respect for the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access, and discussion of transition by both sides.

Thirdly, the UK is playing a full role, alongside our partners, in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria. At the London conference, we doubled our commitment to Syria and the region to £2.3 billion, which has already delivered over 20 million food rations and relief items for over 4.5 million people—but there remain 13.5 million people in need inside Syria. The regime continues to remove vital medical supplies from aid convoys, in violation of international law. It is outrageous that aid itself has become a weapon of war.

Fourthly, we are stemming the flow of foreign fighters through better international co-ordination. At least 50 countries now pass fighter profiles to Interpol—a 400% increase over two years. We estimate that the number of foreign fighters joining Daesh has now fallen to about 200 a month from its peak of about 2,000 a month.

As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we have seen new branches appear, most concerningly in Libya. The Foreign Secretary visited Tripoli last month to reiterate our support for Prime Minister al-Sarraj. Yesterday I spoke to the new Libyan Defence Minister to repeat our offer of assistance to the new Government of national accord. Last Monday, the international community reaffirmed its support for that new Government and underlined the need for enhanced co-ordination between legitimate Libyan security forces to fight Daesh and UN-designated terrorist groups. Britain would provide training or other support only at the invitation of the Libyan Government or by other authority. Let me reiterate to the House that there are no plans to deploy troops in a combat role.

Since this House supported extending military operations, we have intensified our efforts to defeat Daesh. There is a long way to go, and political progress needs to match military progress on the ground, but we can be encouraged.
Michael Fallon:

This may be a long campaign, but it is one we have to win and one we will win. I commend this statement to the House.

1.18 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I start by joining the Secretary of State in recognising the extraordinary bravery and commitment of the men and women of our armed forces? I believe much of what he has said. Daesh and those who fight alongside it are barbaric and hateful terrorists, and they must be stopped. I was surprised, however, that there was not recognition from the Secretary of State of the terrible news of the suicide bombings in Syrian strongholds that caused so many fatalities yesterday. That obviously serves as a reminder that progress cannot be measured only in terms of the size of Daesh-held territory. On behalf of the House, may I express all our condolences to the victims of this senseless violence, and their families?

A particularly significant development in Iraq was seen at the weekend with the launch of the ground offensive against the Daesh stronghold of Fallujah. It is often forgotten that about 250 British troops have been deployed on the ground in Iraq, providing vital training and military advice to the Iraqi security forces. We therefore have an important stake in the success of the Iraqi military, and we will continue to monitor their progress very carefully.

As the Secretary of State acknowledges, the situation in Syria is much more complex. Last year, he said that we were going to “tighten the noose around the head of the snake” that was Raqqa, but taking the fight to the de facto capital of Daesh in Syria will present many challenges compared with the previous stages of the campaign.

In terms of ground forces, coalition airstrikes to date have been complemented by a number of armed opposition groups on the ground, particularly in northern Syria, but the YPG is unlikely to have a role in Raqqa. I would suggest, given its distance from the majority Kurdish regions. There are questions too about both the numbers and the composition of other armed opposition groups.

The House was told last year that the Free Syrian Army, comprising the majority of the 70,000 moderate fighters the Government identified, was going to fight in Syria, but as the Secretary of State said again today, Russian airstrikes have systematically targeted the Free Syrian Army, among other rebel groups opposed to the Assad regime but not thought to be affiliated to Daesh. In fact, there have been reports in the past 24 hours that indicate that the Free Syrian Army may be excluded from the US-led plan to liberate Raqqa. Is that correct? If it is, how are the Government expecting to contribute to the next phase of the campaign without troops of our own on the ground? Do the Government plan to increase co-ordination between coalition efforts and the Assad regime and its Russian allies?

Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that further airstrikes will avoid inflicting civilian casualties, particularly if urban areas such as Raqqa are to be targeted? The statements so far on the latter point have not provided sufficient reassurance. We are told that a review is carried out after each strike to assess the damage, but there are few details of the process involved.

The MOD, we are told, considers all credible reports of civilian casualties, but it is not clear how credibility is defined in that context; nor is it clear how many reports of civilian casualties have been received but not found to be credible, or even how the difficult distinction between combatant and civilian is being made in the first place.

I welcome the progress that has been made in the fight against Daesh in recent weeks. I hope to hear in more detail from the Secretary of State what strategy the Government have for taking the campaign forward.

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the tone of her response. She raised three or four specific points.

The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the operations likely to be needed to liberate both Raqqa and Mosul, which are the main centres currently occupied by Daesh. That will require quite sustained and formidable operations by the local forces on the ground, and nobody should underestimate the difficulty or the timescales involved. However, as I indicated, some progress is being made in north-east and northern Syria, with operations ongoing to try to seal the remaining unsealed pockets of the border and to begin slowly to tighten the noose around Raqqa. Operations have begun to begin to plan how the city of Mosul may be recovered and troops are being moved forward up the Tigris to be ready for that.

The hon. Lady asks about the estimate of 70,000. Our view is that that estimate has stood up. Numbers of that size are still involved in fighting the regime, and the Syrian democratic forces are part of that struggle.

Finally, the hon. Lady asks about civilian casualties. I made it clear to her and the House that we carry out battle damage assessment after every RAF strike; we look back at the evidence of what the strike actually achieved to satisfy ourselves that that there have been no civilian casualties. We will of course look especially closely at any allegation made and any piece of evidence that comes to light that there may have been civilian casualties, but at the moment, after a year and a half of operations in Iraq and Syria, our view remains that we have seen no evidence yet of civilian casualties being caused by our strikes. That, I suggest, is a tribute to the professionalism of the RAF pilots and crews and to the choice of precision munitions.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Russian media are reporting a Russian statement that a force of 6,000 Jabhat al-Nusra fighters are preparing for an assault on Aleppo. Plainly there is scope for confusion and misinformation about identifying al-Nusra and other opposition forces. Has any work been done by the members of the ISSG to create a joint intelligence picture, so that the capacity for misinformation in that area can be reduced?

Michael Fallon: The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who
is responsible for middle east affairs, is already involved in work to build up a better picture. The Chairman of the Select Committee is absolutely right: the picture in and around Aleppo is the most complex of all in terms of the different groups fighting there. He makes a good point about sharing intelligence more widely.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

During the debate in December, we were told that the UK’s unique contribution to defeating Daesh was the Brimstone missile and that our coalition partners were pressing the UK to bring it to the conflict. Incidentally, this unique contribution argument continued even after it was shown that the Royal Saudi Air Force had been using Brimstone in Syria since February 2015. Despite that, it remained a central plank of the Government’s case for extending UK military action into Syria. Indeed, according to information obtained by The Huffington Post under the Freedom of Information Act, until as late as February this year not a single Daesh fighter had been killed by a UK-fired Brimstone missile. The Brimstone missile and its capacity to minimise civilian casualties work best when there is human intelligence on the ground to supply precise information. That explains the other great plank of the Government’s case: the 70,000 moderate ground troops who were, we were assured, ready to cut off the head of the Daesh snake in Raqqa.

Today, we are told that the coalition is airdropping leaflets into Raqqa urging the civilian population to flee the city ahead of an imminent attack—the problem of course being that the civilian population of that city are being used as human shields by Daesh, which has threatened to murder anyone attempting to leave the city. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with our coalition partners to decide whether the RAF will take part in the imminent bombing of Raqqa, with its large civilian population?

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his questions. They are largely about operational matters, but I will do my best to respond.

The RAF uses a number of precision weapons—Paveway bombs, Hellfire and Brimstone missiles—for different tasks. The Brimstone is particularly suited to striking moving vehicles, for example; the Paveway deals with more static targets, such as command posts. I can tell the House that yesterday the RAF used all three—Paveway, Brimstone and Hellfire. There will be more details of that in due course.

We have never suggested that the RAF would start bombing Raqqa or Mosul indiscriminately. The coalition will have to be extremely careful in its use of close air support as operations begin first to encircle, then eventually to liberate the suburbs and the city centre. Obviously, we want to ensure that as many civilian lives as possible are saved. As we have in the liberation of other cities, the coalition has of course been encouraging citizens to leave, to make sure those lives are spared. We discuss such matters regularly inside the coalition.

Michael Fallon: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Friend the brutality of the Assad regime means that he can play no part in the future of Syria. He and his forces have been using barrel bombs and chlorine, dropping munitions indiscriminately and robbing humanitarian aid convoys of exactly the medicines that the local communities need.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): What progress has been made in cutting off finances to Daesh, apart from the sale of oil, such as that obtained from looted antiquities and the terrible sale of slaves, who are the Yazidi women?

Michael Fallon: We have made progress in reducing the dependence of Daesh on illegally traded oil across its borders and also internally in Syria. We have made progress in cutting down the sale of antiquities and artefacts in international markets. We have had the strike that I referred to on the cash stockpiles that Daesh has been using to finance itself. Of course, it draws other revenues from the areas it controls, but one illustration of the progress has been consecutive reports that Daesh has begun to cut the pay rates to its own troops.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Nevertheless, Daesh remains the best funded terrorist group in history, despite the fall in the oil price. How confident, therefore, is the Secretary of State that Daesh can no longer access the financial infrastructure and resources of the Iraqi state, given that the Foreign Affairs Committee is still waiting for answers from the Iraqi banking authorities as to Daesh’s ability to make a turn on the state’s currency markets?

Michael Fallon: That is one of the areas that we are working on. When Daesh originally established its caliphate so rapidly, it was able to access finance from the central bank in Mosul and other areas in Iraq, and it levies taxes on the towns and cities that it controls, but I want to assure my hon. Friend that the work is in hand and we are making progress in restricting Daesh’s financial support.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Is it not now clear that the success of the international coalition against ISIS will be limited so long as civilians in Syria continue to be subject to starvation tactics, siege and attacks with impunity? Is it not time for a rethink on the UK strategy so that it focuses much more on civilian protection? To that end, has operational planning begun by the Ministry of Defence and the Department for...
International Development on supporting the World Food Programme in its deadline of 1 June on airdrops to besieged communities?

**Michael Fallon:** We continue to look at that. The difficulty with airdrops is that they are very difficult to target on the precise population that we want to help. It is difficult to drop water in very large quantities, and at present the United Nations wants, where it can, to get food in through humanitarian convoys, but we will keep that under review.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. We are providing some £80 million in lifesaving humanitarian aid for those who have been forced to flee their homes. The Chancellor announced at the G7 last week that we are contributing some £300 million in loan guarantees to the World Bank’s facility to help rebuild and strengthen the economy of Iraq, and we are also contributing to the Iraqi humanitarian pooled fund that will help tackle poverty and ensure stability, precisely to get back the essential services on which people depend, to encourage them to return rapidly to the areas that have been liberated.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** When selecting and approving targets for deliberate strikes, we take very great care to make sure that they respect the rules of engagement that I set at the beginning of the campaign. A target that is selected may be studied for several days or even weeks to make sure that we understand the pattern of life around it— that it is a building, for example, that civilians are not using and only the military are using. We continue that surveillance right up until the last moment. If civilians are found to be in that area, the strike can be aborted right at the end. We take very good care to minimise civilian casualties. In long campaigns, however, in the messiness of war it is not impossible that there may be civilian casualties at some point. All I can tell the House is that from the evidence so far, we think we have avoided them.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. We are providing some £80 million in lifesaving humanitarian aid for those who have been forced to flee their homes. The Chancellor announced at the G7 last week that we are contributing some £300 million in loan guarantees to the World Bank’s facility to help rebuild and strengthen the economy of Iraq, and we are also contributing to the Iraqi humanitarian pooled fund that will help tackle poverty and ensure stability, precisely to get back the essential services on which people depend, to encourage them to return rapidly to the areas that have been liberated.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** When selecting and approving targets for deliberate strikes, we take very great care to make sure that they respect the rules of engagement that I set at the beginning of the campaign. A target that is selected may be studied for several days or even weeks to make sure that we understand the pattern of life around it— that it is a building, for example, that civilians are not using and only the military are using. We continue that surveillance right up until the last moment. If civilians are found to be in that area, the strike can be aborted right at the end. We take very good care to minimise civilian casualties. In long campaigns, however, in the messiness of war it is not impossible that there may be civilian casualties at some point. All I can tell the House is that from the evidence so far, we think we have avoided them.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?

**Michael Fallon:** Absolutely. We are providing some £80 million in lifesaving humanitarian aid for those who have been forced to flee their homes. The Chancellor announced at the G7 last week that we are contributing some £300 million in loan guarantees to the World Bank’s facility to help rebuild and strengthen the economy of Iraq, and we are also contributing to the Iraqi humanitarian pooled fund that will help tackle poverty and ensure stability, precisely to get back the essential services on which people depend, to encourage them to return rapidly to the areas that have been liberated.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What assessment has the Secretary of State made in relation to the number of Daesh terrorists operating in Europe, as opposed to Syria? How effective has our work been in preventing conscription to Daesh, both here and abroad?

**Michael Fallon:** That is a very good question, if I may say so. As Daesh is squeezed in Iraq and Syria, we may well see some backlash from Daesh in its external attack planning against west European or British targets, so we are vigilant, working with our partners across Europe to make sure that we understand how that attack planning is being carried out and so that we can track down those who are likely to be responsible for future attacks.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken about the battle damage assessment that takes place after a raid. Can he explain to the House, for those who are not familiar with the process, not only about selecting targets and the legal basis, but the fact that some targets are avoided at the last minute because of awareness of the risk of civilian casualties?
On no-fly zones, it is simply the practical application of a no-fly zone that I need persuading about. I am not clear at the moment how a no-fly zone could be properly policed. The most thing of all would be to offer a no-fly zone that is not actually safe.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s final point, Raqqa and Mosul are very large cities with, at the moment, large civilian populations who have not fled. That is why the operations are going to take a very long time. Ramadi took eight months. It is going to take a long time to persuade those civilians that Daesh is not their future and that it would be best for them to leave while the fighting is going on.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I pay tribute to the men and women of our armed services who are working day in, day out to liberate people from Daesh. What preparations are being made for post-conflict reconstruction when areas are liberated from Daesh, and what part is the United Kingdom playing in that?

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said and will make sure that it is passed back not just to the Royal Air Force, but to all those involved in this huge effort—our biggest single military undertaking at the moment. Stabilisation is the key: after liberating a town or city, it is essential to offer the local population the security and stability they need to be able to return. We are co-operating with our partners, and a huge amount of work is being done on the stabilisation effort, which will be offered to each city and town as it is liberated.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): Thank you for calling me so early, Mr Speaker, so that I can get out of the Chamber and spare everybody my germs.

I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Given that large areas of north-eastern Syria would not have been secured but for the Syrian Kurds, what practical support are we giving them and what efforts are being made to include them in diplomatic negotiations? Does he agree that it is incredibly problematic for a key actor in the Syrian Kurds to be excluded from Geneva I and II and from future peace talks, given their strategic importance as interlocutors in any future peace settlement?

Michael Fallon: The Kurds are represented in the Syrian talks. It is not the object of the talks to start excluding every single Kurdish group. The Syrian Kurds have to be part of the solution. Many of them have come forward in the fight against Daesh, as well as in the fight against the regime, and they have to be part of the future.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I also thank my right hon. Friend for his update, and add my thanks to the British military personnel who are serving in the region on our behalf. As the military campaign progresses, what assurance can he give that we are doing all we can to ensure that we also make progress on the political track?

Michael Fallon: Talks are under way on the future of Syria and they need to make more progress. My hon. Friend is right. In Iraq we have not seen the political progress needed to match the military progress, which is getting ahead of the reforms, securitisation and stabilisation that we need to see following on, particularly in Anbar province. We urge the Abadi Government to crack on with the reforms needed to create a national guard in which people can have confidence, to give the governors the powers they need to get essential services up and running, and to ensure that the areas that are liberated are then properly policed.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State’s statement did not refer to the Syrian Kurds—the Democratic Union party—or the Iraqi Kurds, the Kurdish Regional Government. In answer to an earlier question, he said that the long-delayed supply of ammunition to the peshmerga would take place at some point in the future. Why is it taking so long?

Michael Fallon: The peshmerga are able to access ammunition from a number of sources. They now have the funding to purchase it—some more funding has gone in from the United States recently—but we are not able to supply the Kurdish peshmerga directly. The Kurdish area is part of the unitary state of Iraq, so supplies have to be routed through Iraq and we also have to consider the needs of the Iraqi forces—the Iraqi army itself—vis-à-vis the peshmerga. I have, however, agreed a new shipment of ammunition, and I hope it will be going out there shortly.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the interesting update. It is clear from experience that when areas are liberated, a system of government, law and order and justice in which everyone can have confidence needs to be put in place quickly. Does he agree that while there may be some need for transitional arrangements, in the long term Assad cannot be the solution in Syria?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. We have been very clear throughout that there is no future for Assad in the future Government of Syria and he needs to depart. We want to see in Syria what we have in Iraq—a Government who are genuinely representative of all groups in Syria and who are prepared to work towards a democratic and representative Administration.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State said: “It is outrageous that aid itself has become a weapon of war.” Those outrages have grievous consequences for civilians and children. What preparations are the UK Government making to make sure that such crimes are investigated and that someone is held accountable for them at some point in the future?

Michael Fallon: I can give the hon. Lady that reassurance. That will be an important part of the work that will be needed when the conflict finally, I hope, ends. We are already working with non-governmental organisations to see what resources and funding they need in order to collect the evidence required to nail those responsible.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): On a recent visit to Moscow, it was often said that any lasting, peaceful and democratic solution in Syria would only happen in partnership with Russia. That view has also been expressed here at home, too. I have two questions. When did the Defence Secretary and the
Foreign Secretary last meet their respective counterparts in the Russian Government? On timelines, will the Secretary of State give a commitment to the House that the lasting, peaceful and democratic solution will be delivered within the three-year target period that he suggested at yesterday’s MOD briefing? Are we even close to that?

Michael Fallon: On the hon. Gentleman’s first point, Russia has legitimate interests and influence in Syria, and we want it to bring that to bear constructively. The Foreign Secretary regularly meets his counterpart; I believe he met Mr Lavrov early last week. On the hon. Gentleman’s third and final question, the original timescale was set not by me, but by Secretary Kerry. When we asked the House to support action in Iraq in summer 2014, Secretary Kerry’s estimate was that it would take at least three years. We are not yet into the second year. This is, as I said in my statement, going to be a long campaign.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Turkey is a key NATO ally and a partner in our fight against Daesh. It has also taken in and provided a safe haven to millions of people fleeing the terror in Syria and Iraq. What support is the UK Government offering Turkey with regard to its own internal fight against Daesh, the terrorist attacks it has experienced and the other terrorist groups identified as operating there?

Michael Fallon: I visited Ankara for discussions just after one of the first attacks in Turkey. We have offered Turkey counter-terrorism assistance, and we should applaud the role it is playing in looking after so many refugees—more than 2 million of them—and the efforts it is making to close the border, stem the flow of foreign fighters and restrict Daesh’s ability to trade in oil. Turkey deserves enormous credit for that. On the second part of the hon. Lady’s question, I hope she will allow me to write to her.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) ( Lab): In his statement, the Secretary of State mentioned that the number of foreign fighters has been reduced to 200. Has he made any assessment of the number of UK citizens—both male and female—who have travelled out to support Daesh and of how many have returned to the UK?

Michael Fallon: Again, I will try to get that specific information to the hon. Lady; I do not have it to hand. I want to make it clear that the estimate is of 200 foreign fighters joining Daesh a month, vis-à-vis the figure of 2,000 joining a month when Daesh was at its peak a couple of years ago. They have more than 200 foreign fighters, but the flow of new foreign fighters has been quite considerably reduced.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): At the time of the Syria debate back in October, there were guarded suggestions that Russia, through the Vienna process, would work towards a stable transition in Syria within a six-month period. Clearly, that has not happened. Will the Secretary of State say whether there is any hope of Russia playing a constructive role?

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What progress has been made in securing a safe corridor for civilians and in providing support for marginalised groups, such as the disabled?

Michael Fallon: It is extremely difficult to establish any kind of safe corridor in Syria, particularly in northern Syria where such groups are under most threat. If I may, I will look at that very specific point and write to the hon. Lady.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): The point about civilian deaths is really important because the assurances we were given last year, when we were asked to extend precise, limited and targeted air strikes from Iraq to Syria, were central to persuading me to support the Government’s proposals. I welcome—I really welcome—what the Secretary of State has said today, but what additional reassurance can he provide about the steps the RAF is taking to protect civilians in Syria and ensure that they do not become victims of the RAF’s work?

Michael Fallon: We have set rules of engagement that apply to our operations in Syria as well as in Iraq. They are different from the rules of engagement of other countries; each country has its own rules of engagement. Any deliberate targets have to be approved, which covers the choice of munition involved, and an absolute assurance that civilians are not using, near using or likely to use the particular building or area to be bombed. As I said, that is checked over a period of days or perhaps weeks while the target is watched. Our commanders in the operations centre in the Gulf as well as the pilots themselves can, right until the last moment, pull back from a strike if they have any concern at all that civilians may be in the area. Obviously, in some of the areas of very intense fighting where there is close air support, it will be more and more difficult to ensure that we avoid civilian casualties. All I can say is that our policy is absolutely to avoid the risk of civilian casualties, and so far we believe that the RAF has been successful in doing that.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): If the Government’s predictions in the debate on 2 December had proved correct, Syria would have had a transitional Government next week, and free and fair elections by this time next year. What are the Secretary of State’s most up-to-date predictions of when those two vital milestones will actually be delivered?

Michael Fallon: To be honest, I would not have predicted the progress that has been made in Iraq during the past few weeks and months. It has actually been more rapid
than I would have said had the hon. Gentleman asked me about that during the debate in December. In Syria, yes, progress has been far slower than we wanted and far slower than I thought would be the case when the cessation was agreed in Munich in February. However, this is war, and a lot of the people involved have an interest in sustaining this war, especially the Assad regime, supported by Russia, and we have to keep working at it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He will be aware that Daesh’s attacks on the city of Aleppo have been very brutal, very violent, very bloody and very destructive, and that many thousands of people have died or been injured. Some 225,000 Christians lived in Aleppo; now, there are only 25,000. There used to be 80,000 Armenian Christians in Aleppo; now there are only 10,000. What steps will the Government take to ensure that any support for opposition groups does not indirectly benefit extremists targeting minority communities, such as the Christians in Aleppo?

Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman is right: what is happening in Aleppo is nothing short of a tragedy. It is a beautiful and tolerant city—I have visited it myself in the past—which contains all kinds of groups from different faiths living and working happily alongside each other. It is important that all those groups are represented in the drive for a political settlement, and that is our aim.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I join other Members in condemning the attacks and raids on aid convoys. What support or protection can the UK provide for such convoys?

Michael Fallon: That is very difficult given the complexity of the situation in Syria, where multiple strikes are being carried out by the regime against its opponents and where we need to keep up the pressure on the infrastructure that supports Daesh. However, these attacks could stop: it is within the gift of the regime to stop them. It within the gift of the Russians to bring their influence to bear, and I still hope that they will do so.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Defence Secretary talked about people returning to a safe environment, which we all support. What more can be done by the international community to secure the freedom of the Yazidi women who were captured and taken into slavery?

Michael Fallon: We have had some success in populations returning, particularly in Tikrit, to which the vast majority of the population has now returned. That is more difficult in Ramadi, simply because so many improvised explosive devices have been seeded right across the city. There are different circumstances in each of the particular areas. In relation to the Yazidi women, about whom the hon. Gentleman is concerned, we are working with NGOs to see what we can do to identify where they are being held and what more can be done to help them to return to Sinjar.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): To return to what the Secretary of State said in his statement about the number of foreign fighters joining Daesh being reduced to 200 a month from up to 2,000 a month, that is extremely welcome. It would build on that if we could work with our international partners to drive that down to zero and completely isolate this organisation.

Michael Fallon: I hope that we can do so. We are working very closely with our partners—over 40 countries are now reporting, through Interpol and other international organisations, on foreign fighters—so that we can share information about these fighters as they travel towards Iraq or Syria. Of course, we must play our part by ensuring that more people are not radicalised in this country and by keeping tabs on those who are likely to go out there.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give the House an assurance that the RAF will not take part in air strikes against Daesh in Libya without a further vote in this House?

Michael Fallon: Yes. We have made it clear that we are not planning any kind of combat role either for our troops or for the RAF in Libya. That is not part of our planning. If we were considering further military action against Daesh wherever they are—whether in Libya or anywhere else—we would of course come to this House to discuss it first.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): A recent report, “Why Young Syrians Choose to Fight”, argues that money acts as a key recruiter for Daesh, claiming that while the Syrian army pays around $100 a month, often late, Daesh can pay three times that amount on time. What alternative economic options for young Syrians are therefore being used to undermine Daesh’s recruitment?

Michael Fallon: The first thing is to undermine Daesh’s own access to revenue and finance. There is some evidence that we are beginning to do that and to reduce its earnings from oil and other trades. There is also some evidence—anecdotal, perhaps, but an accumulating body of evidence—that its pay rates to fighters are being reduced. Beyond that, we have to get the Syrian economy going again. The sooner we get a political settlement, the sooner we can get in the money that we and a lot of other countries pledged during the London conference. The money is ready and waiting to rebuild the Syrian economy and, most importantly, to give the young people of Syria a reason to stay in Syria and build a new society that is safe and secure for their future.
Debate on the Address

[4TH DAY]
Debate resumed (Order, 18 May).
Question again proposed.
That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:
Most Gracious Sovereign,
We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad

2.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I am delighted to open this debate, and congratulate the Opposition on selecting this subject. The security of Britain and the British people, our relations with Europe and the promotion of Britain's values, including human rights, around the world are at the heart of our foreign policy. One year into this Parliament, the challenges we face to our security, prosperity and values have not diminished—if anything, they are growing.

The threat posed by Daesh and its affiliates continues and has now manifested itself in attacks in European cities. The wider instability in the middle east persists, and the Israel-Palestine question is no nearer to a solution. North Korea has demonstrated its determination to flout international law by developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them. Russia demonstrates the same determination through its continued destabilisation of Ukraine and its illegal occupation of Crimea. Tensions are rising in the South China sea. The migration crisis in the eastern and central Mediterranean is presenting new challenges to our near neighbours in Europe. As we approach the referendum in just over four weeks' time, even the theoretical possibility that Britain might vote to leave the European Union is having a chilling effect on economic growth, and on business and consumer confidence. Wherever we look, our world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain.

Against that hazardous global backdrop, some have argued for retrenchment and withdrawal from a global role as the safest option. But we cannot turn our backs. As a trading nation, with one of the largest and most open economies in the world, our security and prosperity depend upon global stability and order. Some 5 million British nationals live overseas, and millions more travel every year. Our trade depends on the sea lanes and airways that are the arteries of global commerce. International engagement and influence are therefore fundamental to maintaining Britain's security and prosperity.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): My right hon. Friend paints a picture of those of us who want to leave the European Union as wanting to retreat. That could not be further from the truth, and I suggest that “Project Fear” is once again going down a very negative path. In leaving, we would have greater freedom to trade and form trade deals with the rest of the world. At the moment we are barred from doing that; as a member of the EU, we cannot form individual international trading agreements.

Mr Hammond: Never mind “Project Fear”, what about project paranoia? I was not in any way referring to the exit campaigners, but simply observing that some people have suggested retrenchment. As my hon. Friend has taken me in that direction, I will answer his question. We enjoy free trade with 53 nations by virtue of free trade agreements negotiated by the European Union. Those campaigning for exit tell me that if we were to leave the EU we would rapidly negotiate new free trade agreements, with the EU itself and then with the 53 countries with which that Union has free trade agreements. Our experience in the real world is that these agreements take a lot of time to negotiate—the EU-Canada free trade agreement has been seven years in the negotiating and is still not ratified.

Another small problem that my hon. Friend should think about is that we do not actually have any trade negotiators. We would be seeking to negotiate those 53 plus one trade agreements from scratch, because for the past 40 years, for better or worse, the European Union has negotiated all our trade agreements on our behalf. We do not have civil servants experienced in this field of activity.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Foreign Secretary made any assessment of how many additional members of staff would be needed by either his Department or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to deal with this problem, or of how many years it would take to train them?

Mr Hammond: The latter point is more important than the former, if I may say so. It is not simply a question of nipping out and calling up the jobcentre to say, “Could you send us some experienced trade negotiators to hire?” We would literally be starting from scratch. I look across the Atlantic to the world’s largest economy and its trade negotiation team, under Michael Froman; that is an extremely good team, but it is very small and has struggled to carry out two trade negotiations in parallel. Mr Hammond: I am indeed astonished to hear leading exit campaigners suggest that we do not want to be part of the single market. Until relatively recently, their position was that we could have it all—be outside but somehow get free and privileged access to the single market. The wider instability in the middle east persists, and the Israel-Palestine question is no nearer to a solution. North Korea has demonstrated its determination to flout international law by developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them. Russia demonstrates the same determination through its continued destabilisation of Ukraine and its illegal occupation of Crimea. Tensions are rising in the South China sea. The migration crisis in the eastern and central Mediterranean is presenting new challenges to our near neighbours in Europe. As we approach the referendum in just over four weeks’ time, even the theoretical possibility that Britain might vote to leave the European Union is having a chilling effect on economic growth, and on business and consumer confidence. Wherever we look, our world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): My right hon. Friend paints a picture of those of us who want to leave the European Union as wanting to retreat. That could not be further from the truth, and I suggest that “Project Fear” is once again going down a very negative path. In leaving, we would have greater freedom to trade and form trade deals with the rest of the world. At the moment we are barred from doing that; as a member of the EU, we cannot form individual international trading agreements.

Mr Hammond: Never mind “Project Fear”, what about project paranoia? I was not in any way referring to the exit campaigners, but simply observing that some people have suggested retrenchment. As my hon. Friend has taken me in that direction, I will answer his question. We enjoy free trade with 53 nations by virtue of free trade agreements negotiated by the European Union. Those campaigning for exit tell me that if we were to leave the EU we would rapidly negotiate new free trade agreements, with the EU itself and then with the 53 countries with which that Union has free trade agreements. Our experience in the real world is that these agreements take a lot of time to negotiate—the EU-Canada free trade agreement has been seven years in the negotiating and is still not ratified.

Another small problem that my hon. Friend should think about is that we do not actually have any trade negotiators. We would be seeking to negotiate those 53 plus one trade agreements from scratch, because for the past 40 years, for better or worse, the European Union has negotiated all our trade agreements on our behalf. We do not have civil servants experienced in this field of activity.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Foreign Secretary made any assessment of how many additional members of staff would be needed by either his Department or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to deal with this problem, or of how many years it would take to train them?

Mr Hammond: The latter point is more important than the former, if I may say so. It is not simply a question of nipping out and calling up the jobcentre to say, “Could you send us some experienced trade negotiators to hire?” We would literally be starting from scratch. I look across the Atlantic to the world’s largest economy and its trade negotiation team, under Michael Froman; that is an extremely good team, but it is very small and has struggled to carry out two trade negotiations in parallel. I am afraid that the idea that in a matter of months, or even years, we would have negotiated a massive deal with the European Union and 53 separate trade agreements with other countries around the world—before starting on the ambitious expansion programme referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)—is, to quote the Prime Minister, “for the birds”.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Is the situation not actually worse than the Foreign Secretary has set out? Many of those countries have signed trade deals with the EU in order to access the single market. Was he as dismayed as I was to hear major proponents of Vote Leave call for us not to rejoin the single market. He has struggled to carry out two trade negotiations in parallel. I am afraid that the idea that in a matter of months, or even years, we would have negotiated a massive deal with the European Union and 53 separate trade agreements with other countries around the world—before starting on the ambitious expansion programme referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)—is, to quote the Prime Minister, “for the birds”.

Mr Hammond: I was indeed astonished to hear leading exit campaigners suggest that we do not want to be part of the single market. Until relatively recently, their position was that we could have it all—be outside but somehow get free and privileged access to the single market. The wider instability in the middle east persists, and the Israel-Palestine question is no nearer to a solution. North Korea has demonstrated its determination to flout international law by developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them. Russia demonstrates the same determination through its continued destabilisation of Ukraine and its illegal occupation of Crimea. Tensions are rising in the South China sea. The migration crisis in the eastern and central Mediterranean is presenting new challenges to our near neighbours in Europe. As we approach the referendum in just over four weeks’ time, even the theoretical possibility that Britain might vote to leave the European Union is having a chilling effect on economic growth, and on business and consumer confidence. Wherever we look, our world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): My right hon. Friend paints a picture of those of us who want to leave the European Union as wanting to retreat. That could not be further from the truth, and I suggest that “Project Fear” is once again going down a very negative path. In leaving, we would have greater freedom to trade and form trade deals with the rest of the world. At the moment we are barred from doing that; as a member of the EU, we cannot form individual international trading agreements.
market. That was never likely to be possible, but it was at least an ambition. Now we are told that we do not want to be part of the single market. I can read that only as a manifesto for the impoverishment of the British people. We know from the Treasury’s own model that we would be looking at a reduction in our standard of living of £4,300 per annum per household by the end of the next decade. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, sometimes we have to deal with recessions and economic pressure from outside, but we should not have to deal with a made-at-home, DIY recession that is entirely self-inflicted. We should avoid that at all costs.

In the spending review and the strategic defence and security review published at the end of last year, we took clear decisions to invest in our security and safeguard our prosperity, to maintain our world class armed forces, to grow our unique security and intelligence agencies—and, through the Investigatory Powers Bill, give them the powers they need to track down terrorists and others who seek to do us harm—and to protect our global diplomatic network by maintaining the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in real terms. All that is underpinned by our decision to meet the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence, and the UN target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on overseas aid, making Britain the only major country in the world that meets both those commitments.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentions diplomatic posts overseas. Will he remind the House how many new diplomatic posts have been opened under this Government and their coalition predecessor in places where we did not previously have diplomatic representation?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend tests me on the exact number. I think that a dozen or more new posts have been opened, but I will write to him with the exact figure. The important point is that we have opened new posts in secondary cities in China—when we talk about secondary cities in China, we mean those with populations of between 5 million and 10 million—and India, as well as reopening posts in countries in Latin America from which we had withdrawn.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned our commitment to 2% of GDP on defence spending. Will he confirm that had we not transferred £820 million from the pensions budget in another Department, and funds from other Departments, Britain would have fallen below that 2% figure? By that sleight of hand, we have committed to the 2%, but we have not added a single penny to the defence budget, when, as my right hon. Friend said, we face a very dangerous world.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend and I were Defence Ministers in a past life, and there is no sleight of hand. The 2% NATO target is based on NATO definitions, according to which Britain will spend 2% of its GDP on defence. As I am sure he has already found from talking to people in the defence community, the important thing is not the amount spent today, but the long-term commitment to maintain defence spending at 2% of our GDP so that our defence spending rises in line with our prosperity as a nation. That is the right thing for us to do.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) rose—

Mr Hammond: I will be tempted by my right hon. Friend and take one more intervention.

Dr Lewis: My right hon. Friend is right. No NATO rules have been broken—we can argue about whether there was any new money, or whether it was money that we could have counted in the past but did not. Surely the important point is that the 2% is not a target for us: it is a minimum. The last time we faced threats of the sort we face now was in the 1980s, when we spent between 4% and 5% of GDP on defence. We are not talking about ringing church bells over 2%; we need to raise our sights to a higher figure altogether.

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right to say that 2% is a minimum commitment. The reassurance that that level of spend gives to our armed forces and the military, and the fact that it is linked to our rising GDP, is important. Equally, this is not just about the amount of money spent, although that it is important; it is about how we spend it to ensure the maximum defence effect.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) rose—

Mr Hammond: I will come to the hon. Lady in just a moment.

The first duty of any British Government is to keep our homeland and people safe and secure. Today, threats to that security take two principal forms: the immediate risk of terrorism that is associated with violent extremist Islamism, and Daesh in particular; and the longer term threat from a breakdown of the rules-based international system that has underpinned our safety and prosperity since the end of the cold war.

We are engaged in what the Prime Minister has described as a “generational struggle” against Islamist extremism. It is struggle not against a particular country or organisation but against a poisonous ideology that seeks to corrupt one of the world’s great religions. Terrorist attacks in the last year in Paris, Brussels, the skies over Egypt, on the beaches of Sousse, in Baghdad, Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Nigeria and many other places have demonstrated that the threat from Islamist extremism is global. That threat seeks to undermine our values, democracy and freedom, and it is targeting British citizens and those of our allies.

In spite of the tragic loss of life, we should not overlook the progress we have made in pushing Daesh back in Iraq and Syria, and in undermining its core narrative of the caliphate. The Defence Secretary set out in his statement to the House the leading role that the UK is playing, and the military success that we are achieving in Iraq and Syria. As the tide turns against Daesh, we are turning its own weapons against it and harnessing the power of the internet to expose its lies, challenge its ideology and undermine its claim to be a viable state.

On the humanitarian front, Britain continues to be at the forefront of the international response. We have committed more than £2.3 billion, and at the London conference in February we raised more than $12 billion—the largest amount ever raised in a single day for a humanitarian
[Mr Philip Hammond]
crisis. At the International Syria Support Group meeting in Vienna last Tuesday, a British proposal to begin UN airdrops to besieged communities in Syria if Assad blocks access was agreed by all parties, including the Russians and Iranians.

Through its leading role in the ISSG, Britain is also at the forefront of the international effort to end the Syrian civil war—a precondition to defeating Daesh and dealing with the migration crisis in Europe. We are clear that we need an inclusive political solution to that conflict, and to get that we need all ISSG members to use their influence to deliver the transitional Government to which they have all signed up—a Government who can provide stability, represent all Syrians, and with whom the international community can work to defeat Daesh.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that for the threat of the 1 June deadline to be credible, World Food Programme planes need to be protected by member states, or will we need to do the airdrops ourselves? Have the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence begun operational planning to enable those airdrops to proceed?

Mr Hammond: The plan is for the airdrops to be made by the World Food Programme using contracted civilian aircraft. The World Food Programme is already making food airdrops into Deir ez-Zor, the isolated city in the east of Syria, and it has done so successfully without loss to those aircraft. Clearly there are operational aspects that members of the ISSG—particularly the Americans and Russians—are now working through, and we will seek undertakings from the regime. We also know that the Russians have, let us say, significant influence over the operation of the regime’s air defence system, and we expect all members of the ISSG to do everything in their power to ensure that those airdrops are successful and carried out without undue risk to the aircrew.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Idomeni camp has just been closed, and he referred to the refugee accommodation that is at least as secure and adequate as their current accommodation.

Mr Hammond: I cannot answer the right hon. Gentleman’s question, but I can tell him that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is heavily engaged in that action and is trying to ensure that those affected are properly cared for and relocated in accommodation that is at least as secure and adequate as their current accommodation.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rightly said many times from the Dispatch Box that President Putin is one of the few people in the world who can do a lot in this situation. With the attacks yesterday on some of the Assad stronghold areas that have not been touched before, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of Russia’s involvement moving forward and whether we are looking at a new dimension? That area is quite close to some Russian bases.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right, and the Russians will be making a constant calculation about how they can extract maximum leverage from their involvement in Syria while minimising their exposure. I suspect that some in the Russian high command and the Kremlin will have been deeply uncomfortable about the fact that yesterday those Daesh attacks were launched in areas that were previously thought to be under rock-solid regime control and close to Russian military facilities. That changes the calculus, but I hope it will add weight to our argument with the Russians that we need to work together to get a successful transition in Syria to a Government who are supported by all Syrians. We must then work together with that Government to defeat the evil that is Daesh.

Progress in our objective of defeating Daesh will only be possible if the barrel bombings end, if the cessation of hostilities is respected, if humanitarian access to besieged communities is granted and if all sides are prepared to negotiate seriously to achieve political transition.

So much for Syria. In Iraq, we will continue to support the efforts of Prime Minister Abadi to steer his country through the dangers it currently faces, and to deliver the political and economic reform the Iraqi people desperately need: national reconciliation, security, stabilisation of areas liberated from Daesh, and the provision of jobs and basic services.

We have always said that winning the fight against Daesh would take time, but we have no doubt of our ultimate success in Iraq, Syria and Libya. However, winning the hearts and minds of tens of millions of young, potentially vulnerable Muslims who see extremism as a credible response to the lack of opportunity many of them face will be a longer-term challenge for us.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Of course, I think everyone agrees that one has to defeat violent and non-violent extremism. On the extremism Bill in the Queen’s Speech, will the Foreign Secretary clarify how it will define when an individual has crossed the threshold of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, so that communities and enforcement agencies know when to take action? Will there be full consultation with all faith communities?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend hits on a crucial point. The boundary line between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour is fine and fraught with dangers. It is a minefield. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to put forward some of the Government’s thoughts on this and consult extensively before legislation is introduced. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with much of what the Foreign Secretary says about the complexity of the situation in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Clearly, when there is a complex set of humanitarian, terrorist and other circumstances, we have to act in concert across all areas of our international operation. Let me turn briefly to Yemen, which has been discussed in the House today.
The situation in Yemen is also extremely complex, with huge humanitarian needs and different participants. Whether we like it or not, we are involved in a humanitarian, military and diplomatic capacity, either directly or through our relationship with Saudi Arabia. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is absolutely crucial that we act in concert across all areas of international policy? Will he therefore agree to an independent assessment of the very serious allegations made about the use of cluster munitions and other attacks on civilians, which might undermine our place in that region and that conflict?

Mr Hammond: I agree with a lot of what the hon. Gentleman says. The specific allegation is that British-made cluster munitions, which will have been made and delivered probably 30 years ago, may have been used. We do not believe that that is the case, but the Ministry of Defence—he will have heard a Defence Minister say this from the Dispatch Box today—is carrying out an urgent investigation. It will look at the evidence and then decide how to move forward. We have a high level of confidence that British-made cluster munitions have not been used in this conflict, but we must of course look at the allegation that has been made, and any evidence presented in support of it, and respond appropriately.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentions Libya. With hindsight, it is clear that after the fall of Gaddafi we did not really give enough support to the Government we then recognised. The place collapsed into anarchy and is a possible base for ISIS. About half an hour ago, the Secretary of State for Defence said we were offering security assistance to the Government we now recognise, if and when they request it. Will the Foreign Secretary tell me whether his Department and other Departments are giving every other possible diplomatic and political support to that Government? Until they can establish themselves as a real Administration capable of delivering services to their public and of winning public support, we run the danger again of having a slightly fictional Government in Tripoli, while the rest of the country falls prey to anarchy or even ISIS.

Mr Hammond: As I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend would readily agree, hindsight is indeed a wonderful thing. [Interruption.] The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), reminds me that elections were held in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi. It is since then that things have gone wrong.

On support to Prime Minister Sarraj and the Government of national accord, yes, we are providing technical, diplomatic and political assistance. My right hon. and learned Friend will recall that I visited Tripoli a few weeks ago. We are working very closely with Prime Minister Sarraj, both bilaterally and through the European Union. Prime Minister Sarraj was at the meeting in Vienna last Monday in which 20-odd countries got together to discuss how we can best support what that Government are doing.

The situation in Libya is complex, but I think Prime Minister Sarraj is approaching it in the right way—a bottom-up approach. He is not trying to create a Government who can rule Libya in some monolithic fashion, because that is not practical. He is trying to create an umbrella Government within which municipalities are given empowerment to deliver the services and run the structures that people need. We have considerable experience of that approach—including, indeed, in Syria—working with devolved levels of government in small areas to try to establish good governance from the bottom up. I suspect that that will be a more realistic approach than a top-down approach.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): On Libya, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm whether he has had any consultations with the neighbouring country of Algeria? It has great experience of dealing with terrorism and has had huge problems as a result of the instability in Libya. It can be a huge asset and support in stabilising its neighbouring country. Are those consultations taking place?

Mr Hammond: Yes, I can confirm that to the hon. Lady. I visited Algeria and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East has visited Algeria. The Algerians are playing a role. That in itself is significant, because for many, many years Algeria took a rather isolationist, non-interventionist approach. As a neighbouring country, it is at risk from what is going on in Libya. It has recognised that and is engaging with the challenge. We are extremely grateful for the support that Algeria—with, as the hon. Lady says, its considerable experience of dealing with a major scale insurgency—is able to deliver.

Alec Shelbrooke: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hammond: I am just going to make a little progress, if my hon. Friend will allow me, as he has had one bite of the cherry already.

While we step up the fight against Daesh and Islamist extremism, the old challenge of state-based aggression has not gone away. To our east, Russia’s disregard for international norms, its illegal annexation of Crimea and its continuing destabilisation of eastern Ukraine are echoes of an era that, frankly, most of us thought had passed with the fall of the Berlin wall. They represent a clear threat to the stability of the post-cold war European security order, and, more widely, to the rules-based international system on which an open, free-trading liberal democracy such as ours depends.

As well as violating the sovereign territory of another country and undermining the rules-based system, Russia’s actions in Ukraine have led to the loss of more than 9,000 lives and the displacement of up to 1 million people from their homes. Responsibility for this human misery lies squarely at the door of the Kremlin. It is a direct result of a deliberate policy that seeks to deny the right of independent former Soviet republics to determine their own economic and political destiny. This Government remain clear that Russia must be held to account for its actions. We will work through the EU to keep up the economic pressure with hard-hitting and carefully calibrated sanctions. Those sanctions must remain in place until such time as Russia delivers on the pledges it made at Minsk. In the meantime, we will continue to provide non-lethal support and training to the Ukrainian armed forces.
forces. Building on the British military units already rotating through Poland and the Baltic states, we will announce at the NATO summit in Warsaw in June further measures to reassure our eastern allies in the face of this continuing aggression.

At the same time, we will engage with Russia where it is clearly in our national interests to do so. Russia, along with Iran, is one of the two countries that have real influence on the Syrian regime.

As members of the ISSG, they have the principal responsibility for telling Assad that it is time to go. We will continue to work with Russia on Syria and at the UN and to collaborate with it on counter-terrorism, where British lives are potentially at risk, but it will not be business as usual. All nations must know that we cannot and will not look the other way while the rules-based system is repeatedly violated. We look forward to the time when Russia rejoins the community of nations as a partner in upholding international rules, but our eyes are wide open and we know that it might be a long time coming.

As we said in the 2010 strategic defence and security review and again in 2015, Britain’s national security is indivisible from its economic security. We cannot keep people safe if we do not have a strong economy, and vice versa. As we have continued to deal with the economic legacy we inherited—bringing down the deficit and restoring sustainable growth to our economy—we have also been strengthening our diplomatic muscle in emerging economies in order to grow our trade and support jobs here at home. And those efforts are paying off. The state visit by China’s President Xi last year generated £40 billion of commercial deals, helping to create more than 5,000 permanent jobs in this country and more than 20,000 construction-phase jobs. During Prime Minister Modi’s visit in November, UK and Indian businesses agreed deals worth £9 billion. Inward investment from India in 2014-15 created more than 7,000 jobs and safeguarded more than 1,500 others. Since the UK’s free trade deal with the Republic of Korea in 2011, the value of UK exports to Korea has more than doubled.

While we seek to grow our links with the world’s emerging economies, however, our trade and investment relationship with the EU will always be central to our economic success story. As the House knows, the Government’s clear view is that Britain’s continuing prosperity is best served by our remaining a leading member of a reformed EU. Our membership puts us, the No. 2 economic power in the EU, inside the world’s largest single market, with a seat at the decision-making table. It is a market with 500 million consumers and a quarter of the world’s GDP and a market that buys 44% of Britain’s exports.

There is a world of difference between being inside such a market, with tariff-free access as of right, and being outside it, scrabbling around for a deal; between making the rules of the market to protect our interests and being governed by rules designed for the benefit and advantage of others. Our membership safeguards the pound and the Bank of England, and with the deal that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated in February, our membership keeps us out of Schengen, exempts us from ever-closer union and limits EU migrants’ access to our welfare system. It is the best of both worlds.

Sir Gerald Howarth: The Foreign Secretary and I are good friends but we disagree on this matter. Will he confirm that under this much-vaunted reform deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated, which does not add up to a row of beans, if the UK were to introduce financial measures that we believed to be in the interests of the City of London but which the eurozone deemed to conflict with theirs, we would be obliged either to change our measures or to go to the European Court of Justice for arbitration—and we know that the Court always finds in favour of the acquis communautaire?

Mr Hammond: We do not know by any means that the ECJ always finds in favour of the Community. Indeed, we have done rather well when challenged in the ECJ. For example, when the European Central Bank disgracefully tried to prevent euro-denominated financial instruments from being cleared in the City of London, we went to the ECJ and won the case, with a clear declaration that the ECB’s proposal was illegal. So I simply do not accept the premise of my Friends’ question.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Further to that point, is not the very essence of the Prime Minister’s deal in Brussels, to which I suggest too little attention has been paid, that it provides a firm guarantee that the UK’s position outside the eurozone will not be used to jeopardise its position within the single market? Is that not a very important safeguard and one that, in the context of the ECJ and any arbitration it has to carry out, will have to be taken into account and has binding force in international law?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. Those on the other side of the argument spent a lot of time trying to argue that the agreement did not have binding force in international law, only—eventually—to have to concede that it did. He is absolutely right. The deal that the Prime Minister negotiated is substantive, and if we vote to remain in the EU on 23 June, we will move ahead with the implementation of those measures, which will give Britain not only the advantages, which we already have, that come with membership of a 500-million consumer-strong marketplace but all the additional advantages and assurances that the deal brings.

I know from my meetings with colleagues from across the EU that, whatever people in the House or the country think, our colleagues in Europe cannot believe the deal that we have negotiated. They cannot believe we managed to negotiate the best of both worlds—being in the EU but able to opt out of all the measures we find do not suit our political purposes.

Stephen Doughty: The Foreign Secretary talked about the benefits for our exporters, and that includes the steel industry, which has a huge presence in my constituency and across south Wales. Tomorrow, thousands of steelworkers will march through London, to Parliament, to raise their concerns about what the Government will do to support the steel industry. Does he agree that the
very worst thing we can do for the steel industry is to pull out and lose the possibility of our steel industry exporting tariff-free to the rest of Europe?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but it goes further than that. Let us be honest: the steel industry worldwide is facing a crisis. We cannot wish it away, create more demand or just make the excess capacity disappear, but we are always better and more effective at addressing these problems if we do so collectively, and working across the EU is the best way to tackle this very difficult problem.

Britain, in particular, will reap further and disproportionate benefits—some of my colleagues in Europe would say quite unfair benefits—as the EU develops the single markets in services, digital, energy and capital, because all these relatively immature EU single markets are areas in which the UK is the leading economy in Europe. The commitments we have obtained to moving forward rapidly with the further development of those single markets will disproportionately benefit this country and disproportionately create jobs and growth in the UK after our decision on 23 June.

We can only reap those benefits, however, with a renewed democratic mandate from the British people. For four decades, they have been denied their say—and frankly, but for the election of a Conservative Government, they would not be getting a say now. So I welcome the debate and the focus it has brought. It has forced all of us to think hard about the issues and the consequences, now that there is a real decision to be made. I hope that the House can agree on two things—that on 23 June the British people must have their say and that we politicians must respect their decision, whatever it is.

We cannot separate our security and prosperity from the values system in which they are grounded. Countless examples around the world have demonstrated through history that where political competition, the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and tolerance of difference are lacking, social, political and economic stability will be vulnerable at best and absent at worst. Conversely, where societies respond to the demand for greater rule of law, respect for human rights and individual freedoms, innovation and entrepreneurialism flourish—the so-called golden thread of mutually reinforcing values.

Of course, we cannot expect in the 21st century to be able simply to impose a one-size-fits-all system across the world. Those days are well and truly over. As our own example has shown, ideas of freedom, democracy and the rule of law need time to take root, and the form they take will depend on where a nation is on its development pathway and on its individual culture and traditions. We can, however, seek to nurture, to encourage and to support countries as they move towards respect for these essential values.

It is the direction of travel that matters. My view is clear: where a nation’s political, social, economic and judicial development is taking it in the right direction towards better governance, stronger rule of law and respect for human rights, we should work with it and support it. Where it is taking it away from those goals, we will call it out, as we have done recently in South Sudan and Burundi.

Most importantly, where countries fall short, we are committed to a pragmatic response that seeks to make a difference rather than disengagement, posturing and empty rhetoric. We have doubled FCO funding for human rights projects to £10 million, putting our money where our mouth is, but more important than that, by mainstreaming our human rights work, we have hard-wired it into everything we do. We have made it an integral part of day-to-day diplomacy—not a bolt-on optional extra. I firmly believe that our approach is yielding real, practical dividends.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Foreign Secretary therefore take the opportunity to disavow the comment made by his permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Simon McDonald, who said that human rights were “no longer a priority for the UK government”?

Mr Hammond: Sir Simon has explained that what he was trying to convey was that we are mainstreaming, so we do not have a separate category any longer. We have mainstreamed human rights into our consular, political and mainstream diplomatic work. By doing so, we embed that in a way that is delivering results throughout our agenda.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it is a bit rich for British diplomats and politicians to travel the globe lecturing others about human rights when we are about to repeal our own Human Rights Act and some members of the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman is a part wish to withdraw from the European convention on human rights?

Mr Hammond: No, I do not. Throughout the world, Britain is recognised as an important champion of human rights and a country in which many of the rights taken for granted today across the world originated. I hope we can have a constructive debate about these issues.

Before I conclude, I want to confront head on the notion, which have heard, that the Government are putting economic and trade interests before human rights. Yes, we are serious about increasing our global trade to secure more jobs and greater economic security for the British people, but that does not come at the expense of our values. The deeper and broader our relationships with other countries become, the greater our influence and the easier it is to have frank conversations about issues on which we disagree. Building economic and political relationships helps to build influence and leverage. It is not always visible—progress often takes place behind the scenes—but we should be ruthlessly focused on what works. On the occasions where private influence fails, we can and do speak out publicly. Ultimately, I believe the best way to achieve the positive changes we all want to see on human rights is to engage constructively as part of a comprehensive relationship.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Is the Foreign Secretary seriously telling us that right now our relationship with Saudi Arabia is a case of not putting human rights secondary to economic interest?

Mr Hammond: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is around in five, 10 or 15 years’ time, so that we can look back from that vantage point on what is happening
[Mr Philip Hammond] now. Something very significant is happening in Saudi Arabia. The “Vision 2030” plan that has been published by the deputy Crown Prince sets out a trajectory for Saudi Arabia’s development, which is inevitably going to change that country. It is not just an economic plan; it is far more than that. If we want to influence the direction of Saudi Arabia’s development, I strongly advise engaging with that project and helping to shape it rather than turning our backs on that country, as many have suggested we should.

Jo Cox: We now have decades and decades of experience showing that early intervention to prevent human rights abuses and mass atrocities works. Does the Foreign Secretary feel that his Department, and indeed the whole of government, would benefit from a mass atrocity prevention lens being focused on all policies so that we intervene early and fast to prevent escalation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Syria.

Mr Hammond: What the hon. Lady says is persuasive, but I am trying to think how to operationalise it in a way that is different from what we are already doing. As my hon. Friend reminds me, that is what we thought we were doing in Syria, but unfortunately we have not succeeded in preventing the atrocities that are still going on there. Let me consider further what the hon. Lady has said and perhaps write to her about it.

Under this Government, the UK is making a decisive contribution to the global agenda. We are leading reform in the European Union and, if the British people give their consent, we will continue to drive that reform in the future. We are standing up to Russian aggression, defending the rules-based international system that Russia seeks to undermine and providing military reassurance to our eastern allies who feel so threatened by Russia’s actions.

We are supporting human rights around the world, making it a core part of every diplomat’s work, strengthening the values-based, rule-of-law system upon which our prosperity, our security and our freedoms depend. In an ever-more complex and dangerous world, our diplomats, our military, our intelligence and security services, our police, our border force and many others work tirelessly, day in, day out, to keep us safe. Their achievements often go unsung; the risks they take often go unnoticed, so I want to end by thanking them, on behalf of the whole House and the British people, for the work they do and the remarkable results they deliver.

2.47 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I begin where the Foreign Secretary ended, and join him in expressing the thanks of the Opposition to our diplomats for the extraordinary service they give to our country and the work they do around the globe. We are all very proud of them.

It is probably true to say that for every single Member in this Chamber today, this Gracious Speech debate has a significance in one respect that is unmatched by any of its predecessors. That is because it takes place on the eve of the referendum decision that our nation will take on 23 June. It is a decision, yes, about our membership of the European Union, but also a decision about something much more fundamental even than that. We will be deciding what kind of country we are and wish to be in a world that is changing, as the Foreign Secretary clearly set out in his speech, and will continue to change as this generation gives way to the next.

Ours is a remarkable country. We are less than 1% of the world’s population, yet its fifth-strongest economy. Our language is spoken by one in five people across the globe—granted, with varying degrees of fluency. We are among the world’s leaders in science, the arts, literature and Nobel prizes. For a small island nation off the coast of Europe, we have great influence around the globe. Every one of these is a reason why the decision we make will be watched closely by friends and others alike—not least because our future as a nation is now more intertwined with the lives and fates of others than it has ever been before.

Technological advance is expanding our knowledge of the world and shrinking the time it takes to discover more about it. An event can be seen almost instantaneously on a mobile phone on the other side of the world. Global flows of goods and services, information, finance, ideas and people are expanding. This world offers us great opportunity, but presents us with challenges too. It demands that we look beyond these shores if we are to ensure that Britain continues to be safe and successful. The national interest in this era is best served by an international approach. That means playing a full part in global institutions and not walking away from them, and it means defending human rights and our values both at home and abroad. I think it is fair to say that as some politics moves to the extremes, a struggle is taking place in Europe for the soul of the continent, and in that context I congratulate Alexander Van der Bellen on his election victory as the new President of Austria. We saw how close that result was.

With regard to the referendum, there has been much debate about the facts. “Give us the facts,” the people demand.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): May I draw attention to one of the facts that may well emerge from the referendum? If the European Union achieves more than 55% support in Scotland, will that not show that the European Union is more popular among Scots than the British Union, the United Kingdom?

Hilary Benn: I look forward to the contribution of voters in Scotland to ensuring that we remain in the European Union. I think it would be nice to see a more vigorous campaign from the SNP in support of a remain vote, but that is in the hands of those who sit on the SNP Benches.

The first of the facts is the fact of our membership of the European Union, and what it has brought. It has brought jobs, growth and investment. It has brought rights for workers and consumers that are guaranteed from John O’Groats to the tip of the Peloponnese, and from Lisbon to Riga. It has brought paid holidays, improved maternity and paternity leave limits on working times, and a fairer deal for agency and temporary workers: all those are protected by the EU. It has brought environmental protection and progress, from
cleaner air to cleaner beaches, and from better safeguarding of our most precious habitats to tackling dangerous climate change. Europe has acted together to make a difference. As the Foreign Secretary said, we have access to the largest single market in the world, to which we sell 44% of our exports, and indeed, through our membership, we have trade deals with 53 other countries’ markets. That shows how Europe’s collective negotiating strength achieves stronger trade with the rest of the world than we could hope to achieve alone.

When it comes to domestic security, whether we face the threat of terrorism or organised crime, we are made safer by working with our allies, sharing information and bringing criminals to justice through the European arrest warrant. In relation to national security and dealing with climate change, Europe has shown great leadership. The Iran nuclear deal was led by the European Union. As for standing up to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the sanctions to which the Foreign Secretary referred are clearly biting on the Russian economy. I am sure that the whole House will support what he said earlier about the renewal of those sanctions in July, until such time as the Minsk agreement is fully observed.

As well as thanking our diplomats, we should thank the police, the security services and our armed forces for their commitment and for the sacrifices that they have made in order to keep us safe. It is important that, in the legislation promised in the Gracious Speech, we update the law on investigatory powers to enable them to go on doing that effectively; but Labour will hold the Government to account to ensure that, by means of strong safeguards, the right balance is struck between security and privacy.

All this shows that the European Union gives us influence in the world, and a louder voice. It is the very opposite of the picture painted by the leave campaign of “poor old Britain”, put upon and unable to cope. For those who remember the ad, “The Seven Stone Weakling” is having sand kicked in its face by the other member states. What nonsense! What a lack of faith in our abilities as a nation! The truth is that we are a strong and influential member state. That is certainly how other EU member states see us, and it is time that the leave campaign stopped trying to sell us short.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) rose—

Hilary Benn: I will give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee.

Crispin Blunt: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was making an excellent case in the first part of his speech, but he is now entering a different territory in which he is putting up Aunt Sallies to be attacked. Two internationalisms are competing here, one that takes a global view of the world, and one that is within the European Union. Those are both perfectly respectable views, and they are based on internationalism. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will continue to make a positive case for his side of the argument, rather than putting up Aunt Sallies which are not actually true.

Hilary Benn: I hope the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that I am making a positive case. However, I can see that the charge that I just levelled at the leave campaigners has wounded precisely because that is what they argue: that somehow Britain cannot cope with being in the European Union—that we cannot manage the place that we have in the institution.

I also say to the hon. Gentleman that it is a fallacy to suggest that somehow, in this referendum, we are faced with a choice between the one and the other. We hear that in the debate about trade. People say that we should be trading with other parts of the world, but our trade with China has doubled since 2010. Have we been prevented from increasing our trade with China because we are part of the European Union? Of course we have not. We can do both. Indeed, Britain’s tradition suggests that not only are we capable of doing both, but we will benefit from doing both.

Mr Baron: I cannot help observing that, actually, Aunt Sallies are being created here. The leave camp is not suggesting that we are being kicked around; that is a negative view that the right hon. Gentleman puts to the leave camp. What we are suggesting is that there is a much brighter future outside the EU. There is a fundamental difference.

Of course we can stand up for ourselves: we are the fifth largest economy in the world. We have the world’s most prominent language, and so forth. But the fact that we have a brighter future outside is illustrated by the fact that we are currently forbidden to negotiate trade deals with countries unless they are routed through the EU. If we were to come out of the EU, we could do that, and it would lead to greater prosperity.

Hilary Benn: Let me say first that damaging our economy and people’s job prospects is not my idea of a brighter future, and secondly that I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not follow him down the Canadian road. We know that it has taken Canada seven years so far to negotiate its own trade deal with the European Union.

Alec Shelbrooke: As a fellow Leeds MP—along with the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who is also sitting on the Labour Front Bench—I recognise, as we all do, how important a role the University of Leeds plays in our city in terms of employment and investment. Members of the leave campaign are going around with posters which say that all the money we contribute to the EU will go into the NHS. That is their policy, whatever the rights and wrongs of it may be. Does it not concern the right hon. Gentleman that, in that event, there simply will not be the investment in our higher education research that currently comes from Europe, and that, therefore, either those people do not care or it is a lie?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman has identified one of many inconsistencies in the arguments advanced by the leave campaign. It is noticeable that every single university in the country has spoken out about the importance to universities of research, the flow of ideas across Europe—never mind the world—and the benefits and the money that are gained because we have world-class universities. We should pay attention to them, to every single survey of industry opinion that has been conducted, and to all the other warnings and assessments that have been undertaken. It is no longer any good for members of the leave campaign, every time a view is expressed that is counter to their argument, to wave their hands and say, “Well, they would say that, wouldn’t they?”
Tom Brake: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Hilary Benn: I will, but then I must make a little more progress.

Tom Brake: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when the Brexitters campaign on the issue of trade, they should be aware of the fact that India currently invests more in the United Kingdom than in all the other EU countries put together, and that the UK invests more in India than any other G20 country?

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he has given me the opportunity to add to his point. We are the most successful country in the European Union—more successful than Germany, more successful than France—in attracting foreign direct investment. There are a number of reasons for that, some of which I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, which the Chair of the Select Committee welcomed; but there is no doubt that one of the reasons is the fact that we are part of a single market consisting of 500 million people.

Mike Gapes: My right hon. Friend mentioned the free trade agreements. Is it not a fact that since the European Union signed the free trade agreement with South Korea, the UK’s trade with Korea has massively increased? We also have massive Korean investment in this country.

Hilary Benn: That is indeed the case, and it shows that we can have the best of both worlds because we are gaining from the trade deals that the European Union has negotiated at the same time as increasing our trade with other countries with which Europe does not currently have a trade deal.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the significant inward investment in the automotive trade in the north-east of England, not only at Renault-Nissan but at Nifco, at Elring Klinger and at A. V. Dawson in Middlesbrough, which are all part of the supply chain? If we had to wait seven years for a new trade deal to be reached, what would be the likelihood of Nissan or Hitachi continuing to invest in our region?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The north-east, along with Wales, probably understands the economic prospects of the communities and families that depend on the jobs that come from that investment, not least because the north-east exports a higher proportion of what it produces to Europe than to other parts of the world.

Several hon. Members rose—

Hilary Benn: Oh heavens! I shall give way to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and then to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham); then I must make some progress.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): Trade in the economy is very important, and the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that, but is there not something that is more important? Did not his late, great father say that when he looked at the European Union, what he saw was clearly not democratic? Is not our democracy more fundamental than all the points he is making today, and should not the sovereign right to govern this country rest in this House and with the British people?

Hilary Benn: I would say so to the hon. Gentleman that it does. My father and I were in agreement 41 years ago when we both campaigned to leave the Common Market, but the British people in their wisdom voted to stay. I change my mind, and my late, dear father did not. However, he taught me many things, one of which was stand up for what you believe in and to say what you think, and that is what I am doing from this Dispatch Box today. Also, every subsequent change relating to our membership of the European Union has been agreed by this House—by our democracy—and the referendum will give the British people the chance to take this really important decision. I am making my argument as to why we on this side of the House are passionately in support of remaining in the European Union.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on two points that in my view no one should be in any doubt about. First, trade is absolutely critical. All the countries with which I and all the other trade envoys deal are in no doubt that we will do much better with them by being within the European Union rather than outside it. I am also in no doubt that the 53 agreements that the European Union has entered into would take a very long time to replicate—if, indeed, that could be done at all. Lastly, on inward investment, I am also in no doubt that a wave of foreign direct investment that could come here is being held up at the moment as a result of uncertainty.

Hilary Benn: I agree with all three points that the hon. Gentleman has just made, particularly the last one. We all know that what business hates more than anything else is uncertainty, and at the moment there is great uncertainty about our future in the European Union. We need to end that uncertainty as quickly as possible, and we need to end it in the right way.

Greater than all the benefits that I have tried to describe thus far is, for me, the most significant contribution that the European idea has made to our lives. That is, quite simply, 70 years of peace on a continent that had been at war for centuries. Anyone who has visited those graveyards in France and Belgium, as many Members have, will understand the significance of that achievement. You only have to walk along the rows of graves in which the flower of two generations of young Europeans rest, having given their youth and their lives, to understand the force of that achievement.

That achievement did not come about by accident. It was the sheer determination and vision of Europe’s founders to end the history of slaughter and to build something better out of the ashes of a still smouldering Europe that made it happen. The Schuman declaration said it all. It resolved to make a future war not merely unthinkable but materially impossible. What it achieved was peace, as the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames)—he is not here today—described most eloquently in his remarkable speech back in February. That peace even has the seal of approval of the hon.
Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who wrote two years ago in his biography of Churchill that Europe’s securing of the peace had been a “spectacular success”. What a pity that he has learned nothing from his own former wisdom.

Dr Julian Lewis: Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that the people who lie in those graves fought and died for a united Europe? Did they not die for the right of their own countries and the occupied countries to govern themselves? Does he really believe that in the decade before the European Economic Community came into existence there was any risk of war between the democracies created at the end of the second world war?

Hilary Benn: Like many Members of this House, I lost an uncle in the second world war. He was an RAF pilot and he was killed three weeks after D-day. He fought, along with everybody else, against the ideology of Nazism and what it did, which is why the rise of the far right in Europe should give us all cause for concern and remind us of the dangers of the past. The growth and stability of the post-war period have led people to believe that that is all done and dusted, but it is not. It is still with us. The values we are fighting to uphold are the values of co-operation between free democracies that have come together of their own volition in the interests of maintaining peace and building something better for the future. That is the difference between those who argue to remain and those who think we should leave.

Stephen Doughty: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. My grandfather and great-grandfather fought in those wars, and the fact that we have not had to endure such wars is great testament to the European project. Does he agree that we have moved on inexorably from the era of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece? We had fascism, the horrors of the Balkans and the situation in Cyprus, but Europe has taken us forward from many of those conflicts and instabilities on our continent.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should learn from history, and we should recall that Europe has acted as a magnet to countries by offering stability, the rule of law and other values. Despite the occasional irritations and problems that 28 member states trying to reach agreement can cause from time to time, Europe has been a powerful force for good in our continent, and we cast it aside at our peril. I believe we would do so to our regret.

Those are the facts of our membership. We know what membership gives us and we know what it involves. What is the other fact? It is very simply this. The answer to the honest question of what would happen if we left the European Union is that we do not know. We have heard a number of answers from the leave campaign during the debate so far, one of which is that it will all be fine; another is that we will get a better deal outside. We hear a lot of that. I recently took part in a debate in which I heard the argument that nothing needed to change. That is an odd argument, because if nothing needs to change why on earth are they campaigning so hard for us to leave the European Union? So, what will happen if we leave? The honest answer is that we do not know—and there we have it: two facts. We know what remaining in the European Union will involve. We do not know what will happen if we leave.

I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the Foreign Secretary and his predecessor—both of whom it would be fair to describe as having been regarded as Euroscopites—having now served in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are campaigning for Britain to remain in the European Union because they have seen at first hand precisely how being a member gives us influence in the world. We should therefore give thanks for the fact that this Government have not one but two departments of education in Whitehall. The first is called the Department for Education and the second is called the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is a shame that the Prime Minister has been unable to allow more Conservative Eurosceptics to serve in the FCO and go through its excellent retraining and conversion programme.

Turning to Syria, the House will welcome the renewed commitment in the Gracious Speech to support international efforts to bring peace to this brutalised and war-weary country and its long-suffering people. The civil war has raged for five years. Half the population have fled their homes. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 360,000 have lost their lives, mostly at the hands of President Assad, and Russian airstrikes have killed 1,700 civilians in the past six months alone. The determination of some of those fleeing that destruction to try to make it to Europe, despite the perilous, dangerous journey, shows their utter desperation. While the Government’s offering of humanitarian aid has been exemplary, their offering of a home to those fleeing has not. Time and again, they have fallen short and have had to be shamed and forced into action. The immediate priority, as the Foreign Secretary said, is to enable the next round of peace talks to take place, and the ceasefire has to be observed for that to happen. It is unacceptable for the Assad regime to continue to attack opposition forces when they are expected to sit opposite his representatives at the table to try and negotiate a peaceful solution.

We also need humanitarian access. I was struck when Staffan de Mistura said five days ago how unacceptable it is that “well-fed, grown-up” soldiers blocked the delivery of baby food to the town of Darayya. If access is not significantly and speedily improved, we should use airdrops to reach civilians, and I welcome what the Foreign Secretary said on that a little earlier.

Daesh has taken brutal and cruel advantage of the civil war, and its ideology is spreading across north Africa and other parts of the world. The whole House has agreed that we must stand up to its barbarity. It is good to see reports that its grip, particularly in Iraq, has been weakened in recent months as a result of the efforts of the Iraqis, the peshmergas, and the international military coalition. However, we must also hold it to account for what it has done.

The UK can be proud of our consistent support for the International Criminal Court as a means of dealing with crimes against humanity and war crimes. There is no doubt that Daesh is killing people in Syria and Iraq because of their ethnicity, race and religion and the crimes that it is doing has all the hallmarks of genocide, of crimes against humanity and of war crimes. Look what it has done to the Yazidis. When some Members, of
which I was one, sat and listened to a young Yazidi woman describe how Daesh came to her village, killed all the men, murdered her mother, and took her into sexual slavery, we were forced to look into the darkness of human depravity. On 20 April, when the House voted for the Government to refer the crimes immediately to the ICC through the UN Security Council, Ministers abstained, but I hope they will now demonstrate to the House that they are prepared to take that forward. It is important that the evidence is preserved, so that those responsible are held to account in the end.

As we heard earlier today, many across the House have deep concerns about the alleged war crimes committed in Yemen and the hidden humanitarian disaster there. According to Oxfam, 80% of the population urgently need humanitarian assistance, and because of the risks for journalists it is an unreported humanitarian disaster. The Opposition have repeatedly called for an independent inquiry into alleged violations of international humanitarian law and for the Government immediately to suspend all arms sales to Saudi Arabia until an inquiry has taken place. There is mounting evidence of serious breaches of international humanitarian law and a clear risk that British-made weapons are being used, but the Government are burying their head in the sand.

The Foreign Secretary will be well aware of the number of UN officials who have spoken out on the matter, including the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, the special advisor on the prevention of genocide, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the special rapporteur on the right to food and the special advisor on the responsibility to protect. I do not need to repeat for the Foreign Secretary’s benefit the words of the UN panel of experts on Yemen’s final report, because part of what it had found was quoted earlier in the debate. UK and EU law could not be clearer. The Government should not grant arms export licences to a country if there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law. The Government are simply not taking their responsibilities seriously enough. The answers we received during today’s urgent question do not really bear scrutiny.

Mr Philip Hammond: I must pick up on that last point. The urgent question related to equipment that has not been manufactured for two and a half decades. There can be no question of any supply of that type of equipment. I do not understand why the right hon. Gentleman makes that point.

Hilary Benn: It might depend on what aircraft or means was used to deliver it, because we have of course sold a large amount of military equipment to Saudi Arabia. There is mounting evidence of the use of cluster munitions, despite the denials that were reported once again to the House. I think the Foreign Secretary at one point said he believed we have got to a point at which we will have a commitment that such munitions are not being used, but I would like not only to have that commitment from the Saudi authorities but to see an absence of evidence on the ground, given what is being discovered by those who are examining what is occurring in the midst of this terrible conflict.

I welcome the Government’s commitment in their legislative programme to ratify the Hague convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. We have been calling for that, and it will be an important step forward. I hope it will strengthen the UK’s commitment to the protection of cultural heritage in conflict zones around the world, including, given UNESCO’s concerns, in Yemen and Iraq.

As a member of the UN Security Council, Britain has a special responsibility to stand up for international law and fundamental rights. Indeed, the UK’s security is best protected when we do so, which is why any proposal to repeal the Human Rights Act would damage our reputation and give comfort to those who seek to undermine human rights in their countries. I heard the Foreign Secretary when he talked about what the permanent secretary at the FCO said, but it is troubling when the permanent secretary goes to the Foreign Affairs Committee and says that human rights are “not one of the top priorities” in the Department. I say to the Foreign Secretary that if the permanent secretary meant that human rights are being mainstreamed, the message has not been terribly well communicated.

Mr Philip Hammond: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that Britain did not have a reputation in the world for the protection of human rights before the Human Rights Act?

Hilary Benn: Of course we had a reputation for that, and I am not saying we did not, but having taken the steps of, first, helping to found the European convention at the end of the second world war and, secondly, putting the Human Rights Act on the statute book, so that people in this country can access those rights freely entered into, as some Conservative Members seek to do. [Interruption.] The former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), nods approvingly in my direction, and I pay tribute to those who are standing up against them.

Alex Salmond: It was found that Saudi Arabia had used a cluster bomb that was manufactured in the UK—even one made some time ago—would that not in itself be a reason to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia?

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) rose—

Hilary Benn: I will give way one last time and then bring my remarks to a close.
Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about human rights, but I stand with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on this. Britain’s history of human rights goes back hundreds of years—to, indeed, Magna Carta. On the human rights act, we are arguing not about human rights as they are practised in England but about the stretch of the judiciary into areas that are correctly the role of Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman is arguing that human rights should be used to circumvent Parliament by using law to intervene in other areas.

Hilary Benn: I am not arguing that. Let us take the most famous case of all—voting rights for prisoners, a subject dear to the Home Secretary’s heart. How many years ago was that judgment handed down? [Interruption.] Not that they should have voting rights—let me say that for the avoidance of doubt. Do prisoners in Britain have voting rights? No, they do not, because the way in which we constructed the Human Rights Act allows Parliament, in the end, to take that decision. Methinks those who argue that we should take these steps protest too much. We should be proud of our reputation, our history, and the foundations on which we have built our continuing commitment to human rights, including the European convention and the Human Rights Act, which the last Labour Government put on the statute book.

As the United Kingdom, we have always been at our best when we have been an outward-looking and confident nation. We helped to build the institutions that have given the world the best chance to make progress: the United Nations, NATO, and of course the European Union, where we were latecomers. Let us look at the challenges that our children and grandchildren will face: fighting climate change; reducing poverty; dealing with conflict—people fighting over religion, as we see currently, and over water, land and energy—the rise of the politics of the right; and dealing with the consequences of large numbers of people moving around the globe. Mark my words: that will be the story of this century. The question we have to ask ourselves is: what will give us the best chance to manage those challenges and deal with the changes they will see in their lives, just as we have seen in ours?

When I was born, the world’s population was 2.7 billion, but by the time my grandchildren reach my age it will be about 10 billion. The British empire has gone and has been replaced by the Commonwealth. The Berlin wall has given way to the new democracies of Europe. We have seen the rise of terrorism, new global powers and the astonishing economic development of China. The old divide between the domestic and the foreign is increasingly eroding and becoming blurred because globalisation is transforming our world.

As a nation, in 30 days’ time we will be confronted with a choice about how we will deal with that transformation. For me, it is a choice between optimism and pessimism. It is a choice between outward-facing patriotism and inward-looking nationalism—the former built on playing a proud and leading role through co-operation in the very institutions we helped to fashion, and the latter seeking to lure us into turning our back on them. Those are the two competing visions of Britain’s future, and I hope that on 23 June the British people will vote for co-operation, because it represents the best hope we have for that future and for the lives of those who will come after us.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I propose to resist the temptation to give the House my arguments in favour of Britain remaining in the European Union. [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Those Members of Parliament who find it irresistible to hear me on the subject made their way to the debate in Speaker’s House last night, where I debated against, among others, my old colleague Lord Tebbit. On this occasion, I agreed so completely with what has been said by both the Foreign Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary that I thought I might desist, particularly as over the next 30 days I shall be making many more speeches on the subject.

This afternoon, I look forward with a certain amount of relief, after this interminable campaign, to the fact that this House and the Government are going to return to the government of the country on domestic issues. We can return to an agenda that will spare us from the fear of millions of criminal Turks coming to this country, our sovereignty being sacrificed to faceless men in Brussels and all the rest of it. A lot of serious issues are facing this country at home. They are described today as, “How to keep people safe at home and abroad, and how to protect our human rights”, so I shall turn to that.

Alex Salmond rose—

Mr Clarke: With great respect, I am trying to keep my remarks short. As I become more long-serving, I find that I get ever more garrulous, and I know that huge numbers of Members wish to speak in this debate, so if I may be allowed to, I will resist the temptation to give way, much though I normally enjoy it.

When I looked at the Queen’s Speech, listened to it and heard it being analysed afterwards, it seemed to me that the Prime Minister was rather looking to his legacy. He has already become one of the longest-serving Prime Ministers since the war and he has announced that he is not going to be Prime Minister into the next Parliament, so this Queen’s Speech has rather more of a theme than most Queen’s Speeches have. He described it, using the slogan that we are all supposed to use now, as a “progressive, one nation” theme. I do not like slogans, but I can hardly object to that, as I have been trying to describe my own political views in those terms for years. But it also looks at disadvantage in society and improving the life chances of those who have disadvantages, and, in effect, tries to address the still weak state of meritocracy today. I was one of those who benefited from the brief window of meritocracy and social mobility that this country enjoyed quite a long time ago as a result of the Butler Act of 1944, although I hasten to add that I would not go back to that old system nationally or anything of that kind.

We all know that one of the worrying things in our society is a growing awareness of widening inequality, both of incomes, thanks to the absurd levels to which some corporate salaries have been allowed to rise over the past 10 years, and of opportunity for those born in the less advantaged parts of the country. The thing that I was mainly impressed by in looking at the contents of the Queen’s Speech is how we are seized of that. This growing inequality is not just this country’s, but it is very real for many of our younger generation. Inequality of opportunity and of income is a subject that has always concerned those of the left, but in my
opinion those of us who believe in free market economics should be just as concerned by this threat to the stability of our society as our socialist opposite numbers are. It behoves us to do something about it.

I therefore hope that the Children and Social Work Bill, which contains proposals to tackle the inadequacies in what we do for children in care and improve the operation of the adoption system, will be one of those measures—I will not go through the whole Queen’s Speech—that gives positive effect to the agenda of recreating a fairer society in which opportunities are much more widely available to all sections of society.

The most prominent Bill in the Queen’s Speech was on prison reform. Obviously, I very much welcome that. I say “obviously” because the Secretary of State for Justice and the Prime Minister, who made a very noticeable speech, have reinforced an agenda that our party first set out when we were in opposition before 2010. It is an agenda that I propounded and tried to give effect to as Justice Secretary for the first two and a half years of the Government.

I congratulate the Secretary of State for Justice, who I regret to say is not in his place, because he appears to have achieved more success in overcoming the hesitations in practice of some of the more senior members of the Government than I did. He has been able to promise things that I wish I had achieved and has a much bigger agenda than I was able to deliver. I got rid of indeterminate sentences and did a great deal to improve training for work in prisons by outside employers, among other things, but it looks as though there are things that will at last be tackled.

The problem is always that we have a fear in this House of the reaction to anything entitled “prison reform”, because it is seen to be dangerously wet. In recent decades, both parties have been subject to the fear of the right-wing tabloids every time they have looked at this subject. It is not wet; it is part of protecting people from harm in this society that everything should contribute to the reduction of crime. When people are rightly sent to prison for criminal offences, it is an achievement if most of them do not return to crime, but become honest citizens when they are released.

I think that we can get public support for these changes, so long as we emphasise the fact that at the moment 48% of prisoners are convicted again—they return to crime—within 12 months of being released. That shows how little progress we have made in dealing not with the hard-core criminals who will be in prison for long periods of their life if the police succeed in catching them, but with all those who suffer from drug abuse and mental health problems; those who have never had a basic education and are not numerate or literate; and those who could benefit from training, preparation for work and rehabilitation to return them as honest citizens. I hope, therefore, that we implement these changes, as well as legislating for them.

I welcome Dame Sally Coates’s report on education, which addresses the fact that although we have always tried to educate prisoners, what is delivered is very patchy and limited. I hope that we implement all of it. I welcome most of the six reform prisons, but I hope that it does not mean that the most adventurous reforms are confined to those six prisons. I think that we should keep an eye on the 48% figure and judge our progress in a few years’ time on whether we are able, at last, to reduce it.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr Clarke: No, I will not.

I do not think we will deliver much in this area unless we tackle one other problem, which is the enormous number of people we incarcerate. In large part, that is a response to the populist demands that have led to our toughening up sentencing for the past two decades. We now have 86,000 prisoners, which is about double the figure of 20 years ago when I was Home Secretary. As Justice Secretary, I signed up to quite substantial reductions in public spending in my Department on the basis that we would reduce the number of prisoners to something like the level that we ought to have in our jails. I was not able to deliver that and after I left, the number started drifting up again. That has the effect that we do not have the money to deliver programmes in areas such as education, which I have mentioned.

Crispin Blunt: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: No, I will not give way; sorry.

Between 2012-13 and 2014-15, there was an 85% fall in the number of prisoners taking A-level-standard qualifications and a 42% drop in those going for Open University qualifications. When we lower the number of prisoners, we will be able to finance what we wish to do. In my opinion, proper rehabilitation programmes cannot be delivered in overcrowded slums.

If I went through all the other topics in the Bill that I would like to support, I would start to exclude other Members from the debate, which, as I have said, I am anxious not to do and which I promise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not do. However, may I briefly welcome the criminal finances Bill?

On the fight against crime—I think my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is replying to the debate—we in this country are very bad at dealing with white-collar crime, and there is growing awareness of that. If someone wishes to rob a bank, they go to the LIBOR market; they do not put on a balaclava and pick up a shotgun—that is much less profitable. At last we are starting to do something about that, and I hope I can be reassured that the Bill will tackle not just tax evasion, which is quite rightly high on the public agenda, but money laundering. London is still the money-laundering capital of the world. For an African despot or a serious international criminal, London is the best place to put their money, because they can trust the bankers to look after it and not to steal it from them. I welcome the fact that we are going to improve the reporting of suspicious activities. I hope we will also impose a duty on those at the head of the institutions involved to ensure that they take positive steps to stop those working for them encouraging such activities.

I will continue to follow progress on the Investigatory Powers Bill. We have to get the balance right between the powers our agencies must have in order to deal with
the threat of terrorism and crime, and the privacy that we retain in our society to defend the freedoms we want.

I particularly welcome the fact that there was no mention whatever in the Queen’s Speech of repealing the Human Rights Act or any legislation on human rights. I hope that means we are proceeding on this front with very considerable caution. I looked at the speech by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in which she was reported to have said things on the subject of the European convention on human rights. Actually, what she said was rather ambiguous; it was not a change of Government policy. I hope I am correctly reassured that there is not the slightest question of our giving up the convention or trying to weaken the jurisdiction in Strasbourg.

I wait to hear a good reason for getting rid of the Human Rights Act and for stopping British judges applying the principles of the convention. When we are taken to Strasbourg, which is where people will go again if we get rid of the Human Rights Act, we lose only 2% of cases. I do not get frightenedly worried about air hostesses being allowed to wear crucifixes with their uniform, which is the kind of case we actually lose. As someone has rightly pointed out, the Council of Europe has systems, so we are not in fact being forced to give prisoners voting rights.

Our reputation for human rights will be damaged if we are seen to retreat from where we are. The Court in Strasbourg and the convention are the best levers we have to make sure that liberal values are defended in Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Georgia and other countries, which do abide by the judgments in Strasbourg—and they get defeated many more times there than we do. I therefore trust that very considerable thought is being given to this subject. I am not aware of any harm being done at the moment.

Of course I believe in the supremacy of Parliament, but even Parliament must pass legislation consistent with the high standards of human rights that we have always had. I see no harm whatever in British judges, or judges in Strasbourg, being allowed occasionally to challenge the way in which our legislation is interpreted by officials in the Home Office or elsewhere, and even occasionally by Ministers, when that interpretation really ought to be reconsidered.

Subject to that, and assuming we are all putting human rights in our foreign policy, as the Foreign Secretary eloquently said we are, for which he has my full approval, I think we will see, once the slight madness of this referendum is over—I am of the generation who have not succeeded in finding jobs that completely agree with him. He claimed a few moments ago that the leave campaign was saying that millions of Turkish criminals were about to flood the country. That is not true. The actual claim of the leave campaign is that only 1 million are coming over in the next eight years, and not all of them are criminals! Indeed, I have here the quote from Vote Leave:

“Since the birth rate in Turkey is so high, we can expect to see an additional million people added to the UK population from Turkey alone within eight years.”

That accompanied a statement from a Government Minister who had never heard of the word “veto” in relation to the accession of states.

I am grateful to The Times this morning for adding just a little insight into this subject. Under the heading, “Turkish delight”, it says:

“One of Vote Leave’s key warnings is the threat to public services posed by Turkey joining the EU. But what’s this? Big-name Outers Johnson, Daniel Hannan and Douglas Carswell are all listed as founder members of Conservative Friends of Turkey, set up to ‘lobby in favour of Turkish membership of the EU’.”

It is now clear that such are the Machiavellian tactics of the leave campaign that that triumvirate have been campaigning for Turkish membership of the European Union so that they can use that as a reason for the removal of Britain from the Union. What an extraordinary array of political talent and consistency we face!

I want to restrict myself to three points, because we have been well round the houses today with Foreign Office questions, the statement, and now this debate. I want to make an argument about British and Scottish values with regard to immigration; to talk a little about Libya, because I am not sure that we are hearing the full story from the Government about where we are with military action there; and lastly to talk a bit about the European referendum, and particularly “Project Fear”—a subject of which I have some experience and knowledge from the past.

First, I will look at the question of immigration. The nonsense from the leave campaign on immigration can be juxtaposed with the reality of where we are in Scotland with many immigration cases. I want to talk about the plight of the Brain family—Gregg Brain, Kathryn Brain, and their son Lachlan, who is seven years old. This family came from Australia to Dingwall in the Scottish highlands as part of the Homecoming Scotland programme, which was initiated by my predecessor as First Minister, Lord McConnell, and carried forward by my Administration. The family came—this was heavily advertised in Australia—to encourage those of Scottish descent to return to Scotland to help re-populate and reinvigorate the highlands and other areas of Scotland.

Gregg and Kathryn both have Scottish roots. They first visited Scotland on their honeymoon in 2005, and returned in 2011 to do further research on whether a move to Scotland would be the right thing for them to do—to up sticks from Australia and invest accumulated capital in Scotland to make a new life. Between 2005 and 2011, they applied for visas, and Kathryn eventually secured a student visa after enrolling in a degree in Scottish history and archaeology. Her husband and son were listed as her dependants. Kathryn finished her degree last year, and the family’s visa expired in December 2015. The Home Office has rejected their case to stay. It is believed that a further visa application was rejected as they had not succeeded in finding jobs that completely...
fulfilled the visa requirements. This is despite the fact that Gregor Brain had been working, and was working, but then had to give up his job as a result of the Home Office decision.

This family—let me stress that their son Lachlan has known no other home than Dingwall and Scots Gaelic is his first language—are fully integrated into the community. They have massive community support. They have the support of just about every Scottish MP in his House. They have overwhelming support from the newly elected Members of the Scottish Parliament, as well as their own two excellent constituency Members in both Parliaments. This story affects an area where the dominant issue for the past two centuries has been not fear of immigration, but fear of emigration. This family, having so much to contribute and having already contributed so much to our country, having been attracted to it by a Scottish Government-sponsored initiative inviting them to come, and having qualified and worked and sustained themselves, are now to be kicked out of the country next Tuesday unless the Home Secretary and her Ministers have the courtesy to look again at this matter and exercise the ministerial discretion that most certainly should be exercised in this case. If a Home Office Minister would like to say a word, I will gladly give way at this stage.

The silence from the Treasury Bench should be a matter of shame. There is a substantial injustice being inflicted on this family and a substantial discredit on our country. This is not just an immigration issue or a community issue—

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): And human rights.

Alex Salmond: And a human rights issue, as the hon. Lady rightly says. The Home Office is turning its face against the massive support of just about every parliamentarian from Scotland and refusing to accept and acknowledge that this family came to our country on a Government-sponsored scheme. I do hope that Ministers will find it in their heart to look at this case in the next seven days.

Secondly, I come to the subject of Libya. The Foreign Secretary referred a few minutes ago to his visit to Tripoli, where he said the UK was ready to provide training to the new Administration’s armed forces. He said that “it will be possible for us and our partners to support the military training programme.”

Such a mission would not require a Commons vote because, he said:

“That does not extend to non-combat missions.”

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who is in his place, rejected the idea of a training mission, stating that:

“Even if you say it is just a training mission rather than a combat one, any foreign troop presence in Tripoli will be seen as a Western intervention.”

The commander of Libya’s air force warned:

“If any foreign soldier touches our soil with his foot, all Libyan people will be united against him. Our problems will be aggravated with the coming of foreign troops.”

Interviewed in RT, former UK ambassador to Libya Oliver Miles warned against “loose talk” of military intervention in the collapsing state. He said:

“There’s been talks for weeks and months of the possibility of military intervention. But I don’t think it’s helpful at the moment because intervention is not what they need.”

Following the Foreign Affairs Committee’s visit to north Africa in mid-April, the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), wrote to the Foreign Secretary accusing him of being “less than candid” and “deliberately misleading to the uninformed reader” over plans to send British troops to join an Italian-led training mission.

In a few weeks’ time, on 6 July, the Chilcot report will be published. One of the key issues that many of us hope will be identified and brought out in that report is that of pre-commitment—what commitments were made in 2002 by the then Prime Minister to the American President that dictated all his subsequent actions. I ask the Foreign Secretary for a straight answer to this question: what, if any, commitments have been made in relation to intervention in Libya at this stage—not just on combat roles, which the Defence Secretary referred to earlier—or is it genuinely the case that, before any such commitments are undertaken, there will be a debate and vote in this House to ascertain the wisdom or otherwise of such an intervention?

Finally, I come to the European campaign and to “Project Fear”. The term was actually devised in an internal briefing in the Better Together campaign in the Scottish referendum, where the writer self-described the campaign as “Project Fear”. I want briefly to discuss why I think that is entirely the wrong campaign and the wrong tactic to adopt.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has substantial form on the matter. On 13 November 2011 he gave an interview on BBC Scotland television in which he predicted a collapse in inward investment in Scotland because of the referendum of 2014. That was followed by record years of inward investment in Scotland in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The current Secretary of State for Scotland had the brass neck in a statement on 17 June last year to claim the credit for the record inward investment figures of 2014. No one in the leave campaign should be surprised by the nefarious activities of Her Majesty’s Treasury, given the even more nefarious activities it engaged in during the Scottish referendum campaign.

My question today is whether this sort of material wins hearts and minds in a referendum campaign. I do not think it does.

Mike Gapes: You lost the referendum.

Alex Salmond: I hear from the Labour Benches that we lost the referendum in Scotland. That is a matter of fact and record.

Mike Gapes: You lost; we won.

Alex Salmond: Yes, that is true. That referendum was launched with the yes campaign at 28% of the vote. The eventual vote for the yes campaign was 45%. The present campaign on Europe has been launched with a much tighter margin between the two sides, and if the remain
campaign loses 1% a month during the campaign, the result will not be as I or the hon. Gentleman would wish.

**Mike Gapes**: Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman wants remain to lose because he could then pursue his agenda of holding another referendum on independence within two years? His party is hardly doing anything to campaign to remain in the United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. [Interruption.] Order. No. Mr Gapes, senior Member you are, with a lot to offer, but you also want to speak, and I do not want to be the man who puts you at the bottom of the list. Between us, we can all get there. Short interventions if you must, but it would be better if you did not intervene.

**Alex Salmond**: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) should read today’s pamphlet, “The EU and You”, released by the Scottish Government, which explains in a considered and proper way why European Union membership is of benefit to Scotland. Not even the most rabid of the leave campaign could describe that pamphlet as anything resembling “Project Fear”. It makes a considered case for why EU membership benefits Scotland.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the ICM poll for the UK today, he will see that the two sides are level in an online poll. In the ICM poll in Scotland, the margin is nearly 2:1 for remain. Given that even the hon. Gentleman will have noticed the diminishing fortunes of his party in Scotland and the rising fortunes of the SNP, does that not suggest that the campaign that we are conducting in Scotland is rather more successful in winning hearts and minds to the European cause than the campaign that is being conducted across the rest of the country?

A case in point is the release of the Treasury statistics on the economy yesterday—the expectations analysis. An expectations model is the ultimate GIGO model—garbage in, garbage out. The result is manufactured from the input to the model. The Treasury analysis suggests a 6% wipe-out of GDP from a Euro exit. No other credible forecaster is suggesting anything like that.

Established and credible forecasters are indicating enough of the economic damage that I believe would be done to this country by an exit, without having to manufacture and inflate statistics which brings the whole argument into disrepute. It is enough for people to know that there will be an economic impact, without trying to inflate that impact beyond what is reasonable.

I commend the Governor of the Bank of England, who has gone no further than saying that the scenarios “could possibly include a technical recession”.

The Bank of England has demonstrated in both the Scottish referendum and, indeed, this referendum campaign how public servants should behave in terms of offering information and considered analysis.

The major danger to the remain campaign is not the arguments of the leave campaign, because the leave campaign is fundamentally split between those who see the UK’s future after an exit as similar to that of Switzerland or Norway, and those who think it can be some sort of transatlantic Singapore. That fundamental division cannot be resolved, because the way to minimise economic damage from an exit would be to adopt the Norwegian model, but the majority of the leave campaign will not subscribe to that because it would bring with it acceptance of the single market, various regulations and, of course, free movement of labour. That is the fundamental problem with the leave campaign.

The remain campaign across the UK should at the moment be as far ahead as we are in Scotland. The fact that we are not is an indication that the campaign should be recalibrated into one that starts to win hearts and minds, and that addresses some of the issues to which the Foreign Secretary alluded. Sixty-six years after the Schuman declaration, we can say that the European Union has contributed to peace, stability and prosperity across Europe. Over that time, building a single market of 500 million people has been no mean achievement. For Opposition parties in particular, the social gains for every family and every trade unionist in this country—things that the Government do not like to talk about—are a very substantial reason for not leaving the EU behind. It would also add to the credibility of our arguments if we accepted—as, indeed, the Leader of the Opposition did in his speech—the problems and difficulties that people have with the European Union.

The fishing community in Scotland, which takes 60% of the landings, are hugely sceptical, because, of all the EU polices that could be considered disastrous, the common fisheries policy is the greatest. On 11 May I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, suggesting that support for the remain campaign might be enhanced if, as part of the UK’s presidency of the European Council...
next year, he agreed that the Scottish fisheries Minister should co-chair—with the UK fisheries Minister, the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. Incidentally, the Prime Minister was very open to such a suggestion when he came to office in 2010, as indeed was the Foreign Secretary’s predecessor, William Hague.

I suggested that a response to that invitation before purdah in three days’ time would be helpful to my former constituents in Banff and Buchan. I was therefore delighted to receive a letter last week from an unnamed correspondence officer at the direct communications unit at Downing Street, saying that my request was being considered. However, if the Foreign Secretary is genuinely interested in strengthening the position of the remain campaign, I hope he will indicate today to the fishing communities of Scotland that the Government will take advantage of the opportunity provided by the European Council presidency to address their needs and iron out many of the difficulties in the current regulations.

SNP Members would have wished the Government to address the fears that many of our constituents have about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership without being forced to do so by an amendment, because there are genuine fears that a court process may allow an aggressive intervention in the national health service. Last week, I had a meeting with the Baltic state and Scandinavian ambassadors, who indicated that when this Government took office, they invested great hopes in the Prime Minister’s northern agenda—the reform agenda for the European Union that he was putting forward at that time—but their view and belief is that the agenda has been deflected by a referendum that is about British exceptionalism as opposed to genuine reform of the European institutions.

My submission is that if we are to have a campaign that people will endorse and give an enthusiastic response to, that will prevent the danger of differential voting between enthusiastic Brexiteers and those who are cowed into submission by the Government’s “Project Fear” and that will mobilise people to get out of their houses and into the polling stations, the Government will have to rise above the campaign they are fighting so far and actually make a positive case for the European Union.

4.1 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be able to participate in this debate on the Gracious Speech. If I may say so, it was an immense pleasure to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary so clearly present and articulate Conservative principles of international engagement, particularly our adherence to rules-based international systems. We have a long tradition in that area, and it is perhaps one of our greatest offerings to the world. I want to return to that in a few moments, but the way he expounded it seemed to me to put it with absolutely crystal clarity that the United Kingdom sees itself as belonging to a rules-based system that helps to maintain values and to further freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

I have no doubt that, as we meet, we face really serious challenges in promoting those values, whether from Russia, which appears in some respects to be descending into a gangster state given its gross violations of international law, or from the anarchy in the middle east. It is quite clear that on our doorstep—very close to us, and capable of affecting us—there is a whole series of processes that, quite frankly, appear on any analysis to be retrograde. That must inform the entire way in which we look at how we pursue our own policies.

I am delighted that the Government have made progress in Committee on the Investigatory Powers Bill. I recognise that it is absolutely essential to have the tools to protect ourselves properly against those who seek to do us harm. I understand that the Bill is shortly to return to the House on Report, and I very much hope that we will be able to make further progress to ensure that the Government’s completely legitimate aim of protecting us all in this country can be reconciled with some of the concerns that people have about personal liberty. I am pretty convinced that they can be reconciled, and I look forward to playing a part in that process when the Bill returns to the House, no doubt along with other members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing.

I will also take a great interest in the extremism Bill. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that I have some considerable concerns about how this legislation can be framed in practice to reconcile it with the right of freedom of expression, which applies even when the matters expressed are ones with which we heartily disagree. We have to be very careful. There is a tendency within democracy—perhaps for understandable reasons of electoral advantage—to stay silent in the face of comments with which we may disagree where we nevertheless would like at least to encourage people to consider giving us their support. The problem with legislation of this kind is that it might both antagonise people who express points of view that in practice are incompatible with the furtherance and survival of democracy but at the same time subtly free us, as parliamentarians, from the duty of challenging those people. We need to look to what we do as parliamentarians just as much as to any legislation that we seek to enact.

That brings me to my two key points about rules-based international systems. Such systems are indeed the United Kingdom’s principal gift to the world. I once asked the Foreign Office how many treaties we had signed up to; although it was reluctant to go back beyond 1834, it accepted that since then we had signed up to more than 13,000 that were still extant. More than 700 contain arbitral mechanisms for resolving disputes, whereby the United Kingdom undertakes to accept the binding judgment of a tribunal or arbitrator in respect of the treaty. The EU treaties—or for that matter the European convention on human rights—are no different from any of the others when it comes to the UK’s intentions in having signed up to them.

What are we to make of some of my colleagues here in Parliament, who, for example, say that not only do they want the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union but that when we have had a vote in support of that we should not take the lawful route of invoking article 50 of the Lisbon treaty, but instead should merely legislate in Parliament to delete those aspects of the treaty that appear onerous or incompatible
with our own views? What they are advocating is no different from President Putin’s saying that it is legitimate to annex Crimea because the Russian Duma has said that it is an acceptable thing to do. But that is the reality of some—I emphasise “some”—of the very strange utterances that we are hearing in the course of the debate on the EU referendum. Not only are there policy differences on the future, but there is a willingness to articulate suggestions that the United Kingdom should adopt an anarchic approach to our international obligations.

That brings me to my principal point, namely that in the Gracious Speech there is a further reference to enacting a Bill of Rights. I will make it clear that there may be arguments as to why the United Kingdom might profitably seek to have a Bill of Rights. As time goes by, I begin to think that the widespread constitutional changes as a result of devolution are of such a character that providing a constitutional framework in which devolution can operate might be of merit. I recognise that that is an enormous task to take on, and do not in any way criticise my right hon. Friends in the Government for being reluctant to embark upon it, but within that context I can see that a Bill of Rights might play some key role; indeed, the idea that we might have a Bill of Rights was discussed back in the early 1990s, before we decided to enact the Human Rights Act.

I confess that it is quite clear that that is not what my colleagues in the Government have in mind. What they have in mind is very unclear—indeed, that is part of the problem—but it is certainly not that. It appears to range from some minor cosmetic changes to the Human Rights Act—on that, I would simply echo the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that if that is really what is intended, what on earth is the point?—to the suggestion that some radical change to the Human Rights Act and to the text of the convention could be effected, a change that, as far as I can see, would then almost automatically place us in breach of our obligations under the European convention.

The European convention is not a perfect document, and I have no doubt that its interpretation by the European Court of Human Rights has at times also been imperfect. To put it bluntly, however, in my view it constitutes without the slightest doubt the single most important lever that has ever been devised on this planet for improving human rights, not only in Europe but worldwide. The United Kingdom’s ambivalent position on the convention is doing us immense reputational damage, and it is also damaging the effectiveness of that convention. The United Kingdom’s position is invoked by Mr Putin to justify Russian intransigence in implementing judgments by the European Court of Human Rights, and in the past it has been invoked by the President of Kenya when justifying a failure to co-operate with the International Criminal Court, which is at the centre of the Foreign Secretary’s efforts to promote human rights worldwide. There are also other examples, including by signatory states such as Ukraine.

As we debate this matter, and as the Government consider what to do about a Bill of Rights, we must bear it in mind that this is not an internal conversation; it is one to the very heart of the principles that the Foreign Secretary so clearly set out. This debate should be conducted in a way that reflects that, and that also reflects the immense changes that have been taking place at the European Court of Human Rights, thanks—he was very modest about it—to the efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe and the Brighton Declaration. We must consider how the convention is operating today and how it is applied in this country through the Human Rights Act, and not just how it was applied 10 years ago. If we keep that in mind, we may come up with some sensible conclusions, although I urge my Front-Bench colleagues to ensure that any consultation period is long enough to enable us all to consider and participate in it fully.

With that in mind, I was pleased to hear the way that the Government articulated their adherence to an international rules-based system this afternoon. That is one of the things that brought me into the Conservative party, although our adherence to and belief in such a system is not exclusive to us, and is probably shared widely across the House. In those circumstances, we must uphold it, and if we do that we will come up with the right conclusions on the legislation proposed by the Government this Session.

4.12 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I would like to say a few words about the counter-extremism Bill and human rights. First, however, I pay tribute to the shadow Foreign Secretary for his speech, with which I strongly agreed. It was profound, principled and progressive, and without wanting him to think that I want some sort of promotion—I am so beyond that at this point—I should say I thought it was exceptionally good. He does great credit to our party, to the House and to politics, and I thank him for what he said.

I was glad to hear the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is a weighty Member of this House and speaks as a former Home Secretary, Justice Secretary, Health Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is well and truly a “former”, and I agreed with an awful lot of what he said. In fact, I agreed with everything he said about prison reform and Europe. I find that quite traumatic, because when I was first in the House, he was sitting in Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet and was not to be agreed with on everything, or indeed anything. However, today I agreed with what he said. I also now find myself elevated to the status of a “former”, albeit not one as weighty as the right hon. and learned Gentleman. In this House, one thing about “formers” is that we must crack on with our speeches and not make them too long—that was a reference to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), not to the right hon. and learned Members for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) and for Rushcliffe.

I want to mention two measures in the Queen’s Speech. The first is the counter-extremism Bill. I have the privilege of chairing the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who sits on the Committee and has a particular interest in mental health and human rights, is also in the Chamber.

The Government have a duty to protect us—a responsibility that any and every Government take with the utmost seriousness. That is undoubtedly uncontested ground, but when it comes to how to tackle terrorism, specifically the task of countering Daesh-inspired terrorism,
there is no consensus. The Government’s approach, set out in the counter-extremism strategy, appears to be based on the assumption that there is an escalator that starts with religious conservatism and ends up with support for jihadism, and that religious conservatism therefore is the starting point in the quest to tackle violence. However, it is by no means proven or agreed that extreme religious views, in particular religious conservatism, are in and of themselves an indicator of, or even correlated with, support for jihadism. If there are to be, under the new Bill, banning orders, extremism disruption orders and closure orders, it has to be clear that they are banning disruption and closing something that will lead to violence, not just something of which the Government disapprove.

The second issue is that if the Government are going to clamp down on Islamic religious conservatism in the cause of tackling violence, is that discrimination that can be justified, or will it serve merely to give rise to justified grievance? Everyone seems to agree that the most precious asset in the fight against terrorism is the relationship between the authorities—the police, the schools and the councils—and the Muslim communities of this country. We must guard against any undermining of the relationship between the authorities and the Muslim community, which would thereby make the fight against terrorism even harder. The last thing we must do is anything that fosters the alienation that can lead to radicalisation.

The third issue is the problem of taking conservative religious views in the Muslim community as an indicator of future terrorism if the same beliefs in evangelical Christianity or Orthodox Judaism would not be seen as prompting the need for any action. Are the Government going to discriminate and seek to justify that, or will they be indiscriminate and annoy and concern everybody?

The fourth issue is the question of definition. This was hinted at by the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) in his intervention. Even if there was reliable evidence of the escalator from extreme views to violence, if the law, in the form of banning orders, closure orders and extremist disruption orders, is to be invoked, there needs to be clarity and consensus around the definition. It is far from clear that there is an accepted definition of what constitutes non-violent extremism, or, indeed, extremism. In the counter-extremism strategy, the Government describe extremism as the “vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”.

Now, I am not tolerant of the beliefs of those who are homophobic and I do not respect those who regard women as inferior. Which is the extremism: their beliefs or my intolerance of their beliefs? If we denounce our judiciary as biased Islamophobes, is that undermining the rule of law or is that the exercise of free speech? I have done a certain amount of denouncing the judiciary for all sorts of things in the past, but I would not have regarded myself as extremist—I was just pointing out that they were sexist and needed to be replaced by many more women judges.

The fifth issue is whether it is better to suppress views or to subject them to challenge. Many in the higher education sector say that for their students they believe it is better to challenge abhorrent views rather than to repress them, but do we allow the same approach for school-age children? Some have argued that it simply should be seen as a question of child safeguarding, but although there is a consensus around the nature of child neglect, physical abuse or sexual abuse, from which children have to be safeguarded, there is no such consensus around the definition of extremism from which children should be safeguarded. We can all understand the definition of safeguarding; it is just a question of what we are safeguarding children from. In relation to extremism, there is no such shared consensus or definition. The difficulty around these issues should lead the Government to tread with great care. They should publish the Bill in draft and allow extensive debate and discussion. We should listen with particular attention to those who would be expected to apply for and enforce these orders, such as the police, educational establishments and councils, and to the Muslim community.

I completely agree with everything that the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield said about the repeal of the Human Rights Act and its replacement with a British Bill of Rights. We have not yet seen the consultation, but, when we do, it will again be important that the Government tread carefully. They should ensure that human rights remain universal, rather than simply retaining the popular and carving out the unpopular. The legal protection of human rights is important for everyone, even those who are justifiably the subject of public hostility.

The Government should not do anything that makes it more difficult for people here to enforce their rights in the UK courts, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said. I had to trek all the way to Strasbourg to get my rights. Had we had the Human Rights Act, I would have been exonerated seven years earlier and at much less expense to the Government. Neither should they do anything that would disrupt the devolution settlement in Scotland or the peace agreement in Northern Ireland, of which the Human Rights Act is part, as was made clear to us on our visit to Scotland and in evidence submitted to our Committee from Northern Ireland.

The Foreign Secretary acknowledged that this country is seen as a champion of human rights around the world, and the Government should be mindful of how what the UK does affects those in other countries who are fighting for their rights but who do not have the democracy and rights we have. Our adherence to the framework of international human rights standards, which includes the European convention, is a beacon to which those campaigning for rights in other countries look and demand in their own countries. That was made clear to us when we visited the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where people, whether from Poland or Russia, basically told us, “If you leave the European convention, we’re done for.” If our Government were to abandon the convention, it would have a devastating effect on the progress of human rights in other countries.

No Government like any court telling them what to do. Legislators, elected as they are, do not like to be constrained by unelected judges. Parliament does not like to be so restrained. Governments have got used to listening to their constituents and into government, like even less to be constrained. That feeling is multiplied when the judicial ruling comes from—perish the thought!—abroad, but even the best
intentioned Government need to be subject to the rule of law. Governments can abuse their power, on purpose or by mistake, so oversight by the courts is essential. International standards, presided over by international courts, are important abroad and to us too. If the Government do not agree with a court ruling, they can gnash their teeth or try to get the court to think again in a subsequent case, but their disagreement with a judgement does not justify their rejecting the jurisdiction of the court concerned.

In conclusion, it is easy to promise to tackle extremism, to whip up hostility to court rulings and to make “human rights” dirty words, but when it comes to legislating on counter-terrorism and amending our human rights framework the Government need to tread carefully, consult widely and work on the basis of consensus. What I have heard in the debate so far gives me confidence that there are Members on both sides of the House, as there are in the House of Lords, who will make sure the Government do exactly that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am now introducing a five-minute limit. I know it is disappointing but it is the way to get everybody in.

4.24 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I shall try to proceed with Twitter-like brevity in this Twitter age, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I want to reinforce the points made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) on prisons, although I gently remind him that, given the number of prisoners, they are too many in comparison with the quality of the work being done there and the courage behind it. A few prisoners should have the right to vote stand pretty small in comparison with the quality of the work being done there and the courage behind it.

When it comes to reflecting on our overall relations with Russia, it is the case that they are absolutely in the deep freeze right now. Our bilateral relations are in an extremely poor place. I am struck by the fact that both the Russian mission here in London and our mission in Moscow are largely obstructed by tit-for-tat measures that prevent them from carrying out their duties effectively. Both missions are reduced to that situation, with both complaining about the measures imposed on them.

In our meeting with a Russian official in the Russian Foreign Office who oversees British affairs, I suggested that it might be an idea to start relaxing some of the measures on British representation in Moscow to begin to try to get out of this downward spiral. Let us see if some micro-measures can be made to make the work of British diplomats easier and start this process off.

What has gone wrong, of course, is the strategic relationship fall-out at the end of the cold war. Probably rightly, the west decided to secure the position of central and eastern European people, but the price was the failure subsequently to get an effective strategic relationship with Russia. That is now being made infinitely more difficult by Russia’s departure from the international rules of the road.

There is an issue about whether we are going to try to help the Russians out of the cul-de-sac that they have got themselves into. Even if it is initially at the level of cultural exchanges and students coming over here and so forth, we should invest in this relationship in any way we can. It is a very important relationship; Russia is a very important country. That is why it becomes even more critical when a country of that size is under the leadership that it is—a leadership that undermine it all has a deep lack of self-confidence, even though tactically it might feel strong.

Finally, on the European Union debate, I thought the first part of the shadow Foreign Secretary’s speech was terrific, but then he set up the Aunt Sallies about the opposition case. There are two internationalisms competing here, and there are very good arguments to show why geopoltically the United Kingdom has a choice here. I believe we need positive arguments on both sides. I cannot go into those arguments because of the time limit, but I urge all colleagues to be positive in how they present their case on this issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Let me say that Chris Elmore’s will be a maiden speech. I call Chris Elmore.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

4.29 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the distinguished Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in what is my maiden speech in this House. It is, I hope, the first of many contributions that I will make in representing the people of Ogmore, as long as I am able to catch the Speaker’s eye.

I make my speech with an enormous sense of pride and a significant amount of humility. I am proud to have been elected to this House by the people of Ogmore, and to represent and work for them in Parliament. To me, there is no greater honour. I am humbled by the trust that they have placed in me to represent them as their Member of Parliament, and I shall never forget
the opportunity that they have given me. I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to all my constituents who voted for me. As for those who voted for my opponents, or did not vote at all, I hope to prove in the years ahead that I am worthy of their future support. I now strive to serve all my constituents to the best of my ability throughout my time in the House.

It is, of course, customary to pay tribute to one’s predecessor when delivering a maiden speech. Many Members have been elected in by-elections, some following the tragic passing of the previous Member and some owing to the retirement of the previous Member because of ill health, but very few will succeed the previous Member because that Member has been elected to a new office. I wonder whether I am unique, in the modern age of devolution, in that my predecessor is—I am pleased to say—not only alive and well, in a fit state of health, but still representing the same constituency as he did in the House so diligently until only a few weeks ago. In the 19 days since my election, I have been reminded by many of my constituents that I have “big shoes to fill”. One constituent informed me last Saturday: “If you can be half as good as Huw, you will do all right, boy.”

Huw Irranca-Davies’s contribution to the House, as a constituency Member, a Minister and a Select Committee Chair, has been significant. His work as a Wales Office and environment Minister has earned him a reputation as a champion of environmental issues, and I am confident that he will now make a significant contribution in the National Assembly for Wales. I know that Huw’s dedication to the numerous communities that make up the Ogmore constituency has earned him the respect of many of those who are now “our” constituents, and that I do indeed have “big shoes to fill”. I am fortunate to be working alongside him, able to ask for advice when I need it, and I am proud to call him a friend.

I am abundantly aware of the list of parliamentarians who have come before me, representing the constituency of Ogmore in all its forms since 1918. I am conscious, too, of the long-standing trust that the electors in the constituency have placed in the Labour party—a trust secured only by Members working for constituents, and ensuring that Labour stands up for the many communities in Ogmore. That is something that I am determined to continue. In the hope of no more by-elections, I look forward to marking the centenary of Labour representation in Ogmore in 2018, as, to my knowledge, I do not plan to go anywhere.

One of my predecessors, Sir Raymond Powell, served the people of Ogmore for more than 20 years and championed many local and national causes. He and I have a mutual skill. Many longer-serving Members have been keen to share stories of Sir Raymond’s skills during his time in the Whips Office, but I have yet to discover whether I have such abilities. We are, in fact, both trained in butchery: Sir Raymond was a master butcher, and I was a butchery assistant. I am not sure whether my skill with a knife will be of use in the House, but I am told by Members that it is a useful skill to have. I assume, of course, that that is meant metaphorically.

The diverse communities that make up Ogmore are rich in character, with proud histories and, I believe, bright futures. It is a landlocked community, with many former mining villages and towns which have shaped the rich histories of the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore valleys, as well as the community of Evanstown and Gillach Goch. To the south are the picturesque villages of Blackmill, Llangeinor and Coytrahen, before we reach the town of Pencoed and the busy communities of Aberkenfig, Sarn, Cefn Cribwr and Tondu. In the east of the constituency, the distinct communities of Llanharan, Brynna and Llanhari, although former villages, are growing apace, but their sense of community remains. In Llanharan, archery is taught, with sportsmen and women competing at a national level.

I am pleased to say that, as many of the villages and towns across the constituency—as well as the physical landscape—have recovered from the heavy industries that once dominated many of them, the rich culture of music, sport, entertainment and proud history has continued, and grows year on year. The cultural capital of Ogmore, Maesteg, boasts some of the greatest names in the entertainment industry who have performed there—as well being able to lay claim to being the ancestral home of none other than Kylie Minogue. It would be remiss of me not to mention the annual Maesteg festival, which opened at the end of last week. I look forward to enjoying the rich musical mix of opera, choirs, theatre productions and various events for young people over the coming weeks. Music and its history are deeply rooted in Ogmore, with the world-famous “Calon Lân” having been written in Blaengarw in the Garw valley and the tradition of male voice choirs continuing to play a significant part in community life. For example, the Ogmore Vale male voice choir, based in Ogmore Vale, entertains thousands with performances across Wales and beyond. As is traditional for the newly elected MP for Ogmore, I am looking forward to entertaining—I use the word loosely—members of the choir with a song of their choice at a choir rehearsal. I can safely say that I have not been blessed with the ability to sing that so many of my fellow countrymen and women possess, so that will be a one-night-only performance.

Like many who live in Ogmore, I am deeply proud of its history and culture. I also see a positive future for the constituency in the years ahead. Nested within the villages and towns are industries that are thriving. Many Members will be unaware that if they are ever in need of a parachute, including those on an ejector seat, the odds are that it will have been manufactured in the village of Llangeinor. As specialist industries go, you might think that parachute production was something of a niche industry, but Ogmore boasts many such industries, as well as technological hubs such as the UK base of Sony in Pencoed, allowing talented designers to reach their full potential, including in the development of video games and the training of young people in the use of coding, which is something that is still completely beyond me.

The village of Heol-y-Cyw is home to the Rockwool factory. It constructs insulation made from stone, which can be found in many structures across the UK, and it employs hundreds of people directly and over 1,000 in tributary industries. Of course, many of my constituents work either directly at the steelworks in Port Talbot or in connected occupations, and their potential closure is of significant concern. I will do my utmost to keep the pressure on the Government to ensure that a long-term
plan is secured for the steel industry not just in Wales but across the United Kingdom, and I shall work with fellow Members to achieve that. My constituency has already faced the realities of an industry ending, and the legacy that that creates, and we cannot allow that to happen again.

The European Union has played a significant part in the funding of many projects that have been delivered across my constituency, including through the much needed European social fund moneys used to train and reskill young people and to deliver employment schemes such as the successful Jobs Growth Wales initiative delivered by the Welsh Labour Government. I am a proud member of the GMB and Unison trade unions, and workers’ rights are close to my heart. One of the reasons that I am proud to be campaigning to vote to remain in the EU in the coming referendum is the fact that many of the improved workers’ rights that benefit the people of Ogmore, Wales and the United Kingdom are a direct consequence of the UK’s membership of the EU and the work of the trade unions, which I am proud to support.

I would like to close by thanking the many Labour party members who campaigned for me during the recent election. I am exceedingly grateful for the support that they have shown me in recent months. I would also like to pay tribute to my parents for their support and to offer them an apology for the turbulence of having a son who works in politics. Finally, I would like publicly to thank my partner, Bridie, who has tolerated my career choice in recent years. I hope I live up to their expectations. I look forward to making further contributions in the House in the months and years ahead, and to ensuring that the people of Ogmore are always my first priority.

4.38 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), who has entertained the House with a truly exceptional maiden speech. He spoke about his constituency with eloquence and about his predecessors with wit. Many of us remember his distinguished predecessor, Sir Raymond Powell. Indeed, I served in the Government Whips office opposite him and I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that he was a distinguished butcher. The hon. Gentleman will discover, I hope, that his expectation of working with people across the House will be fulfilled. He will find that we on this side are the opposition and not the enemy, and I personally look forward to working with him. It is perfectly clear from his maiden speech that he will fulfil his expectations, just as his partner and his constituents would wish him to do.

The Queen’s Speech that we are discussing today is an authentic one nation speech. Social mobility is at its heart, and it makes clear the importance of capitalism working for everyone. It also puts some flesh on the bones of Prime Minister’s speech at last year’s party conference, which was one of the finest that he has made.

For the moment, Europe dominates our politics. Indeed, at midday on 11 June, Sutton Coldfield town hall will hold a debate between the noble Lords Heseltine and Ashdown on the one side and Nigel Farage and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on the other. I can tell the House that tickets for that great debate sold out faster than Glastonbury and all went within half an hour yesterday.

I want to make just a few brief points in the time available. I want a much greater focus in this parliamentary session on the importance of building new homes. It is virtually impossible for young people today to get on to the housing ladder in the way that my generation did, and dreams of a property-owning democracy are receding. However, homes must be built in the right places. Sutton Coldfield would suffer from the proposals of Birmingham’s Labour council to build no fewer than 6,000 new homes in the green belt. That is completely unacceptable, and we look to the Government to call that in at an early stage.

I propose three ideas for how we can make the house-building process easier. First, there must be more imaginative and considered inner-city developments, with more power for local communities and less for developers. Secondly, there must be more incentives to decontaminate land, which would have a huge effect on the availability of land for house building in Birmingham. Finally, I want a real effort to be made to bring to fruition the plans to build a garden city in the black country that could provide up to 45,000 homes, none of which would need to be built on the green belt.

This Queen’s Speech debate takes place against the background of an agonisingly difficult but ultimately catastrophic situation in the middle east. The four horsemen of the apocalypse continue to ride through what was Syria—a second-world country. I remind the House that in a country of just over 20 million, 11 million souls are now on the move—6 million within the country and 5 million outside. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) and I have produced a report under our joint chairmanship of the all-party political group on Friends of Syria, which benefits from considerable expert advice and input. Clare Short and I recently visited the Turkey-Syria border with some brilliant British Muslim charities, and I pay tribute to their bravery.

We must ensure that every child in a refugee camp and all those refugee children in Jordan and in Lebanon get an education, which should be paid for by rich European countries. Lebanon and Jordan are swamped by the number of refugees using their public services, and we must help out.

Alec Shelbrooke: On that point, it is perhaps worth reminding the House that if the UK took an equivalent percentage of people, 17 million people would be coming into the United Kingdom.

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

We must also keep refugees and migrants as close as possible to the areas from which they came. Few if any of these people want to recreate Syria in Europe; they want to return to the homes from which they were driven, often under gunfire.

The EU must cancel all tariffs on goods from Lebanon and Jordan. Industrial and agricultural goods are still subject to tariffs in some cases. No progress has been made on the EU’s 2011 proposal to have deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those areas. We also need to encourage the international community to look ahead to the reconstruction of Syria. The Prime Minister has already made it clear that Britain will
provide up to a billion pounds of support for reconstruction, which we must ensure happens as swiftly as possible. For how much longer will the international community tolerate the deliberate targeting of hospitals by Russian military aircraft, which have now hit more than 30 hospitals in Syria? Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, but its shocking behaviour is an affront to international order and is almost certainly a war crime.

Finally, I want strongly to support what was said about human rights, and about the two key pieces of legislation in that respect in the Queen’s Speech, by the former Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). Let me just make it clear that ISIL will be relatively easily defeated militarily, but 90% of any defeat will be an ideological defeat, and that will be very much more difficult to achieve. We must show the same abhorrence of Islamophobia as we show of anti-Semitism.

4.45 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Lab): May I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) on an excellent maiden speech? I am sure that Members from all parts of the House would agree that it was a great way for him to start his parliamentary career.

I want to focus my remarks on the Bus Services Bill, which includes measures that are welcome and have long been argued for by political leaders in Greater Manchester. However, the Bill also contains serious weaknesses that expose how this Tory Government’s belief in “private good, public bad” acts against the public interest and highlights the need for a fair, not flawed, devolution deal. I will expand on that later. It is frankly a scandal that successive Governments, including the last Labour Government, failed to give us the same powers to regulate bus services as there are in London; for decades, the people of Greater Manchester have been denied the right to have a fully integrated public transport system because of free market ideology and vested interests. Of course, we are very proud of our Metrolink light rail system in Greater Manchester, which was developed as a result of the vision of local council leaders, often in the face of opposition from the Department for Transport. But the financial arrangements that have made that possible are also flawed, with the result being excessive fares, too many areas still without a service and a high debt burden.

The people of Greater Manchester want and deserve a world-class public transport system that is accessible, reliable and affordable. That is essential for not only jobs and growth, but our environment and quality of life. Congestion is a scourge of everyday life, with traffic jams, tailbacks and unacceptable delays the norm for motorists, especially during the rush hour. Our unregulated bus services and inadequate tram and train network do not offer a viable or attractive option for too many people. Although the new powers are welcome, we also need a new transport fund on a par with that in London, so that we, too, can offer subsidised services to communities that do not have adequate connectivity, develop orbital schemes around Greater Manchester and enhance access to local hospitals. We should not be penalised for rejecting congestion charging—that was and is the settled democratic will of the people of Greater Manchester.

I believe five radical changes are necessary: a price freeze for bus and Metrolink fares at least until 2020; the development of a Transport for Greater Manchester connect card and smart ticketing system, so that all tickets can be used on buses, trams and local trains; a new transport fund on a par with that for London to support non-profitable routes for isolated communities, deliver easier access to hospital appointments and prioritise new orbital routes around Greater Manchester; reduced fares for young people, to support travel to study, apprenticeships and work; and a publicly owned, publicly controlled Greater Manchester bus company that could bid for some or all franchises. That fifth change is prohibited by the Bill, which is why I am today urging the Labour Front-Bench team to move amendments to remove this prohibition. If that proves unsuccessful, I will work with colleagues in Greater Manchester to explore the possibility of developing a not-for-profit, co-operative organisation as an alternative.

I believe the vast majority of people feel we should have a publicly owned, publicly controlled public transport system. Public transport should be operated for the public good and in the public interest. Real devolution would allow Greater Manchester to choose our own system. That is why Labour must seek to amend this Bill. If that proves unsuccessful, we in Greater Manchester should explore the not-for-profit, co-operative option.

4.49 pm

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): As one of those who helped to secure the EU referendum in the last Parliament, in opposition at the time to the leaderships of political parties across the House, I very much welcome the EU referendum. It represents a seminal moment in our history; it allows us the opportunity to lance the boil of our strained relationship with the EU. If we vote to remain, we need to roll up our sleeves and make the EU work better for us all. If we vote to leave, I suggest that we need to maximise the potential of what is before us.

It is also a seminal point in another respect: the result will tell us much about how we see ourselves and our place in the world. Do we have the confidence to seek a better future outside the EU? I take issue with the view of Opposition Front Benchers that we see ourselves as lacking in confidence—a 7-stone weakling being kicked about on the beach. I take quite the opposite view: we are a confident nation. I happen to believe that we could do so much better if we left the EU. That contradicts, in many respects, the view of the remain camp.

**Mr MacNeil:** The Eurosceptic side really fear a federal Europe, whereas from our perspective, a federal Britain would be a massive step forward. That shows the disparity between the British Union and the European Union, certainly from an SNP perspective.

**Mr Baron:** The one thing I share with the SNP is the view that “Project Fear” was the wrong approach at the last referendum. We should have painted a much more
positive view of the Union. That is my point here. I think that we can paint a very positive picture of what would happen if we left the EU.

I suggest that it is remaining in the EU—an organisation mired in uncompetitiveness, low growth and high unemployment, with youth unemployment reaching 50% in some countries—that presents the greater danger. The EU’s vaunting project of monetary union has proved to be a disaster. It has forced austerity on countries that really should not have been in that position. Furthermore, its pursuit of fiscal union in defence of the euro bodes ill for the future. Voting in is not a static option.

We have heard the merchants of doom and gloom before. Some may remember that it was broadly the same group of people who predicted absolute disaster if we did not join the euro. The same people are now predicting the very same if we leave. One can go back to those forecasts. The last time the Bank of England predicted a negative economic shock prior to the latest estimate of “Project Fear” was when we were considering leaving the exchange rate mechanism. It transpired that we had a very long period of economic growth following our exit from the ERM. That goes to show that forecasts from the establishment and from great and good bodies are not always up to the mark.

The criticism that is often levelled against us is that we cannot paint a picture of what it would be like if we left the EU. We are told that we have no idea. Of course there will be an element of uncertainty if we leave an organisation like the EU, but we must remember that we are a key player in global diplomacy and security. Britain is a member of more international organisations, including having a permanent seat at the United Nations, than any other country. This is not retrenchment; it is embracing a faster growing world when the EU is becoming increasingly stuck in the global economic slow lane.

In the two minutes that remain, let me paint very briefly the picture that I see of what would happen if we were to leave. We would be able to negotiate trade treaties for ourselves, which we cannot do at the moment. Our hands are tied by the EU, which has to accommodate the special interests of 28 members. That means that British firms and workers are missing out on the benefits of potential trade deals with faster growing parts of the world. There are myriad trade opportunities for Britain in the wider world, especially with the faster growing economies outside the EU. Leaving the EU would allow us to take advantage of them.

There is concern that there would be a fall-off in trade if we were to leave. Again, that does not stack up. We run a massive trade deficit with the EU. It is in its interest to pursue trade with us. Trade will continue, as it always has. We trade with Europe, not with the EU. Even if the EU did try to cut up rough, the World Trade Organisation, which has teeth, would not allow tariffs above most favoured nation status tariffs. In other words, the US tariff with the US would prevail—and we could lose that in a week or less in a currency swing.

I suggest there would be greater prosperity. Small and medium-sized enterprises are bound to apply EU regulations, but only 5% of businesses actually export to the EU. How many more people could they employ if they were freed from the dead weight of irrelevant EU regulations?

On immigration, we pursue a discriminatory policy at the moment: we say no to the rest of the world, but yes to the EU. That is not fair. The Australians have a points system. Let us treat everybody fairly, and let us benefit from the skills around the world. However, we cannot do that at the moment.

Then there is the £10 billion that we could spend if we left the EU—that is, the difference between the £19 billion we send to the EU and the £9 billion that comes back by way of various grants. We would be £10 billion up. What could we spend that on? Many things.

This also comes down to sovereignty. However, to conclude, I would say that we put a mirror up to ourselves when we vote on 23 June. Let us get out.

4.55 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): There were a number of things I wanted to say, but time is limited. However, there are one or two omissions from the Queen’s Speech. Members will recall the debates we have had over the last few months about women’s pensions, and I thought there would be something in the Queen’s Speech to start to address the anomaly on that issue. As many Members in this Chamber know, some women feel they are being discriminated against, and the Queen’s Speech should have addressed that.

A campaign is also going on at the moment over the cuts to pharmacies in the national health service budget. Those cuts could result in some local pharmacies closing—so much for the Government talking about local democracy and involving local people. There is also the issue of student nurses and their bursaries. The bulk of student nurses are women—again, it appears that women are being discriminated against.

On the European situation, I was one of those who campaigned against going into Europe in 1975. I did that for a lot of good reasons. At the time, most people in the labour movement saw Europe as a market that had no benefits—certainly for the trade union movement. We had campaigns across Coventry. Trade union leaders came to Coventry and said, “If you go in, you won’t get out.” Then, of course, we had the Delors speech about social justice and social policies being introduced in Europe. That changed the attitude of the labour movement and the Labour party.

If we were going to have a referendum, we should have had one when we talked about the single market. As everybody knows, if there is a single market, there is a single bank and a single currency, whichever way we argue it. The Government at the time said they were going to change the agricultural policy, but, unfortunately, they did not do that. They signed us up to the single market, and they boasted about the rebate they got. It was a very interesting scenario. There was another occasion when we should have had a referendum—in fact, there was a chance of one—and that was Maastricht.

I welcome the fact that we are now having a referendum, but we can see that there have been lost opportunities.

Like a number of people, I have changed my mind, and I have explained why before, but let me give an example of why. Nissan was interested in investing in Coventry; it was going to locate its car plant there. However, when it discovered that there was no regional aid and no leverage into Europe at that time, it located in Sunderland. I wish the people in Sunderland well,
because Nissan has done well there. That is a good example of how people can change their minds when they are faced with the realities.

One reason that a lot of people—particularly some in the Conservative party, but not all—want to pull out of Europe is red tape. However, when we ask them to try to define it, the only thing they can come up with is health and safety or labour relations; they do not come up with any other reasons. In fact, the Leader of the House gave the game away about a month ago in a television interview, when he was pointedly asked, “What do you mean by red tape?” He blurted out, “Health and safety.” This is one of the reasons why we should certainly remain in Europe. It has been suggested that the world will be lovely outside Europe. However, people who argue that tariffs in the United States would be only 3% are wrong. We would find that when we traded with the United States, and particularly with the South American market, we paid a higher tariff. Equally, we would pay higher tariffs outside Europe but be expected to conform to the rules and regulations of Europe. These are the hard facts of life.

With the referendum only one month away, I support the right of people in Coventry to have their say, as I have indicated, but must clearly highlight the fact that the hard-won rights of the workplace are at risk—paid leave, for example. Anti-discrimination laws, jobs growth and our place in the world are at stake. We have two universities in my constituency that rely heavily on EU membership. European academics, scientists, technicians and students all play a leading part in Coventry.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

5 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): It is a pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) on taking his seat, and to endorse the tribute he paid to his predecessor. Huw Irranca-Davies is living proof of the fact that one can be a genuinely nice guy and still succeed in politics, and we will miss him.

Members of Select Committees are as divided as any other groups on the question of membership of the European Union, and so it should go without saying that in my remarks on this subject today I am speaking solely for myself. My concern is that the fixation of the European Union on creating a single European defence and foreign policy may make future conflict more likely rather than less. So why has NATO proved to be the most successful military alliance in history? The answer is clear: it is the deterrent effect of United States membership. Taken together with article 5 of the NATO charter, according to which an attack on any member country will be considered an attack on them all, this means that any would-be aggressor must face the prospect of war with the world’s most powerful state, the United States, right from the outset. If Germany had faced that prospect in 1914, not 1917, or in 1939, not late 1941, who knows but that those wars might not have begun, and all that suffering might have been avoided?

In order reliably to deter, collective security must combine adequate power with the virtual certainty that it will be brought into action if triggered by an act of aggression. On both grounds, NATO succeeds, and the European Union fails, as a collective security organisation. Since the US does not belong to the EU, the latter can muster only a fraction of NATO’s deterrent military power. Nor can there be any certainty that the US will respond to an attack involving EU member states outside the north Atlantic alliance. By trying to create its own foreign policy and its own military forces—which on typical European levels of defence investment will remain modest indefinitely—the EU risks reverting to the uncertainties of the pre-NATO era. The NATO guarantee is a solemn commitment to be willing to start world war three on behalf of a member country facing attack or invasion. NATO membership must not be proffered lightly nor extended to countries on behalf of which article 5 of its charter is simply not credible. Where security is concerned, it is dangerous folly to give promises and guarantees that we are in no position to fulfil, and the EU needs to be particularly careful in pursuing a foreign policy that gives promises of that sort.

In terms of deterring an external threat, the EU adds nothing to the exemplary role discharged by NATO. As for the threat of EU members attacking each other, there is certainly no risk of their going to war once again with each other as long as they remain free, democratic and constitutional. That is because constitutional democracies do not attack one another; instead, wars break out between dictatorships and other dictatorships, or between dictatorships and democracies.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Is it not absurd to suggest that peace in Europe might be destabilised by the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU? The fact is that before we became a member in 1973, Europe had managed for 28 years not to go to war with itself.

Dr Lewis: Indeed, and my hon. Friend anticipates a point I was just about to make. Looking at the internal threat, one sees not the slightest chance of members of the EU going to war with each other as long as they remain democratic and constitutional, but if they lose that element of popular democracy in their constitutions, all bets are off.

We heard warnings today about the rise of the far right in some EU member countries. Why is the far right—the extreme anti-immigration right—on the rise? It is on the rise because people feel that they are being disfranchised to some extent and the fate of their country is being decided instead by people whom they did not elect to power and whom they cannot remove. By trying to build a supranational state in Europe in the absence of a democratic mandate, the EU runs the risk of sowing the seeds of precisely the sort of conflict it seeks to abolish.

I know that in this Chamber today more voices have been raised in favour of remain than of leave, but I am not disheartened because I know that all those people campaigning to leave are out there, at the grassroots level, ensuring that when independence day comes on 23 June, the right decision will be taken by the majority of the British people.

5.7 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I am always reluctant to disagree with the Chairman of the Defence Committee, and on this occasion I could not agree with
him more profoundly. I do agree that our defence and security policies must embody the values that they are established to defend. There is no trade-off to be made between security and the values and principles on which a free and open political society is based. On that, we can agree. I think we can agree too that only a defence policy governed by rules established in laws will retain integrity and credibility in the fluid and fickle world of international relations in which we are now mired.

I was disappointed that an opportunity was missed in the Queen's Speech to provide clarity, particularly on the legal consequences of the Government's new policy on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, especially given that in September last year the Prime Minister announced that a UAV had been used for the targeted killing outside armed conflict of a British citizen who had been fighting for Daesh. Since then, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has issued a report calling on the Government to clarify the legal basis for using UAVs in that way. A rebuttal to the Joint Committee's findings was rushed out by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and his colleague Sean Augey, which criticised aspects of the legal analysis and accused the Committee of adopting “a blunt approach” to the application to drone—I hate that word; UAV—strikes abroad. Clearly opinion is divided, and I feel the opportunity was missed in the Queen's Speech to disperse the fog of law in relation to our defence.

Equally, in the 2015 strategic defence and security review, the Government announced a £178 billion investment in arms and equipment, in part to compensate for the dire budget cuts imposed five years earlier, particularly their cutting of the RAF Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft.

Instead of going to an open contract to replace the Nimrod with a competitive tender, the Government agreed to purchase nine Poseidon P-8 aircraft from the US-based firm Boeing in a deal worth £2 billion. I felt that this was a clear snub to the UK aerospace industry, for which I know Government Members, like me, share a huge respect. The industry employs 80,000 people and contributes £9 billion annually to the UK economy.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Moon: I will certainly give way to someone who shares my love of the aeronautics industry.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I wholly support what the hon. Lady says about the British defence industry, but I was the Minister at the time involved in the decision on the Nimrod MRA4. It was £750 million over budget, nine years late and still not fit for purpose. I am afraid the project had to be scrapped, but we should have replaced it.

Mrs Moon: I totally disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that issue, but I want to move on to the P-8. The MOD has repeatedly evaded all my attempts to obtain information on the P-8 contract. How many UK jobs will be generated by that contract in either manufacturing or support? No answer. Will the P-8 be capable of carrying British torpedoes or sonar buoys? No answer. Standards of ministerial answers to parliamentary questions have deteriorated desperately, and Members of Parliament, constituents and UK business and industry have been left in the dark.

For too long the MOD has used commercial confidentiality to hide the true cost to UK industry and jobs of its single source contracting. The Single Source Regulations Office has revealed that the MOD's use of non-competitive defence procurement represented 53% of the value of new contracts in 2014-15. Approximately £8.3 billion was spent on single source contracts, and this figure is set to rise. How many of those companies are non-UK? How many have included no offset work to UK companies? The House, the public and our defence industries deserve to know.

Finally, I have to raise a campaign I feel passionately about. Again, I am disappointed that it was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. The campaign calls for veterans and reservists to be included in the census. It is essential that we know how many veterans we have and where they are. How are we to put in place an effective response to the community covenant if we do not know how many veterans we have in each of our constituencies?

It is a great pity that the Government reneged on their promise to introduce a war powers Act.

I will work closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) to make sure that Bridgend does not lose valuable jobs, particularly those in the Ford factory, where his constituents and mine work. Ford Bridgend won a bid against Romanian, Spanish and German factories to build the new Dragon engine in Wales. That is what Europe does for us.

5.13 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I spent 20 years as a human rights lawyer, and for much of that time I represented the Prison Service. I remember when I was young and keen and thought I was at the cutting edge of human rights law. With hindsight, cases came and went and not a lot changed. Human rights law has not of itself reformed prisons, although it did produce a lot of work for lawyers.

What has changed is the spotlight shone on prisons by the leadership shown by the Prime Minister in his speech in February—incidentally, the first speech by a Prime Minister on prisons in my working lifetime—the reforming zeal of the Secretary of State, the family-centred focus of the prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), and the determination of the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice that women prisoners and their children should not be left behind. The Department is showing bravery in getting rid of barriers both physical, in the form of old prisons, and structural, such as the surely now outdated idea of categorisation. The vision is a compassionate one, but it is founded on sound Conservative principles. Prisoners are our neighbours. It is to our communities that they return on release and in which about half of them reoffend during their first year out of prison. It is in all of our interests that we deal with this issue. It is too expensive, both financially and emotionally, to throw away the key.

Is this the moment for those of us who care about prison reform to break out the hooch? Sadly not. There is no doubt that prisons are more dangerous places today than they have been for many years. The Justice Committee, on which I am honoured to serve, recently published a report that makes clear the extent of the problem: assaults are up by 20%, suicides and
murders are up substantially; and the number of arson attacks—think how frightening a fire is in prison—is up by 57%.

The Secretary of State’s response to our report was characteristically robust; he acknowledges the extent of the problem and has found extra money to deal with aspects of it. He will ensure that, in future, the figures we really need to measure progress—such as the number of hours spent out of a cell during the day—are made available to us.

There are two major obstacles to reform. First, as identified by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the numbers of those imprisoned are impeding progress. Too many inmates and too few staff mean that limited time can be given to supervision, and even delivering a prisoner to a classroom door is often too difficult. Prisoners are put in cells with people who have the same extremist views or who are from the same gang, which might make their management easier but does nothing for their rehabilitation.

Having more prison officers will help, but they will have to be good ones. The Ministry of Justice is doing its best, and there has been a net increase of 530 officers since the last recruitment push. Experienced staff take years of training, however, and greater efforts must be made to retain them.

What would really help is a push on diversion from prison. The sad, rather than the merely bad, and the vast majority of women and young adults coming up for sentence should never go through the prison gates. A judicial working group is looking at models of problem-solving courts, where contact between a judge and those they sentence is regular, and multiple organisations work together on rehabilitation. Trials of those courts must go ahead as soon as possible. The Justice Committee saw some excellent examples when we visited the States recently. They are not easy options for offenders; it is much harder to give up substance abuse or a pattern of behaviour than to spend time in a cell. Restorative justice may have a role to play, and release on temporary licence certainly does.

The second major obstacle to reform is the exponential increase in the use of new psychoactive substances, which make an already difficult cohort of prisoners almost impossible to manage. This stuff should not be confused with cannabis. I was recently told about an incident where a prisoner had been smoking spice. He became violent and four officers went into the cell to help. All four of them had to be hospitalised because of secondary inhalation. These drugs are dangerous and addictive and they induce psychosis. They have, sadly, become the currency of choice in prisons. The criminalisation of their possession, which comes into force this week, will help, but real resources need to be put into using our world-leading testing techniques and searching everyone often, if we are serious about holding back the tidal wave of these drugs.

In summary, the Government’s reforming policies are brave and desperately needed.
Embarking on a course of so-called reform is never a very good idea unless we have a good idea about what we want to do and why we want to do it. Since the UK Government announced that they intended to bring forward a Bill of Rights in the Queen’s Speech last year, we have seen a great deal of confusion in the Government about what they want to do. The Justice Secretary has appeared before parliamentary Committees several times to try to explain why they are pursuing a path of so-called reform of the Human Rights Act: sometimes his position seems to be informed by his Euroscepticism; sometimes he talks of giving powers to British judges rather than to European ones; and sometimes he says that we only need to tweak the Human Rights Act.

Both he and his junior Minister, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), whom I see on the Front Bench, have told us that they wish to stay in the European convention on human rights, but the Home Secretary recently gave a speech in which, according to my reading, she was pretty clear that she thought we should leave it.

I suggest that this confusion and lack of clarity do not bode well for the Government’s plans on human rights, but the Scottish Parliament will be happy to ride to the rescue. In all three separate devolution arrangements, the Human Rights Act is a matter reserved for the Westminster Government, but human rights themselves are not so reserved.

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has made it very clear that there is absolutely no question of such consent being given. The reason consent would have to be given is the Sewel convention, which has now found statutory form in section 2 of the new Scotland Act 2016. On 11 November 2014, the Scottish Parliament, as then constituted, voted by 100 votes to 10 in favour of a motion supporting the Human Rights Act and expressing confidence in it.

I believe that the Northern Ireland Assembly passed a similar vote of confidence in the Human Rights Act in June 2015. It recognised the “vital importance” of the Act to the Good Friday agreement, which we should never overlook. The National Assembly for Wales also passed a motion with overwhelming support in November, stating that “we oppose any attempt to repeal the Human Rights Act”.

I believe that the Welsh First Minister has argued that scrapping it would make the UK “look like a banana republic.”

I could not have put it better myself.

Since the Scottish Parliament last gave its overwhelming backing to the Human Rights Act, there has been an election in Scotland, which was won by the Scottish National party. The fact remains that in the new Scottish Parliament the parties that support the Human Rights Act far outweigh those that do not, but we are not sure of the position of the Scottish Conservatives. Their leader, Ruth Davidson, recently gave an interview to the Pink News, a paper dear to my heart and hers, in which she said she opposed the Home Secretary’s plans to withdraw from the European convention on human rights. However, Ruth Davidson has as yet been silent on the repeal of the Act.

During the election in Scotland the Scottish Tories took great care to distance themselves from this Government—they did not even mention the Conservative party on their leaflets. But Ruth Davidson will not be able to duck the issue forever: my colleague Ben Macpherson, the new SNP MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith, has lodged a parliamentary motion in the Scottish Parliament calling on all MSPs to make it clear that the new Scottish Parliament will refuse consent to repeal the Human Rights Act. It is time for the Ruth Davidson party to get off the fence. But even if she ends up siding with her colleagues here—as she usually does, when push comes to shove—the overwhelming majority of Members of Scottish Parliament want to keep the Human Rights Act and will keep it for the whole United Kingdom.

5.26 pm

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The good news is that the Scottish Tories doubled their representation in the Scottish Parliament. The Tories are coming, so the SNP had better watch out—the only non-socialist party in Scotland is on the march.

Some have said that this Queen’s Speech is a bit thin. I personally take the view that it is much better that the Government limit their activities and do less but do it well, rather than trying to rush through a whole load of ill-thought-out measures. I particularly welcome the proposal to give local authorities the power to retain their business rates, and the Investigatory Powers Bill.

I also very much support what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) said about prisons. The hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) and I served as prison officers in Dartmoor for three days, as a consequence of which I changed my view. I used to be a “lock ’em up and throw away the key” man, but then I found that we were spending £25,000 per prisoner a year on just locking up people who learn nothing. That is wrong, and this Government are absolutely right to try to bring education into our prisons.

In the short time available to me, I will concentrate on four issues: the proposal to speed up the adoption process, the introduction of further measures to prevent radicalisation, defence and, inevitably, Europe. I welcome the adoption measures in principle, and understand that social services are caught between a rock and a hard place. But I have myself witnessed Surrey County Council’s behaviour in respect of two young people in my constituency. The council had made up its mind to remove the children from a couple. Each was represented by a different law firm, whose narrow interest was alleged to be the individual client and not the couple. I was threatened with contempt proceedings for having had the temerity to intervene on behalf of my constituents, and the social worker wrote that for the parents to provide good care was not “good enough”. If half the energy expended by Surrey Council on removing those children from their parents had been invested in helping them, the outcome might have been better all round. I am encouraged by my conversation with the Minister for Children and Families earlier this afternoon. I think he understands the problem.

On radicalisation, the principal threat we face is not generic terrorism. We have to be honest about this; the threat is specifically Islamic fundamentalism. That is
what threatens our country. Young people brought up in Britain and taught in our schools are nevertheless being indoctrinated by Islamic fundamentalists and persuaded to engage in acts of medieval barbarity, in the name of Islam, beyond the understanding of the British people. The principal onus to root out that evil must therefore rest on the Muslim community. I will wait to see what the Government produce in the way of legislation before making a final judgment. The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) set out some of the challenges that the Government will face in defining extremism.

Earlier this year, the Government mooted a proposal that any group that met in an out-of-school setting for more than six hours a week should have to register with Ofsted. Although it is vital that the Government take action against those people who wish to do harm to our society, regulating groups such as Sunday schools is clearly absurd. It would place a huge administrative burden on such groups, would severely damage volunteering and would be a serious infringement of personal liberty and freedom of association. Furthermore, any such extremist groups simply would not register, or, given the arbitrary nature of a six-hour figure, would divide their teaching into two three-hour groups a week. This is unworkable and a danger to our freedoms.

On the wider issue, it would be perverse in the extreme if, in order to manage extremist Muslims who are bent on our destruction and whom we have allowed to settle in the country, the Government were to impose severe restrictions on those practising the state religion of Christianity, which espouses turning the other cheek and love for thy neighbour. I believe that Christian society here is under threat. It was reported in the paper today that only 52% of people regard themselves as Christian, and we are in danger of creating a vacuum that will be filled by others.

Dr Julian Lewis: I have never been able to document this, but I remember my father telling me—coming as we do from a Jewish background—that when Polish émigrés who settled here at the end of the second world war began, in certain enclaves, to bring some of the anti-Semitic traditions from their homeland of the past to our homeland of the present, the Labour Government of the day made a very firm statement about that. There was nothing discriminatory about focusing on that particular problem; we must focus on the problem where the totalitarian doctrine is being applied.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I am grateful, as ever, to my right hon. Friend. I raised with the Foreign Secretary the issue of how the Government calculate defence expenditure, and I entirely accept that that expenditure fits with NATO guidelines. However, we have only met that 2% target by shifting money from other Departments into defence, which I do not think is the way to proceed. I hope that the Prime Minister readily acknowledge that Britain can survive outside the EU? What has changed? We prospered well enough in the glorious 1950s under the Macmillan Conservative Government—"you’ve never had it so good"—and people were able to move around the continent for work, as my father did in the mid-1950s, when he weekly commuted to Hamburg where he established the Johnson Wax company in Germany. These fears are being raised deliberately to frighten the British people. We should have confidence in our ability to exit the EU, and head for the sunlit uplands where we can prosper as an independent nation on our own.

5.32 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It might have been better for the current EU debate if the Government had taken some time to sketch out the vision for Europe of those Tories who are committed to remaining in the EU, but I guess that could not happen because this is a cobbled together programme—a coalition Queen’s Speech of pro and anti-European Tories, and those who are pro and anti the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said that economic security always comes first, which is obviously why he has plunged us into a referendum, with the Government tearing itself apart while he is running around the country telling anyone who will listen about the catastrophic economic consequences of leaving. This is an “on balance” decision and choice between two visions. One is where we blame other Europeans for all our ills, conjure up an image of a return to an idyllic 1950s, and have to accept—without evidence—that alone we can be a land of milk and honey. Then there is the reality for our car industry, our food and drink manufacturers, and science and innovation budgets, and a future where our economic prosperity is intrinsically linked to our membership of the European Union. I have come to the conclusion that the interests of our children and grandchildren lie in being part of that successful trading bloc, and that that is also the best way to guarantee many other rights and freedoms.

However, it does not have to be an inflexible Union that is blind to new concerns. It needs more democracy and a better balance between the interests of the domestic state and the wider Union. A significant influx of people into parts of this country can put a strain on school places and other services. The solution is a European migration fund, so that those areas receive additional funding to help them cope with added pressures.

On the proposed Bill of Rights, it is hard not to see yet another measure to appease the Prime Minister’s enemies. We already have the Human Rights Act 1998, based on a convention drawn up by British lawyers and adjudicated on in our courts. What rights do we currently have that the Government want us to lose? If there is to be a focus on human rights, what about a bit more respect for the rights of disabled people? What about a measure that acknowledges the unfair assessment arrangements currently depriving them of the payments they rightly deserve and the lack of legal aid to challenge those decisions at tribunals? What about some action to address the rights of those being denied access to fertility
services because of the bungled reorganisation of the NHS? Why are there no national standards for IVF in England and Wales? Why do Ministers stand by while clinical commissioning groups exclude couples on the basis of invented moral criteria and ignore National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on IVF treatment? What about the human rights of those couples? What about the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign? What about their rights? How about a signal from the Government that they are going to right that wrong?

The Children and Social Work Bill is another mish-mash of what now passes for Tory policy. We see some welcome measures, with a promised covenant for care leavers. That ought to be applauded, because this is one group who suffer almost as much from the intervention of the state as they do from the circumstances that led to them being brought into care. They are deprived of education and are more likely to end up in prison or in receipt of psychiatric care. As welcome as the changes are, however, they are accompanied by changes to the regulation and training of social workers. How many attempts will the Government need before they think they have got this right? We will not get better social work by trying to reduce social workers to the status of some kind of functional technicians carrying around a manual of dos and don’ts based on the latest ministerial fantasies. On adoption, of course, we had a definitive piece of legislation last year, but here we are in Foster Care Fortnight back with another bite at the cherry in an effort to make the courts do the Government’s bidding.

On the Investigatory Powers Bill, we need a modern framework of power available to the police and security services, but we will not protect our country by turning it into a surveillance state. On the Policing and Crime Bill, why do police and crime commissioners not look at it into a surveillance state. On the Policing and Crime services, but we will not protect our country by turning

5.38 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I am delighted to take advantage of this debate to talk about one of the issues raised in the Gracious Speech: reforms to our prison system. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who spoke so eloquently earlier, I welcome the reforms that will ensure that individuals have an opportunity for a second chance; that give prison governors unprecedented freedom; that ensure that prisoners receive a better education; and that will provide improved mental health care to all individuals in the criminal justice system. Our prison system has long suffered from high numbers of repeat offenders. I firmly believe that if we are to change that, rehabilitation must be improved. We cannot allow offenders to get stuck in a constant cycle of feeling there are few options available to them but to reoffend once they have been released.

I would like to thank the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who is the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. She afforded me the opportunity to be the rapporteur on mental health to the Joint Committee. As part of that role, I have been studying the recent report released by Lord Harris on the self-inflicted death of prisoners aged 18 to 24. We are seeing a worrying rise in levels of suicide and self-harm in prisons, in particular among young adult males. This is tragic. Prison should be a place of punishment, but we need to care for the mental health of those who cannot look after themselves.

I recently visited a local prison and saw the challenges facing the prison system. Anyone who visits a prison can rest assured it is not a holiday—not a three-meal-a-day place that is free. Sadly, a young man was recently found dead in his cell in the prison I visited. An inquiry found that neglect as a result of systematic failings had contributed to his death, including a lack of access to medical help. This is so sad and raises questions about what more we should be doing to help individuals in these situations.

From my research, I have been shocked by the high levels of violence in the system. Despite all the efforts, a gang culture still operates in prisons, with a hierarchy among those in the system. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), I recognise that part of the problem is the availability of legal highs. Despite efforts by prison wardens, the challenge of preventing these drugs from entering the prison system is proving incredibly difficult. For me, a clear way of tackling the problem is to ensure good, strong leadership in our prisons, so I welcome the creation of reform prisons. Led by governors, these will drive a revolution in education, training, healthcare and security for prisoners.

We must start with the basics and do all we can to change the environment within the prison system. Instead of allowing prisoners to focus on the negatives, let us reverse the cycle and provide them with a positive sense of purpose. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), I think we need improvements in education and careers advice so that prisoners can learn skills that could bring them major opportunities in the future.

The mental state of prisoners can be extremely difficult to manage. For many, the realisation that they will be spending years behind bars is overwhelming. Of course they should not have committed the crime in the first place, but if we can use prison as an opportunity to support them back into playing a positive role in society, surely it must be a good thing.

Today, just one in six people leave prison with an education or training placement. Last year, the Prison Reform Trust issued figures showing that 47% of prisoners had no qualifications. Is it any wonder they reoffend, given the lack of opportunities available to them on their release? It is easy for individuals to get stuck in that cycle when they feel that their opportunities when they are released are extremely limited. If we can break the cycle and provide them with skills that can be readily translated into the workplace outside prison, we can hopefully go a long way to improving an individual’s chances of rehabilitation and make it less likely that they will reoffend.

5.42 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The referendum on 23 June will shape this country’s future international relationships probably for the rest of the century. Whatever the result, there will be serious consequences. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee produced a report recently that concluded that...
“leaving the EU could result in the UK becoming a ‘smaller’ or less influential international player, especially in the context of increasing pressure from rising powers on the post-1945 global economic and governance frameworks.”

We see those rising powers in Asia. The Americans have just agreed to sell arms to Vietnam. We see massive territorial disputes between China and almost all its neighbours: the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam. The rising powers of Asia, including south-east Asia, believe — rightly — that the global institutions that we did so much to shape in the immediate post-war period do not reflect the growing economic importance of other parts of the world. If we were to leave the EU, the British permanent seat on the UN Security Council, currently defended by our 27 EU partners, who see Britain and France as having worked together consistently in the UN system to protect European interests, would no longer be seen as protecting European interests. France will have that role, but we will not.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I was under the impression that the European Union was seeking to take France’s and the UK’s position in the Security Council and act as one, which is not how the hon. Gentleman presented it.

Mike Gapes: That impression is wrong. The reality is that there is general acceptance — at this moment, grudgingly in some cases — that the UK and France work collectively and consult their European partners within the UN system. That, however, might well be put in jeopardy if we leave. There would be big question-marks for the future.

We live in a world, as already mentioned in the debate, in which Russia is nationalist and assertive under the Putin regime and that led to the annexation and invasion of other territories — not just Ukraine, but Georgia — along with cyber-warfare against NATO members in the Baltic states. We have seen aircraft either going very close to or entering other countries’ air space and, of course, the buying of political parties, including the Front National in France. Then there is Putin’s propaganda channel, which pumps out every day through Freeview a completely distorted view of what is happening in many countries around the world, without ever referring to internal Russian problems. We see all that today.

Some countries around the world have started to take action on the money laundering and other activities going on from Russia. I hope that the Bills that will come out of this Queen’s Speech will lead to more robust action against the money that is being put into our financial institutions by the kleptocracy in Moscow.

I do not have time to refer to it in detail, but the Home Affairs Select Committee heard evidence from William Browder, of Hermitage Capital Investments, in the early part of this month. This needs to be looked at and studied by Members to understand how Sergei Magnitsky died in very strange circumstances. The United States Congress has, of course, passed the Magnitsky law. Interestingly, human rights was mentioned in this debate in the Foreign Office. The House of Representatives agreed a proposal for a Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act to extend the sanctions against people involved in corrupt activities to those who abuse human rights globally. That is an interesting concept. If for good reasons we are not prepared or do not wish to stop trade with certain countries, but nevertheless wish to target the individuals who carry out human rights abuses, perhaps we should consider a similar proposal in this Parliament.

Let me highlight one other area in the time left available to me. The European Union provides a democratic vision. The shadow Foreign Secretary referred to the peace and co-operation we have had since the second world war, but we also act as a magnet for those countries coming out of authoritarianism, out of fascism or out of domination under the Warsaw pact. We need to maintain these standards, but if Britain leaves the EU, we will weaken that process in our continent.

Let me start by talking about the international development project, which the Queen’s Speech commits us to once again. It is something that I wholeheartedly support not simply because of the moral obligation I believe we have as the fifth-richest nation in the world to help the poorest nations, but equally because, at the heart of it, is a true Conservative idea in the sense of investing for our own future and gaining from it. We benefit from the advantages of India, which now trades with us: a country into which we have poured much money over the years through the international development budget. Equally and fundamentally, however, there is the question of where the money is going in today’s hotspots around the world — although the term “hotspots” almost undermines the importance of what are areas of real human tragedy. We have put more money into, for instance, the refugee camps around Syria than all the other European nations added together.

We are talking about just 0.7% of income. People say to me, “That £12 billion should be spent on other things.” It should be spent on repairing the roads, on improving schools, or on providing more nurses.” While all those items are laudable, I would argue that if we were to say, “That is it: we are going to give in to those demands, and we are not going to spend 0.7% in those areas”, the money would in fact disappear, because it is a percentage of income.

As I said earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), the proportion of people who have gone into refugee camps in Lebanon is the equivalent of 17 million people entering the United Kingdom. I am not saying that 17 million people are coming into the United Kingdom, but that gives some impression of the pressures that that country is under in dealing with such a huge influx of refugees.

It is absolutely right that a country like the United Kingdom is there to support countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. That is not just an illusion: if we withdrew our support from them — along, perhaps, with other countries — they simply would not be able to cope with the refugee crisis that is enveloping
them, and the refugees would go to the next place. They would move across the Mediterranean into central Europe, as, indeed, hundreds of thousands already have.

That is not an argument about the European Union, but between 40% and 50% of our trade is with European countries, and if those economies are struggling because of the influx of refugees, they simply will not have the economic capability to trade with us as they do now. That will inevitably lead to a strain on our own economy and a reduction in our GDP. The 0.7% that we will have saved by not spending the money elsewhere will suddenly become a 0.81% reduction in GDP, so the money will still not exist, and we will have turned our back on the poorest people in the world. We should not do that, because we are a proud nation that stands up and helps.

That, I think, is at the heart of the security aspect of today’s debate. It is not just about security at home, but about how the consequences of events throughout the world affect us at home: about how they affect the people in our constituencies. The cost of living and the prices that they pay in our shops are directly related to what is going on in the world. We cannot turn our back on those issues.

In the brief time that I have left, let me simply say this. We know that the Chilcot report will be published on 6 July, and last weekend we read articles in The Sunday Times about what might or might not be in it. Mistakes were made with Iraq. Mistakes were made when we went into the war, mistakes were made during the war, and mistakes were made after the war. That is going to be addressed, but we must not allow the report to be the shield behind which we automatically hide when discussing whether to intervene in other areas and other conflicts. The world is a dangerous place.

Mention has been made today of Libya, and of the extent to which the intervention there may have been catastrophic, but let us not forget that Gaddafi was on his way to Benghazi to slaughter those people. The idea that that would not have happened if we had not intervened, and the idea that Daesh would not now be in Benghazi in a state that had been wiped out by Gaddafi’s troops—who would then have withdrawn—is fanciful. There is living proof of that in Syria, where we did not intervene. So I hope that after the Chilcot report has been published on 6 July, it will not be used as a shield to prevent us from doing things elsewhere in what is indeed a dangerous world.

5.53 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Let me say this, Madam Deputy Speaker:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness… it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us”.

While that may not be a fair analysis of the Queen’s Speech, I think that it provides, fairly and appropriately, a synopsis of today’s debate. By today’s, it has been lauded and applauded as a progressive programme for this country during the ensuing year, while for others it has been a huge letdown.

I shall focus my comments on security here at home. There is a bizarre amount of hypersensitivity surrounding the proposed Bill of Rights. It is as though a sacred text was going to be burned on the altar of populism in this country, but that is not the case. I wish that people would sit back and analyse the proposals and then assess whether they appropriately enshrine the underlying principles of the European convention on human rights. No one is asking that question, however. They are simply saying, “If it’s not the Human Rights Act, it’s not good enough for us.”

Will the proposals build on the European convention on human rights? We do not know, because we have not seen them, but we know from the contents of the Queen’s Speech debate that a commitment has been given that the ECHR will underpin all the proposals. In doing this, we should establish the supremacy of this Parliament and of our Supreme Court, as well as underpinning and expanding the principles and foundations from which we have benefitted not just in the past 50 or 60 years but over the centuries going back to the Magna Carta, which was built into the Bill of Rights, which was built into the convention, which was built into the Human Rights Act. If we can build upon those principles in that way, there will be nothing to fear. But let us see the proposals. Let us see what we are to be presented with.

I look forward to scrutinising the criminal finances Bill. Many Members will know that the scourges of terrorism and paramilitarism still exist to this day in Northern Ireland, and that many people are involved in the criminality that funds such terrorism. I remember a prominent paramilitary in my own constituency—as a result of his involvement in such pursuits, he is no longer with us—who used to pay a premium for bookies’ docket to justify the wads of cash that he obtained from his drug dealing. I want to see legislation that will outlaw that kind of money laundering and the pursuit of crime that supports terrorism in our country.

The biggest disappointment of this section of the Queen’s Speech is the failure categorically to refuse to introduce proposals on the registration of out-of-school educational settings. I have read with interest the counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill, and the Home Secretary knows my views on the fact that it will not apply to Northern Ireland. Given the extremism that we have faced, that is a missed opportunity. In Westminster Hall, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) proposed that we should use the Disclosure and Barring Service for this purpose. That was a good, appropriate proposal and I am glad to see that it forms part of the Gracious Speech and the Government’s plans.

However, I would love to know whether the proposed regime will include an Ofsted appointment and the regulation of out-of-school educational settings. If it will, it will breach the Conservative party’s manifesto commitment to reject any sweeping authoritarian measures that would threaten the hard-won freedoms in this country. It would be far too wide and far too shallow, when, in response to extremism, we need a measure that is deep and narrowly focused.

I would like to hear, in response to the debate today, that disaggregation will be considered. We know the fears that an accumulation of six hours could easily be amassed in a church setting—across scouts, Sunday school and going to church itself, alongside other ancillary activities. Will the Government please take the opportunity to rule that out today and to assure us that we will be able to enjoy the hard-won freedoms that we have in the Human Rights Act and in the proposed Bill of Rights, now and in the future?
5.59 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I will not follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) in quoting from a novel because, given what I am about to say, it would have to be “Crime and Punishment”, which might take quite a long time. However, I agree with what he said about the Bill of Rights to the extent that we must have a careful and considered debate on the matter. It is not something that should be rushed. These are important matters, and our international reputation in the field of human rights is a precious thing, as is our reputation for safeguarding the rule of law. It is legitimate to look at how best we can best achieve that in the current context. The Government are doing that in a calm way, and I have complete faith that the Lord Chancellor will take it forward in a considered manner.

I want briefly to touch on my old stamping ground of local government. I welcome the proposals in the Queen’s Speech relating to local government and planning. The proposal for 100% retention of business rates is one for which many of us have long argued. If I may take a modest measure of pride, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) and I were proud when we were Ministers to bring forward partial business rate retention in the Local Government Finance Act 2012. We always thought that it was the first step along the road to 100% retention. The new Bill will put that on the statute book, but we must now look at even further freedoms for local authorities to raise capital against the opportunities for income. Perhaps we might see the development of a large and significant municipal bond market to take infrastructure projects forward. The proposal is welcome.

Reform of planning law is also welcome, but I hope that we carefully consider the extent of reform of the promised compulsory purchase legislation. Practitioners in that field want a thorough and complete updating of the law, and I hope that Ministers will take that on board. A sensible way forward was offered in a Law Commission report from 2003, but it is yet to be put on the statute book.

Prison reform is important to the Justice Committee, which I have the honour of chairing. On previous days and today, several hon. Members touched on our report on prison safety, which highlights the fact that our prisons have got significantly less safe and are now more dangerous. The number of assaults has increased both among prisoners and on staff. Suicides, self-harm and fires have all also increased. That is unsustainable, and it is to the full credit of the Secretary of State for Justice that that was immediately recognised. His response in a letter to our Committee yesterday made no bones about the fact that he regards the figures as terrible and that immediate action must be taken. He has put money where his mouth is by assigning an additional £10 million to prison safety with immediate effect. He is to be commended for that, and I congratulate him on that approach.

However, we need to go further. The prison reform Bill and the concept of reformed prisons will change the legal framework to ensure that work is proper and meaningful and that our prisons have a real sense of rehabilitation, which is critical, but it cannot be achieved only if we get the numbers down, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said. It is unsustainable to have a prison population of 86,000. Officers are overstretched. Efforts have been made to recruit new staff, but they have in large measure been offset by resignations from the Prison Service, often of experienced staff. The National Offender Management Service needs to get a grip on staff retention.

If prisons are bursting at the seams, purposeful work and serious rehabilitation cannot happen. As anyone who has been involved in the criminal justice system will know—I was a barrister for 30 years—we must deal with the key factors, such as the lack of family ties, of educational attainment, of literacy, of employability and of stable homes. We have to grasp the nettle, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, and say to the more populist press that getting prison numbers down is actually desirable and a good goal from a Conservative perspective, never mind anything else.

The ultimate test of doing good by society is to ensure that there are fewer victims of crime, and if we reduce reoffending, there will be fewer victims. It is now possible to achieve that through better technology, such as tagging, and through much more serious alternatives to custody, such as much more imaginative use of release on temporary licence. All those things are real opportunities, and the prison reform Bill presents a chance to seize them. The Secretary of State has been bold in a good and long tradition of Conservative social reformers, and I wish him well in that process.

6.4 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): If a single phrase could define Whitehall’s ambition for the UK’s place in the world, it might be that the UK should “punch above its weight”. In 2010, the Prime Minister adopted that phrase when introducing that year’s strategic defence review, in which his Government inflicted swingeing manpower and equipment cuts on the armed forces, making sure that Britain’s biggest ever aircraft carriers would be without aircraft for years after entering service and scrapping the Nimrod replacement, ending any pretense that the UK could effectively monitor and respond to activity in its territorial waters. Despite creating such gaps in the UK’s defence capability, the Prime Minister made it clear that the armed forces were still expected to deliver Britain’s punch wherever the Government directed. It is no wonder that five years later, as demonstrated by the Ministry of Defence’s own survey, this Government have presided over a troubling decline in the morale of the armed forces.

The question of whether Britain can, or indeed should, punch above its weight militarily is addressed in just two phrases in Her Majesty’s speech. The first is: “Ministers will invest in Britain’s armed forces, honouring the military covenant and meeting the NATO commitment to spend 2% of national income on defence.”

The second states: “They will also act to secure the long-term future of Britain’s nuclear deterrent.”

Yet time and again we learn of decisions that demonstrate how difficult this Government find balancing such competing demands. From its introduction in 1988, the Army’s main armoured personnel carrier, the Warrior, has been known for faulty electrics and problems with its electrically controlled chain gun. However, it was not
until 2009 that Warrior gunners were authorised to use the mechanical safety catch, and in the interim there were an unknown number of undemanded firings and an unknown number of unintended casualties. Surely a Government aspiring to remain a member of the nuclear club, whatever the cost, must provide their front-line troops with a vehicle that is secure and safe to use if they are serious about investing in our armed forces.

Members from across the House participated in a campaign on compensation for service personnel affected by mesothelioma. That campaign was necessary only because of the Government telling victims already diagnosed that their diagnosis had missed an arbitrary cut-off date. Although the Minister involved is to be commended for responding positively, it raises questions about the Government’s approach to our armed forces that such a campaign should be necessary. Lately, I have been approached on behalf of RAF squippers who kept their colleagues safe by repairing vital life-saving equipment. There are strong indications that their working conditions have resulted in many of them dying from work-related cancers and chemically induced illnesses. I ask the Government to examine the evidence closely to see whether there is another injustice they should proactively address.

My point in raising these issues is, first, to recognise the unsatisfactory conditions in which our military personnel are too often asked to carry out the work that underpins Britain’s punching above its weight and, secondly, to demonstrate that decisions to spend large sums on any military programme are not without consequences. The commitment to Trident contained in the Queen’s Speech has profound implications for the rest of the military. In signs of what is to come, there have been yet more budget revisions that will see the true cost of the Trident replacement continuing to spiral out of control, yet the Government continue to talk of a programme that will be carefully managed and subject to value-for-money processes.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the alternative spend on military applications. The recent price tag of £204 billion is being placed on Trident, but the Queen’s Speech prioritised new transport methods and an opportunity to connect people on a wider basis. Would not another valuable way of spending some of that money be to invest in mass transit rather than in mass destruction?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is undeniably true that there are many and varied uses that that money could much better be put to.

If the decision is to proceed and the Government are committed to this programme, whatever the cost may be, Trident then becomes the one unstoppable expenditure commitment in the defence budget. Homework was set for all Members by the Minister for Defence Procurement before the recess, as we were all provided with a handout on nuclear weapons, a copy of which I have here, and asked to read it carefully. I did, and it demonstrated clearly to me that this Government are running out of credible arguments. It stated that to be effective, Britain’s nuclear weapons system needs to be “invulnerable and undetectable”. In this world of technological change, who can truly believe that that will remain the case for its planned lifetime? Already, we can see the emergence of technologies and detection systems that will make concealment very challenging. I know this House does not like to be reminded of it, but there is one place where it will always be possible to find one or more of these submarines, and that is on the Clyde, just a few miles from Scotland’s most densely populated city region. In extremis, if the one submarine that is on patrol is disabled, there is one other place from which the UK’s Trident missiles can be fired, and that is from these submarines on the Clyde. The homework factsheet also suggests that the UK could use Trident missiles on countries that may transfer nuclear technology to terrorists. Even to consider the use of Trident missiles for such a role highlights how inappropriate it is for the UK to attempt to remain a member of the nuclear club.

In trying to cover all bases, from counter-insurgency to projecting marine and air power across the globe to remaining an independent nuclear power, the danger is that the UK will perform none of those roles well. As we have seen, when the budget is squeezed, lives are put at risk by inadequate equipment for our front-line troops and poor standards of protection for those working in the background. Too much of the track record of recent conflicts speaks of ill-prepared interventions and badly planned and poorly resourced rebuilding programmes. The UK Government’s track record suggests that they should consider how better to punch within their weight, instead of continuing constantly to strive for overreach, which can only damage the UK’s reputation and cause the kind of unintended consequences we face in Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I am sorry, but I have to lower the limit to four minutes. I urge Members not to take interventions; otherwise, we will not get everybody in.

6.10 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate, and in doing so I want to reflect on the pageantry and ceremony of last week’s occasion. Having thought about how that tradition fits in with the wider issue of human rights, the lived experience of all the citizens of our country and the growing inequalities in our land, I confess to finding it all somewhat uncomfortable.

Last year was the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and the beginning of our human rights story. That milestone in civil and human rights laid the foundations for the Chartists, the Levellers, the suffragettes and other movements that have believed that citizens ought to be equal under the rule of law and protected from the exploitation of political power.

I find myself questioning how all those hard-won rights sit with the realities of the lives of the citizens of our country, because they are the reason we are here in this place. For example, cuts to legal aid are turning access to justice from a right for all into the preserve of a wealthy few. The absence of accountability for the powerful in cases of historical injustices fuels the notion that the powerful in our society are above the law. Attacks on our rights and the failure to hold transgressors...
to justice are undermining civil and human rights both at home and abroad. The exorbitant fees that are now paid in employment tribunal cases have eroded the ability of working people to seek justice for abuses in the workplace, as was fully intended.

Ensuring that people have access to justice is a fundamental part of our democracy, as everybody, regardless of their personal circumstances, should be entitled to equal treatment under the law. It is the poorest and the most marginalised who find themselves without legal representation when they face legal problems, and that has become worse as our welfare system has been made ever more punitive, punishing the most vulnerable in our land.

The current undermining of access to justice is mirrored in cases of historical injustice that have not yet been addressed. The Hillsborough disaster is a poignant illustration of how justice was denied to ordinary people to protect the interests of the politically powerful. The recent verdict of the inquest that supporters were unlawfully killed owing to grossly negligent failures by the police and ambulance services to fulfil their duty of care was nearly three decades too late. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) is to be wholeheartedly commended for his efforts to secure truth and justice for the Hillsborough campaigners. The Home Secretary also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

That the friends and families who said goodbye to loved ones who went to enjoy a game of football and never returned had to wait 27 years for an inquest to conclude what an entire city already knew was shameful. However, I want to send a message of full support to all the police officers throughout the UK who go about their duties diligently every day to keep us safe. My criticisms are not of them—they do brilliant work, day in, day out—but of the rotten culture that was all too pervasive. It is our duty to ensure that the truth is revealed in all its horror, so as to extinguish any last vestiges of such corrupt thinking and ensure that such disasters are never repeated. Nothing short of a cultural shift will suffice.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

The Hillsborough inquiry showed how senior police officers in South Yorkshire falsely blamed the victims to protect certain interests, which was an absolute disgrace. The Sun also deserves a great deal of credit. Her excellent performance at the Dispatch Box recently spoke to the very issue I want to explore.

I readily accept that other countries require the Government’s attention—not least Syria and Ukraine, as mentioned in the Queen’s Speech—but the situation in Bangladesh is rapidly deteriorating. Since the failed general election on 5 January 2014, Bangladesh has gradually slid into chaos. We now see political intimidation, fraudulent elections, disappearances, a loss of media freedom, a breakdown in human rights and the creation of a culture of fear. Let me provide some brief examples.

Human Rights Watch has criticised the authorities for the excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings. The police are accused of human rights abuses and of disappearing political opponents. The media are having undue pressure placed on them, and the justice system is now biased and is being used to silence the Government’s political opponents—only last week, a leader of a political opposition party was hanged as a result of the tribunal that is currently taking place in the country.

There are three reasons why I raise my concerns about Bangladesh. First, we have to think about the awful human rights abuses people in that country are having to endure. Secondly, as the country slips further into chaos, we should not underestimate the immigration problems we could have here. Our countries are strongly connected, and we have a large diaspora here already. Bangladesh has a population of over 160 million; if civil war breaks out, a lot of asylum seekers will look to come to this country, and we should bear that in mind. Thirdly, civil society has been shrunk in Bangladesh, and that space is now being filled by extremists. The Government rightly talked in the Queen’s Speech about tackling extremism, and one of their priorities must be Bangladesh. Let me briefly illustrate why.

During April, people started hacking others to death for having secular views or because of their sexuality. Someone was killed on 6 April. Someone else was hacked to death on 23 April. People were also killed on 25 April and 30 April. All those crimes were either al-Qaeda-related or Daesh-related. We are beginning to see extremism flourish. Not only is that alarming for Bangladesh, but it should be concerning for Britain.

Given the strong ties between our two countries, many of which should be celebrated, we must be vigilant about some of that extremism transferring from that country to ours.

Hon. Members may be aware of the murder of my constituent, Mr Jalal Uddin, in Rochdale on 18 February. I want to say very little about that, because the issue will come before the courts. However, I can say that recent media reports have made it clear that anti-terror police have been involved in the case and that there are concerns about it being linked to extremism.

Let me finish by making this point: as the situation in Bangladesh escalates, it could have profound consequences for Britain—even at a very local level, in towns such as Rochdale.
6.18 pm

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I will try to get my speech flowing now that I have cut it so much. I wish to focus my remarks on justice and prison reform—a key aspect of keeping people safe in this country.

It is a pleasure to serve on the Justice Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and along with the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who has had to leave the Chamber.

The current state of the prison and criminal justice system means that that system is seriously failing society as a whole. I reiterate the comments I made in the House on 27 January, when I warmly welcomed and supported the statement by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, in which he expressed his desire to reform our prison system. The Ministry of Justice has sought to improve prison safety through a range of legislative, operational and staff recruitment measures. The Ministry hoped that prison safety would stabilise. In reality, it has deteriorated further and continues to do so. It is imperative that further attention is paid to bringing prisoners back under firmer control, reversing recent trends in the escalation of violence, self-harm and suicides. If we do not bring this under control soon, that will seriously undermine the wider reforms we are awaiting.

Ministers frequently assert that problems in different areas of the public services are not all about money. Of course, this is the case. Appropriate management, support and effective allocation of resources is essential, but in the prison and criminal justice system this is no longer a viable line of argument. We need sufficient resources and we need them now, or a crisis will become an absolute catastrophe. Our prison population continues to rise, with 7,000 fewer prison officers and 2,500 more prison officers required to carry out the day-to-day running of the prison and criminal justice system this is no longer a viable line of argument. We need sufficient resources and we need them now, or a crisis will become an absolute catastrophe. Our prison population continues to rise, with 7,000 fewer prison officers and 2,500 more prison officers required to carry out the day-to-day running of the prison and criminal justice system.

There has been a serious recruitment and retention problem. Last year, 2,250 extra prison officers were recruited. That resulted in a net gain of 440, but many of them left. In fact, that figure has now gone up to 530 because we have recruited since 2015. How can officers be retained in an environment that is regularly on the verge of riots? That gives rise to questions about health and safety policy and the management arrangements for implementing the policies in prison. We need to get prison officers in, and we need them immediately. That requires money. It also requires an acknowledgement that warm words about efficiency and getting more for less are nonsense when it comes down to potentially bringing down the whole system.

I have to ask Members of the House who they think would do a prison officer’s job at the moment. A prison officer’s basic starting salary is £17,735 basic, or £9.22 per hour, exempting antisocial hours payments, and having had years of real-terms pay cuts. By 2020, with the full implementation of the Government’s national living wage, their basic pay will be very little over the legal minimum, disregarding the antisocial hours premium.

I warmly recognise and accept the letters dated 18 and 19 May that we received from the Secretary of State. However, we need to address the problems across the whole prison estate, not just in six prisons. It must be done, and done quickly.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I am afraid I am going to have to drop the time limit to three minutes.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I want to use the time available to present a positive case for these islands remaining within the European Union and to dispel some of the myths on which the Brexit case has been built. We hear regularly, and have heard again today, the fantasy about laws being passed by unelected bureaucrats. That is a bit ironic in a Parliament that is home to the second-biggest unelected, undemocratic legislative body in the whole world. It is also completely untrue. The European Commission is unelected, but it has no powers whatsoever to pass legislation. Any legislation proposed by the Commission must be approved by the European Parliament, which is at least as democratic as this Parliament because it is elected on a proportional system, so there cannot be a majority in the European Parliament without a majority vote by the people of Europe. Legislation also has to be agreed by Council meetings at which a UK Minister is always entitled to be present and to have a say equal to that of our 27 partners.

These myths are allowed to gain currency only because UK citizens are among the worst, if not the worst, informed in the whole of Europe about what the European Union is actually about. That is a matter of deep shame for this and previous Governments, as well as an indictment of those in the media who claim to inform us about these important issues. Why are Council meetings, in particular, so shrouded in secrecy? It is because UK Ministers choose to make them so. In just three months—the first three months of 2016—the European Scrutiny Committee, of which I am a member, published no fewer than 37 different findings that were intensely critical of the Government’s treatment of the Committee. Words like “cursory”, “unsatisfactory” and “unacceptable” were used time and again. At the close of the last parliamentary Session, there were 13 important European documents that the Scrutiny Committee had asked be debated either on the Floor of the House or in Committee, but the Government had chosen not to find time. Four of those documents had been waiting since before the general election last year. They were important enough to require debate by Members, but the Government had chosen not to allow that debate.

We talk about a lack of scrutiny and a lack of transparency in the European Union and its institutions, but I do not think the fault lies with Europe. I think it lies squarely with the UK Government and Ministers. Perhaps if the Government were elected on a more representative and proportional basis, and if we reformed the way in which Parliament is able to hold the Government properly to account, many of these myths would not have currency and we would not face the possibility of cutting ourselves out of a Europe that should be a force for the most progressive social justice programme anywhere on the planet.

6.25 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The general consensus is that we are debating a very thin Queen’s Speech, the most striking aspect of which is the lack of attention paid to defence and our armed
forces. Today, I want to speak about keeping our people safe at home and abroad—a subject that this Government seem constantly willing to sacrifice to accommodate the obsession their right wing has with the EU.

This Government are slavishly dedicated to renewing the UK’s discredited and unusable nuclear deterrent, despite the effect that might have on the rest of our conventional forces and capabilities. That is a serious matter. Time does not allow me to dwell on the knock-on effects Trident renewal will have on our armed forces personnel, but they include the 1% pay freeze that has been built into all MOD calculations and will result in a real-terms pay cut for those who give so much. I assure the Secretary of State that the Scottish National party group of MPs will hold him to account on every aspect of Trident renewal and every aspect of protecting our service personnel.

I do not have time to highlight the lack of any sort of timeframe for the main gate for Trident—or weapons of mass destruction—or indeed any idea that there will be no single main gate decision to be made by this Parliament. That is an absurdity in a programme that is predicted to cost more than £167 billion—or, as some recent estimates suggest, £205 billion. In our Queen’s Speech—an alternative Queen’s Speech—we would have a nuclear weapons consent Bill, to be agreed to within the Scottish Parliament before another generation of weapons of mass destruction is located in Scotland.

The SNP would also commit to keeping our people safe by introducing a defence shipbuilding Bill. This Government have failed to reassure the Royal Navy on the number of frigates it so desperately needs. Such a Bill would have the knock-on effect of increasing certainty for thousands of skilled shipbuilding workers, particularly on the Clyde. As the Minister for Defence Procurement suggested in answer to a parliamentary question just last month, the whole programme for the purchase of the Type 26s has been delayed, with most estimates giving a date of late 2017 for the cutting of steel on those vessels.

During the referendum campaign, a clear vow was made to the Scottish people. On the basis of the rejection of the Type 26 programme, that vow has been broken by this Government. We should do all we can to ensure that the vow is kept and the programme reinstated.

6.28 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Gracious Address should have given our nation a sense of mission and purpose, vision and ambition, opportunity and hope. It should have charted a course for a fairer, more equitable country, securely placed in our ever interconnected but ever challenged world. Instead, the Government chose to draw back into minutiae with micromanagement, permissions, frameworks, reorganisations and even encouragement and promotion, but not to address the big issues facing our globe at this time—a globe in desperate need. That is why the country is so frustrated: it cannot grasp what we are doing, where we are going and how we are going to get there on the big challenges before us. I am reminded of Proverbs 29, where it says:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”.

That is why leadership is so important and why our being at the table to influence change is vital for our future.

I wanted to speak in today’s debate because that is exactly why we are where we are with the EU. We have a Government who have lacked vision and ambition in Europe these past six years, and who instead of leading Europe and setting the agenda have drawn down to the fringes and lost their way until they realised what is at stake. Even now we are seeing blame being placed at the door of the EU, rather than at the door of No. 10.

What are the issues that we should be debating this week? Climate change, population expansion, 60 million people on the move on our planet, disease, famine, humanitarian disaster, instability and conflict. There was not a whisper of any of these issues in the Queen’s Speech, yet right across our country there is a deafening chorus crying out for a response and leadership on these very issues. Even worse, we see the Brexiteers wanting to take us into the wilderness, without being able to articulate where we are heading, how we are going to engage with nations, how we are going to trade, how we are going to protect jobs and provide for our future security, or how we are going to address climate change and find the solutions to the issues facing the populations under so much threat. That why our membership of the EU is so crucial.

There is so much I could have said today. I believe we need not and should not be fearful as a nation about what is happening on our planet. Britain needs to find its confidence again, with vision and ambition to lead—to lead at the heart of Europe so that we can take action on the issues that people on our streets are looking to us to lead on. That is why on 23 June we need to vote to remain and to take the lead in our world.

6.31 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I cannot help but feel an ominous sense of déjà vu. Prior to the general election, the Conservatives vowed to bring forward their British Bill of Rights proposals in their first 100 days in office. Kicked into the long grass last year, these plans have once again reared their ugly head. Like many in this place, I find it infuriating that the Government refuse to drop their attack on human rights. Let us be clear: that is exactly what this is. No amount of Government spin will convince me or many others that plans to scrap the Human Rights Act are anything other than an outright assault on human rights themselves.

The Human Rights Act is a very important piece of legislation, and the Government have seriously underestimated sentiment towards it. There is little public appetite for their plans, and plenty of opposition. The Prime Minister’s plans are not that new. Let us remember that it is more than a decade since he set up a panel of legal experts to draw up a British Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act. He has been utterly unable to sell these plans 10 years on, despite being in power for more than half that time. Rather than admit defeat and allow these plans to die a dignified death, he insists on keeping them on life support. His pig-headedness is becoming a source of huge embarrassment, again.

The existing legislation is a very modern Bill of Rights. It protects sovereignty and safeguards the rights and freedoms across all our nations. It underpins the Good Friday agreement, and the Government’s plans could be a breach of that monumental and hard-won...
concord. Indeed, if the Government press ahead with their plans, they risk eliciting a constitutional crisis. It is time the Government stopped fluffing this issue. They should either kill the Bill or introduce concrete plans.

The Government must disclose details and a timetable for the consultation on the British Bill of Rights. The consultation needs to be far-reaching. Although downplayed by the Government, this will mean a fundamental change in the rights of all British citizens. Any consultation held must engage civic society. In that regard, the Government could learn from the inclusive manner with which Scottish parliamentary consultation is carried out. Views from the public are actively sought, with consultations well advertised, utilising social media channels, as well as conventional ones.

Of course, if the Government want to kick their plans into the long grass again this year, there will be no complaints from me. I only ask that they kick them hard enough to ensure that they are unable ever to find them again.

6.34 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): This has been an excellent and informative debate, during which we have been treated to the marvellous maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore). He told us that his constituents have set him the goal of being half as good as Huw. On today’s evidence, and given that he is already making the case for steelworkers who will lobby Parliament tomorrow, he will pass that test with flying colours. We wish him well.

A clear majority of speakers, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), have made the case that Britain will be immeasurably stronger by remaining part of the European Union. Just as the economic case for leaving has crumbled under questioning in recent days, so today’s debate has put the security case for Brexit under intense scrutiny and found it to be illusory. A vote to leave is a vote for isolation, and that simply makes no sense whatsoever in a highly volatile and unpredictable world. Nobody put that case more powerfully than my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Foreign Secretary, who gave yet another tour de force in this House. [HON. MEMBERS: “Shadow Foreign Secretary!”] I am sure everyone will agree that it is only a matter of time.

We agree with the Government that our membership of the EU strengthens our security at home and abroad, but we do not agree that the Bills in the Gracious Speech will make our society stronger or fairer. Indeed, they could do the opposite, undermine our standing in the world and expose us to greater risks from radicalisation.

Let me quote from the Gracious Speech:

“My Government will bring forward proposals for a British Bill of Rights.”

That was, in fact, from the 2015 Gracious Speech. This year’s said:

“Proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights.”

Is it not a little unfair on Her Majesty to ask her to keep reading out a cut-and-paste Queen’s Speech?

One can speculate why this long-promised Tory Bill of Rights has never materialised. Might it be because it springs from an impulse for political grandstanding, rather than a carefully thought-through response to the challenges of the modern world? I fear that the same can also be said of the counter-extremism Bill. In both cases it seems that the Government are opening Pandora’s box without fully knowing where they are going or what they are trying to achieve. In areas as sensitive as these, that is a dangerous thing to do.

Let me take each Bill in turn. A few weeks ago, the Home Secretary gave a speech in which she called for Britain to leave the European convention on human rights. What a terrible message that would send to the rest of the world, but what a boost for regimes that seek to deny human rights to their own citizens to claim that Britain is doing the same, as the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), eloquently pointed out in his speech. Of course, the nuances of our debate would be lost on the other side of the world, and Britain’s moral authority on the world stage would be severely dented.

A few days ago, however, The Daily Telegraph reported that the Prime Minister did not support any change to the ECHR, so we have the Home Secretary saying one thing and the Prime Minister another. How can we possibly have confidence in what the Government are proposing when their position is so confused?

They have lost sight of a simple point, which might explain why they are so muddled on this matter: the Human Rights Act is a British Bill of Rights. These are the basic rights that Britain wrote and promoted around the world in the post-war period—rights that protect ordinary people from the unaccountable power of the state and vested interests.

Look at some of the examples of how those rights have helped people fight injustice. I think of the elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Driscoll, who had lived together as a married couple for 65 years but who were then put in separate care homes by a local authority. They used the Human Rights Act to be brought back together. I also think that if the Human Rights Act had been in place in 1989, the Hillsborough families would have had much more ability to challenge the cruel decision of the original inquest to impose a 3.15 cut-off time, which prevented them from finding out basic details about what happened to their loved ones.

One can only surmise that the Government’s purpose in legislating in this area would be to water down the rights in the Human Rights Act and to add more qualifications. I ask the Home Secretary: how is that going to build a stronger and fairer country? It will not do so, and that is why Labour will proudly defend its Human Rights Act and fight any attempt to weaken human rights laws in this country.

Similarly, I struggle to see how the proposed counter-extremism Bill will do anything other than undermine community cohesion. I would be the first to say that the Government are right to want to tackle extremism, and I support them in that aim. However, the question is not whether we do it, but how we do it. I am genuinely concerned that the Government are getting their approach drastically wrong. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) was at her best on this subject today. I say this not out of party politics nor a desire to score points, but because I am worried about the deep despondency caused by the existing legislation, as I hear in the Muslim community
[Andy Burnham]

when I visit mosques and madrassahs. If the House legislates in haste once again, the damage could be profound.

At the weekend, the Home Secretary received a letter from police representatives, faith groups and civil society organisations expressing major concerns about the proposed Bill. She cannot just ignore this and plough on regardless. The Prevent duty to report extremist behaviour is creating a feeling that the Muslim community is unfairly targeted and monitored. It is building a climate of suspicion and distrust. In my view, if the Government legislate further and extend what is perceived to be an illiberal and discriminatory approach, far from tackling extremism, they will risk creating the conditions for it to flourish.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I understand the shadow Home Secretary’s concern, but the rest of the nation knows that the real threat we face is a specific one. As I said in my speech, for which he was not in the Chamber, the threat is specific: with Islamic fundamentalism, barbarity on a scale previously unimagined is being carried out in the name of Islam, and it is up to the Muslim community in Britain to address this problem in its midst.

Andy Burnham: The way to address the hon. Gentleman’s point is not to tar everybody with the same brush and throw suspicion on the whole community. That is the language we have heard from Conservative Members. We have heard the Prime Minister say that parts of the Muslim community are “quietly condoning” extremism. That does not win hearts and minds in the community, and we need 99.9% of people to work with the Government to find the very small number of people who may be at risk of radicalisation.

Rather than compounding the damage by legislating in haste, I urge Ministers to take a step back and to set up a cross-party review of how the statutory duty is working in practice. That would be much more beneficial than pushing on with further legislation.

Dr Julian Lewis: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would accept that when we dealt with the totalitarian theories of communism and fascism in the past, we never made illegal the holding of such views; we made illegal the carrying out of such views with any form of violent action. However, does he also accept that where ideas are concerned, we must intervene if we are not to see the radicalisation of a new generation?

Andy Burnham: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. That is why it is important to step with great care into the space that the Bill proposes to tread into. Talk of gagging orders and closure orders will be perceived as an attack on the whole community. That is how people in this country feel right now. There is no difference between those of us on either side of the House: we want to tackle extremism and radicalisation in the most effective way. I simply put it to the Government that they are not achieving that at the moment.

Britain must remain a place where everybody is free to express and develop their beliefs without the fear of being spied on. That freedom is what makes this country a wonderful place to live and worship in, and we must never lose it. At the same time, we must be steadfast in fighting all forms of extremism—including Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and far-right extremism—to prevent any suggestion that extremism is the preserve of just one community.

Let me touch briefly on prisons. We welcome the Government’s efforts to reform and modernise our prison system, with a greater focus on rehabilitation and prisoner education. It was a pleasure to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) speak on that topic. However, there is a real issue with our prisons. The former chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, has talked of prisons being in their worst state for 10 years and as “places of violence, squalor and illhealth.”

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) spoke very powerfully about prison safety and the need to improve staffing numbers. I hope the Government listen to her before they proceed with the prisons Bill.

I will end on a more constructive note. There are two carry-over Bills in the Gracious Speech on which it might be possible to build more consensus. As the Home Secretary knows, we share her goal of putting an updated law on the statute book governing the use of investigatory powers and giving the police and the security services the tools to do their job in the digital age. But we continue to have serious concerns about the Bill as currently drafted, as it does not yet contain sufficiently strong safeguards and human rights protections.

A few weeks ago, I wrote to the Home Secretary setting out seven issues on which we want significant improvement. Yesterday, she wrote to me on two of the issues I highlighted. I have to say that I found her letter extremely encouraging. She gave a commitment in the letter to an independent review of the operational case for the bulk powers. That review was called for in Committee by the shadow Immigration Minister, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). It is not only the right thing to do, but it could build trust in the whole process. I am pleased that she has agreed in the letter to look at having a review and has approached David Anderson QC to lead it. The Opposition strongly welcome that development, which we believe will build trust and support behind the Bill.

The second issue that the Home Secretary has written to me about is our concern about the targeting of trade unions. The Opposition have not just concerns but proof that in the past the security services have targeted trade unions, in particular, in the case of the Shrewsbury 24. The Home Secretary’s letter contains a suggestion that she will change the Bill to ensure that investigatory powers cannot be used to monitor legitimate trade union activity. That is a major concession—historic, even —and I am certain that it will go a long way to reassuring Opposition Members. There is still a considerable way to go before the Investigatory Powers Bill becomes acceptable, but this letter shows that the Home Secretary is listening, which bodes well for the rest of the Bill’s passage.

I will touch briefly on the Policing and Crime Bill. Colleagues on all sides of the House will know that I have written to them seeking support for a number of
changes in response to the Hillsborough verdict. Those include making sure that bereaved families have parity of legal funding at inquests where the police are represented and removing any time limit on misconduct proceedings to prevent retirement from being used as a route to avoid them. I am grateful for the support I have had from colleagues from Plaid Cymru and the Green party, and I urge other parties to offer the same support. The best message we could possibly send to the Hillsborough families—this point was made very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)—is to come together across the Floor of this House to make Hillsborough a moment of real change.

My experience of working with the Home Secretary on Hillsborough is a reminder of the incredible power we in this place have in our hands to change lives for the better when we put differences aside and work as one. But we do not always choose to use that power. I believe that the issues we have discussed today—the promotion of human rights and the eradication of extremism—are bigger than party politics. They are issues on which our most vulnerable communities will look to us to achieve the maximum amount of political consensus, because that in turn will give strength back to those communities. I urge the Government to keep that point in mind as they bring their new Bills forward.

6.48 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): As is fitting for a debate on the Queen’s Speech, we have had a very wide-ranging and significant set of contributions from right hon. and hon. Members. Many speeches referred to human rights, to the European Union and to counter-extremism. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) referred to housing development in Birmingham but also to international development; I pay tribute to his work as Secretary of State for International Development. The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) referred to buses, which of course were mentioned in the Gracious Address.

I will respond to some of the main points in a moment, but I first join the shadow Home Secretary in commending the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) for his maiden speech. I apologise that I was not in the Chamber to hear it, but his predecessor was a much respected and well-liked Member of the House. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman reaching his century—I think he referred to that in his speech—and, from his contribution today, it seems that not only will he be an excellent representative for his constituents, but that he too will be a much respected and well-liked Member of the House.

I also commend the two opening speeches in this debate. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke with characteristic authority, knowledge and understanding of the wide range of foreign affairs that require our attention. As he said, the world is becoming more dangerous and uncertain, and it is against that background that the Queen’s Speech referred to a number of issues of national security and defence, including Trident. I disagree with the hon. Members for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), because Trident is an important part of our defence and national security.

Against that dangerous background, it is right to ensure that our law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies have the powers they need in today’s world, where criminals and terrorists increasingly use new technology. Our agencies must be able to operate in the digital age, and I am grateful to the shadow Home Secretary for his comments on the exchange that we have had in the past couple days on a number of matters regarding the carry-over Investigatory Powers Bill. I intend to continue working with him and the shadow Immigration Minister—who made an important contribution alongside my ministerial colleagues in debates on this matter in Committee—to ensure that we provide a Bill that does what it needs to do, and provides those operational powers and also contains the necessary safeguards.

One of my abiding memories of this House is the day on which the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) came to this Chamber following a by-election, and of the look—the beam—of absolute pride on his late father’s face at his son coming to this House. As he said, his father would not have agreed with the substance of what he said about the European Union, but he would have welcomed and been proud of the eloquence and passion with which the right hon. Gentleman put his case.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the European Union, including the hon. Members for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), and for York Central (Rachael Maskell). Some were not in favour of remaining in the European Union, including my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) was concerned about some of the defence issues. I understand that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who serves on the Defence Committee, took issue with some comments that the Chair of that Committee made in the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said that although he was originally against membership of the EU, he was now in favour of it because of the various protections that he felt it provided. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) reminded us that we need to remember Britain’s role in the world, as well as the benefits that working together in co-operation with other countries can bring.

Drew Hendry: Among many things to disagree with and criticise, I would like to focus on a positive point about work abroad. Stephanie Inglis is a Commonwealth games medal-winning athlete, and she is in a critical condition in a coma in Vietnam. She has received overwhelming public support for her GoFundMe page, in contrast to the refusal of insurance sold by Debenhams to pay out. I am in regular contact with the family, and they are very grateful for Foreign and Commonwealth Office support. They need more help with translation services, and I would like to reflect their good wishes that more work can be done. I wonder whether the Home Secretary agrees.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case about the sad circumstances in which his constituent finds herself. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was here earlier, and I
think the hon. Gentleman was able to speak to him briefly about this issue. As he sees, other Foreign Office Ministers are present and have heard his point, as has the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims. I am sure that support will be forthcoming for the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

A number of hon. Members referred to the proposed counter-extremism Bill. It is absolutely right that our proud tradition of defending shared values has allowed Britain to grow into the diverse, tolerant and inclusive country it is today. We live in a society where we are free to decide how to live, what to wear and how to worship according to our beliefs. We are free to take advantage of education and employment opportunities. However, we also have a responsibility to respect the rights of others. We should be concerned about, and stand up to, those who seek to sow the seeds of division between our communities, pushing us further apart rather than choosing to bring us together. Legislation can only be part of the answer, but where there is a gap in the law we must act. That is why we will introduce a counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who raised specific concerns about the Bill, that there will be consultation. We recognise the sensitivities involved.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs May: I do not have much time.

I mentioned the European Union. I have to say to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) that I think he is trying to face in two directions at the same time on this issue. The hon. Member for Ilford South was absolutely right: the Scottish National party view appears to be want to be in the EU, but it would actually like an exit vote so it can have another independence vote in Scotland. We should all be doing what we believe is right for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Alex Salmond rose—

Mrs May: I have limited time in which to finish my remarks.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) referred to the institutions of the European Union. It is the Ministers in this Government who have been standing up in the EU for British interests, and long may that continue. As the shadow Home Secretary said, from everything I have seen, I believe we are safer and more secure inside the EU.

There were a lot of contributions on human rights, including from the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights; my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), who referred to human rights in relation to Russia; the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry); the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier); and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), who talked about human rights in Bangladesh. I can confirm, as the Foreign Secretary said, that human rights are mainstreamed throughout Foreign Office thinking. It is one of the issues we look at in other areas too, such as policing arrangements, exchange of legal information and so on.

There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding behind some of the contributions. Some Members, across the House, seem to think that human rights started with either the European convention on human rights or the Human Rights Act 1998. They did not. This is the country that has the proud tradition of Magna Carta. This is the country that has led the way on human rights. Human rights do not reside in just one piece of legislation—that is the important point. Our commitment is to bring forward the Bill of Rights. We will have significantly more consultation and scrutiny of the Bill of Rights than there was for the Human Rights Act, which was introduced without formal consultation and within just six months of the 1997 general election.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) referred to Hillsborough. Everybody in this House was shocked when they heard the verdicts of the independent panel. It is important that we learn the lessons, which is why Bishop James Jones will be working with the families on that.

It is the first duty of Government to ensure the safety and security of citizens. The measures in the Queen Speech will do just that. We are safer and more secure when our police forces are transparent and accountable, and when criminal gangs are no longer able to use the financial system to manage the proceeds of their crimes and evade justice. We are safer and more secure when our prisons are not just places to punish. We are safer and more secure when criminal gangs are no longer able to use the financial system to manage the proceeds of their crimes and evade justice. We are safer and more secure when our prisons are not just places to punish. We also heard many contributions on the importance of prison reform, including from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who did indeed, as Justice Secretary, start the Government down the path of this important prison reform.

This Queen’s Speech is the mark of a reforming Government. Its reforms will put justice at the heart of our public services, protect the vulnerable and reshape our criminal justice system in the name of creating one nation, and I commend it to the House.

7 pm
The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).
Ordered, that the debate be resumed tomorrow.
Speaker’s Statement

6.59 pm

Mr Speaker: I must tell the House that nominations closed at 5 o’clock this afternoon for candidates for the post of Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. One nomination has been received. A ballot will therefore not be held tomorrow. I congratulate Mr Ian Mearns upon his re-election as Chair of the Committee.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BILLS)

Ordered,

That Private Members’ Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 21 and 28 October; 4, 18 and 25 November; 2 and 16 December; 13, 20 and 27 January 2017; 3 and 24 February 2017; and 24 March 2017.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Budget for Community Pharmacies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

7 pm

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am grateful for the selection of this debate on the budget for community pharmacies, which the Government announced in December would be cut by £170 million in 2016-17—a cut of 6%.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members, from both sides of the House, who attended the parliamentary event today organised by the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, Pharmacy Voice, the National Pharmacy Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to stress the importance of safeguarding a strong community pharmacy sector. I also thank the cross-party delegation of Members of this House and the other place, as well as patients and pharmacists, who came together to deliver a petition to 10 Downing Street today against the Government’s planned cut. The petition was signed by more than 1.8 million people, making it the most signed petition on any health issue in history.

It is clear, therefore, that there is massive opposition out there to the Government’s planned cuts, and it is entirely right, given the huge public interest, that we should have this debate today. The Government must now listen to the public and consider the mounting evidence showing that the cuts will be bad for many of our local communities, the pharmacy sector, public health and the wider NHS. Just yesterday, Pharmacy Voice published a comprehensive analysis of the merits of community pharmacies. The report, “Dispensing Health Equality”, found that community pharmacies “are not just an invaluable community asset, dispensing medicines and vital public health services, they are potentially a key to unlocking deep-rooted health inequalities.”

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Instead of cutting the budget for pharmacies, we could use them much more effectively—for example, in combating diabetes. Rather than getting GPs to test patients for diabetes, pharmacies could do it more efficiently and effectively.

Michael Dugher: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Given the success of community pharmacies, we should be doing far more with them, not cutting them. I shall come to some of the arguments for that during my remarks.

In the course of this campaign, I have been lucky enough to visit some excellent community pharmacies in almost every part of my constituency, campaigning with local councillors, listening to residents who rely greatly on the services these pharmacies provide and meeting staff who are among the very best healthcare professionals in the country.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Like him, I have visited several pharmacies in my constituency. They make the point that we are short of GPs and that, in that environment, it makes no sense to cut a service that can provide the support necessary to make up for the
[Bill Esterson]

challenging circumstances that GPs face. Pharmacists can often provide advice and support to those who otherwise would go to their GP. In the absence of those GPs, pharmacies are essential.

Michael Dugher: My hon. Friend is of course absolutely right. One of the successful community pharmacy operators in my own constituency, Lo’s pharmacy, which has 20 community pharmacies across Yorkshire, was set up by a fantastic individual, Mr Steve Lo, who was brought up in Hoyland Common in my constituency and remains the firm’s managing director. Of the Government’s proposals, he told me:

“There is a real and present danger that these cuts will make many pharmacies unviable. That can only mean a longer trip, not just for your prescription, but for free advice on minor ailments or medicines as well as a number of other NHS led services, and is only going to put more pressure”,
as my hon. Friend just said.

“on GP surgeries and Accident and Emergency departments.”

I wholeheartedly endorse his comments.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend. On securing this timely debate. Pharmacists have become very much like GPs—they are part of the community. This Government are always telling us all how they are taking big government out to the communities, but here they are again cutting another community facility, as well as cutting local government facilities.

Michael Dugher: My hon. Friend is right. A modern community pharmacy of the type he referred to has so much to offer patients—from free medical advice and dispensing prescriptions to, crucially, reducing strain on other NHS primary care services.

Community pharmacies are of growing importance. Figures from the Health and Social Care Information Centre show that since 2005, the number of prescriptions dispensed has risen by 50%, with over a billion items dispensed in the community last year. There have been increases in the number of items dispensed every year for the last decade, as community pharmacies have become more important for public healthcare. Staff at community pharmacies, trained pharmacists, technicians, dispensers and counter assistants are often the first port of call for an unwell patient or indeed a carer. Some 1.2 million health-related visits are made to community pharmacies across the country every single day—more than to any other primary care provider. The average person visits a pharmacy 14 times a year, and there are 11,500 community pharmacies across England.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Where we have seen quite serious reorganisations of NHS services and A&E departments downgraded, part of the justification for it has been the role of pharmacies in delivering the “care close to home” agenda. If we see anything in the region of 3,000 pharmacies close across the country, that will raise very serious questions about how we have reorganised our existing NHS structures.

Michael Dugher: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I know what a formidable campaigner she has been on this issue in her local community. I pay tribute to her, and not simply because she is also my Whip and occasionally allows me to go home—though I would not rule it out as a contributing factor!

The community pharmacy network is made up of trusted local chemists who are rooted in the communities they serve. I do not doubt that the Minister and his Department share with me an understanding of the vital importance of community pharmacies. Indeed, in the Government’s own letter last December to the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, which announced the cut, it was stressed that community pharmacies must be at the “heart of the NHS”. The letter went on to praise the excellent work of community pharmacies

“in prevention of ill health; support for healthy living; support for self-care for minor ailments and long-term conditions; medication reviews in care homes; and as part of more integrated local care models.”

That is all true, so why on earth are the Government pressing ahead with a massive arbitrary budget cut for community pharmacies that will, by the Minister’s own admission at a meeting of the all-party pharmacy group in January, potentially force up to 3,000 local chemists to close?

A properly funded and well-resourced community pharmacy sector is vital for enhancing public health, reducing risk to the public and mitigating downstream costs to the NHS. This is the key argument. In his response, the Minister will no doubt rightly draw on the financial pressures facing the NHS, but is not this cut in the community pharmacy budget a false economy? By contributing to improved public health—frankly, by heading off some people at the pass—our community pharmacies prevent patients from resorting to visits to the GP surgery or the local hospital.

The Government’s timing could not be worse. We need our community pharmacies more than ever, given that we have an NHS that is so self-evidently in crisis. A&E departments are under enormous pressure on the Government’s watch. In the three months to March this year, only 87.9% of patients visiting them were seen within four hours, which missed the Government’s own target of 95%. Despite the brilliant efforts of NHS staff in my own area—which was visited recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), in his capacity as shadow Minister—the figures were even worse, and, indeed, were going backwards. Just 86.7% of patients were seen within four hours in Barnsley Hospital’s A&E department, down from 87.2% in February and 89% in January.

Cutting the budget for community pharmacies will do nothing to alleviate the crisis. In fact, Ministers risk deepening the problems that face our A&E departments by removing access to the medical advice that those pharmacies offer before patients feel the need to go to hospital.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Allison’s chemist in Cockermouth, which is in my constituency, provided a very important resource for local people after the floods. Rather than people going to hospital because they needed care, Allison’s visited them in their homes or where they were staying. This cut means that we shall risk losing that kind of important support.

Michael Dugher: My hon. Friend has given a compelling example of the contribution made by community
Another argument for arguing against the proposed cuts is the crisis relating to GP access. Millions of people are waiting longer for appointments: 14.2 million patients had to wait for a week, or were not given an appointment at all, when they last tried to see their doctors in 2015. The truth is that the GP access crisis can only be made worse by the Government’s plan to cut the community pharmacy budget.

The findings of new research carried out by YouGov, commissioned by Pharmacy Voice and published in the report yesterday, show that one in four people who would normally visit a pharmacy for advice on common ailments would instead make an appointment with their GP if their local pharmacy faced closure. The report also states that the impact of the cut would be much more severe in areas of higher deprivation, such as my constituency, and that as many as four in five people would visit their GP if their local pharmacy closed. According to the National Pharmacy Association, that would mean approximately 1 million extra people per month using GP and alternative local NHS services.

In a recent letter to the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, the Government said that they wanted “a clinically focussed community pharmacy service that is better integrated with primary care. That will help relieve the pressure on GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments”. I could not agree more, but how can an arbitrary cut—because that is what it is—in community pharmacies on such a scale possibly do anything other than make a bad situation in our NHS even worse, and how do the Government plan to introduce a “hub and spoke” dispensing model against a backdrop of thousands of closures in the sector?

Particularly in recent days and weeks, the Government have tried to argue that this is not the arbitrary cut that we all know it to be, and that it is not a raid on the community pharmacy budget in the Department. They now say that it is all about making the pharmacy sector stronger by eliminating what Ministers call “clusters” of chemists. However, in response to a written question on 4 May in which I asked the Government to “make an assessment of the effect of the budget reduction for community pharmacy in 2016-17 on high street vacancy rates”, the Government conceded that they could not accurately assess the impact of the cut. They could not say how many community pharmacies would close, or, indeed, where they would close. The Minister said that the Government were “not able to assess which pharmacies may close or what the effect on high street vacancy rates might be because we do not know the financial viability of individual businesses or the extent to which they derive income from services commissioned locally by the NHS or local authorities or have non-NHS related income.”

As I have already highlighted, the Minister previously said that he estimated that up to 3,000 community pharmacies—a quarter of all those in the country—could close as a result of this cut. However, with no planning, no strategy and no impact assessment, it is painfully obvious that the Government have not the faintest idea which community pharmacies are at risk of closure. It could be a chemist that is located in a so-called cluster, but it might well not be.

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the petition that went to Downing Street today was not just about 1.8 million people being concerned about their local pharmacy? Those 1.8 million people are also taxpayers who feel that this efficiency drive is going to have a negative effect on what they believe to be an important part of their communities.

Michael Dugher: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I have seen the cuts to community pharmacies described as a Treasury-led process. A lot of people are paying their taxes, including the 1.8 million who have already signed the petition. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the leadership he has shown as chair of the all-party parliamentary pharmacy group.

This is not a clear, well-thought-through strategy. It is a reckless leap into the unknown, and it is the NHS, patients and every community in the country that will pay the price. For those of us who were here during the last Parliament, this is painfully reminiscent of the process involved in the passing of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, with the Government making things up as they go along and ending up in a situation where things are worse for the NHS and more money is once again wasted.

I implore the Minister to listen to Members from both sides of the House and from the other place who have voiced their real and sincere concerns. I urge the Government carefully to consider the overwhelming body of evidence from our healthcare professionals who do so much to serve our local communities and our NHS. The Government must now listen to the unprecedented 1.8 million people who have signed the petition, which states:

“We, the undersigned, believe that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service and part of the fabric of communities across England. Under new Government proposals, many pharmacies could be forced to close—depriving people of accessible medicines, advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals. It would also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services. In the interests of patient care, we urge the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary to abandon plans that put pharmacy services at risk.”

The Government must now think again.

7.18 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) on securing this debate and on the excellent way in which he put one side of the equation as we discuss pharmacy. His timing is of course impeccable. Over the past few months, we have been consulting on our proposals for the future of community pharmacy. The consultation closes today, as he said, although it is important to note that the confidential part of the consultation with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and other key stakeholders will continue. Today is also the day on which the National Pharmacy Association has handed over its “Support Your Local Pharmacy” campaign petition, signed by 1.8 million people, to No. 10. Colleagues might have also attended today’s “Pharmacy health checks and speed briefing” event. All of this is testament to the very high regard in which community pharmacies are held by patients and the public, and the hon. Gentleman will get no argument from me or the Government that that is not the case.
I said that the hon. Gentleman had addressed one part of the equation. He has indicated clearly what the state of pharmacy is today, but he said very little about what pharmacy could become. I understand that, and it is in fact my job to do that. I shall set that out in a few minutes.

If I may be forgiven for saying so, the hon. Gentleman presents a case that suggests that no Labour Government or local council has ever reduced the money for any service and he gives us the clear impression that, were it left up to him, there would be money for absolutely everything. There is not. In a perfect world in which money is no object, a service can be developed and extra money can be added. In the real world, in which we have to operate, it is rather different, so let me explain exactly how we are going to do that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Alistair Burt: The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) approached me before, so I will take one intervention from him; I will not get through my answer otherwise.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I want him to take two things into account. First, there is a correlation between clusters of community pharmacies and areas of high deprivation and associated ill health, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) said. Secondly, small, independent, local community pharmacies do not have the ability of the big multiples to negotiate bulk discount deals. Will he take those two factors into account as he moves forward?

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He has made representations in the past, and I know how keenly he understands the matter. I will come on to discuss access to funds in due course. It will not be based purely on location, but it will take into account what he says about areas of deprivation. We recognise that these are small businesses, and I understand exactly what he says.

The proposed funding cut has understandably created uncertainty and concern. I assure the House that I see a bright future for community pharmacy and pharmacists, so I urge colleagues to see the opportunity that the consultation presents, as well as the inevitable and understandable concern around funding.

The background to the matter lies in the NHS’s five-year forward view. One of its key strategic aims is to break down the traditional barriers between different primary care services, wider out-of-hospital care services and other sectors, such as social care, to deliver a more cohesive, community-based care model that is focused on keeping people healthy and helping people to manage long-term health conditions. Our vision is to achieve a transformation in primary care and out-of-hospital care more widely as we continue to move towards a seven-day health and care service. We want to empower primary care health professionals to take up opportunities to embrace new ways of working with other health professionals to transform the quality of care that they provide to patients and the public. In particular, we want to free up pharmacists to spend more time delivering clinical and public health services to patients and the public in a range of settings.

I have seen at first hand the fantastic work that pharmacists are doing from within community pharmacies, such as in healthy living pharmacies and other settings, and colleagues have also paid tribute to that work. Pharmacy-led services, such as the recently recommissioned community pharmacy seasonal influenza vaccination programme, can help to relieve pressure on GPs and A&E departments and ensure better use of medicines, better health and better patient outcomes. There are real opportunities for pharmacists and their teams to play an even greater role in helping people with long-term conditions and helping people to make better choices to improve their health and to get the maximum benefit from their medicines.

It is not a zero-sum game of accepting the reduction in funding of £170 million—from a budget of £2.8 billion—and ending this degree of high street care and having nothing in its place. I strongly believe that we can still have a network of high street pharmacies based on a financial regime that rewards quality as well as volume while moving pharmacy into different settings. To that end, we have consulted pharmacy bodies and others, including patient and public representatives, clinical commissioning groups and health and social care providers, on how best to introduce a pharmacy integration fund from 2016-17. The fund will help us to transform how pharmacists and their teams operate in the community, bringing clear benefits to patients and the public. The fund is set to rise by an additional £20 million a year. By 2020-21, we will have invested £300 million in addition to the £31 million that NHS England is investing in funding, recruiting and employing clinical pharmacists to work alongside GPs to ease current pressures in general practice and improve patient safety. The integration fund will help to move pharmacy in a direction that supplements what is already done on the high street and in a way it might not otherwise have done.

The chief pharmaceutical officer, Dr Keith Ridge, has commissioned an independent review of community pharmacy clinical services to make recommendations on future models for commissioning pharmacy-led clinical services. I am very keen that what we are doing is seen in the context of where pharmacy is going to go—not a snapshot of how good it is now, but what it can become. Clinical pharmacists will offer complementary skills to GPs, giving patients access to a multi-disciplinary skill set, and helping GPs manage the demands on their time and provide a better experience for patients. This is a great opportunity for pharmacists wanting to make better use of their clinical skills and develop them further.

Let me give a couple of examples. At the Wallingbrook Health Group in Devon, the work of the local pharmacist on all aspects of medicines optimisation has reduced the need for patient GP appointments by 20% to 30%, making a significant impact on GP workloads and patient outcomes. In Cambridge, Sandra Prater is working with patients to optimise their medicines and supporting patients to self-manage a range of conditions, including asthma, high blood pressure and atrial fibrillation.

The reduction in funding for community pharmacy that we have set out was a commitment in last year’s spending review. I want to emphasise that our aim is to
secure efficiencies, make savings and improve quality. It is most definitely not our aim to close pharmacies. I accept that it was me who said to the meeting with the all-party group that up to 3,000 pharmacies could be affected. That was me extrapolating the figures. It is not the aim of the Government to close pharmacies and, as I said in answer to the question, we do not know exactly how the funding will fall, because we do not know yet the result of the negotiations and how this will be handled. I accept that I put that figure into the public domain, but it may not happen in that way at all.

I know that many people choose to access health services through community pharmacies, and I want to assure them that our aim is to ensure that those community pharmacies upon which people depend continue to thrive. That is why we are consulting on the introduction of a pharmacy access scheme, which will provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population, as the right hon. Member for Knowsley mentioned.

Let me deal with another theme that the hon. Member for Barnsley East mentioned. Hand in hand with that approach, we want to ensure that modern community pharmacies reflect patient and public expectations, and developments in technology. Large sections of the population are now accustomed to using digital services through their phones and tablets. Why not do this for people wanting to obtain their prescription medicines? That is why we want to help those patients to get their prescriptions in a way that fits their lifestyle, by promoting the use of online click-and-collect or home-delivery models. We have also consulted on amending legislation to allow independent pharmacies to benefit from hub-and-spoke dispensing models, which facilitate more use of automation and increase efficient dispensing processes. Officials are now carefully considering the responses received and the Government will respond in due course.

These are things we want to encourage people to do, but they do not totally replace what is already being done. They might, however, free up more time for the pharmacists to spend on patient contact rather than on doing some of the other work.

The public phase of the community pharmacy consultation may now have ended, but that does not mean that we will stop listening and talking—the hon. Gentleman asked me to keep doing those things. The Department, supported by NHS England, will have further confidential negotiations with the PSNC, and there will also be a final round of confidential discussions with other key pharmacy stakeholders, who take a keen interest in the discussions in this House. Our aim is to communicate the final decisions early in July so that pharmacy contractors are fully informed in advance of the changes being implemented from October 2016.

Our proposals are informed by the discussions that have taken place and by what has been said by those involved in pharmacy in the past—the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and independent studies—about how pharmacy can move in a different direction but that the current funding structure rewards volume not quality and that changes could be made that would widen the reach of pharmacy. I believe that these ideas can be taken forward in the current context. Our proposals can truly place pharmacy at the heart of the NHS and provide a better, more integrated, service for patients and the public. I am confident that the efficiencies we have proposed can be made within community pharmacy without compromising the quality of services or the public’s access to them. I want to thank those in pharmacy, who are working so hard at the moment and making their case very well, and the public who support them. I think pharmacy can have a great future, as can pharmacists.

Question put and agreed to.

7.29 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Wednesday 25 May 2016

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Rail Electrification

1. Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent discussions has he had with the Secretary of State for Transport on rail electrification in Wales.
[905012]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): This Government’s rail investment strategy is historic in its scale and ambition, and will benefit passengers in both north and south Wales. We are electrifying the Great Western main line all the way to Swansea, and we are developing the north Wales main line through a £43 million programme of modernisation and investment.

Christian Matheson: The Department for Transport seems to be making precious little progress on the Crewe to Chester-north Wales coast electrification, so will the Minister get together with his DfT colleagues and perhaps the Welsh Assembly Government, and I will even come along myself, to get a full engineering survey to find out the costs and the timescale for the electrification process, which is so important to the growth of the area?

Guto Bebb: I understand the importance of the north Wales main line to the hon. Gentleman’s constituency and the whole of north Wales. We are engaged in a £43 million programme of investment and modernisation and we are seeing the benefits of that investment. For example, there has already been vast improvement in services from Chester to Euston, which also benefits north Wales. I would thoroughly welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with the hon. Gentleman as part of our strategy for a north Wales growth deal.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Will the Minister join me in welcoming the recent decision by the Office of Rail and Road to permit regular new direct rail services from north Wales and Chester to Manchester airport? Does he agree that journey times remain too lengthy? With that in mind, will he encourage Network Rail to increase line speeds and pave the way for electrification by prioritising the replacement of Victorian signalling systems—works that had been due for completion last year?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend touches on the crucial point. I pay tribute to his work since he came into the House. I remember his first Adjournment debate on north Wales transport links, in which he talked about the importance of the north Wales rail line and the A55. He is right to highlight the fantastic investment from Arriva Trains, which will see a tripling of the services from Llandudno in my constituency to Manchester airport. That development is most welcome to people in north Wales. I thoroughly accept that we need to modernise the signalling system, which is why we have a £47 million programme of investment during control period 5 and control period 6. That has slipped somewhat, which is a shame, but it is interesting to note that it did not preclude the decision by Arriva Trains to increase its services dramatically.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): When the Secretary of State was serving as the Under-Secretary, he met my predecessor to discuss the Pencoed level crossing, which causes a significant amount of chaos in the town and the Ogmore constituency. Will he agree to meet me and constituents from Pencoed to carry on those positive discussions about improving the Pencoed crossing?

Guto Bebb: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. I am aware that the Wales Office has been working with local government and the Welsh Government in relation to the Pencoed issue. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman—after all, my first by-election was in Ogmore. It was a very wet by-election. I would be delighted to meet residents of Pencoed once again.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): There is great momentum in north Wales and north-west England to improve transport links. This is a time for the Welsh Government and the UK Government to work together to improve those links. May we therefore have candour? The £43 million that the Minister referred to was actually investment by the Welsh Government, so will the UK Government step up to the plate and invest a penny piece in infrastructure in north Wales? That would be very welcome.

Guto Bebb: It is important and imperative that we work together—the Welsh Government, local authorities and the UK Government—in developing transport links throughout north Wales. That is why we have opened the door for a north Wales growth deal, on which we are working in partnership with the Mersey Dee Alliance and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that a real, effective change in north Wales will depend upon co-operation between Westminster and the Welsh Government.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The new Welsh Government are ready; cross-party and cross-border; Members of Parliament and local authorities are ready; and most important of the lot, we north Walians are very ready. May we have a commitment for proper electrification so that we end up with a growth deal that is worth the name?

Guto Bebb: It is imperative that we look carefully at the best value for money from investment in our transport infrastructure. I accept that there is a need to work together, but I also highlight the fact that the CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses this morning called
for more action from the Welsh Government. We hear that £200 million has been allocated for the A55, for example, but we have yet to see any action. We do need to work together; finger-pointing does not help.

Steel Industry

2. Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the steel industry in Wales.

Alun Cairns: With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), who is now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for the work he did when he was Secretary of State for Wales in all matters supporting Wales, but particularly in relation to the steel industry?

We are doing everything we can to support the sale of Tata Steel UK, including offering support to potential buyers worth hundreds of millions of pounds. Our discussions with buyers, the Welsh Government and the unions continue, and we stand ready to negotiate with the preferred bidder to ensure the future of steelmaking in Wales and across the UK.

Stephen Kinnock: As we know, a critical meeting is taking place in Mumbai later today, and the future of the industry is hanging in the balance. What measures have the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the Cabinet taken to ensure that a viable and sustainable pension scheme is developed as a result of the sale of the business? Can he assure the House that it will be sustainable for the 130,000 members of the scheme?

Alun Cairns: I have spoken to the Secretary of State for Business since his meetings with Tata in Mumbai. Pensions are rightly one of the issues under consideration, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend highlighted them at the outset, when he said that pensions, plant and power were three of the issues that needed to be addressed. Pensions are an extremely complex issue and cross a number of Departments, but we are determined to find a way through in the interests of the members, the trustees and the company.

8. [905020] Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): The sale of the steelworks is at a critical stage. It is crucial to the survival of the plant that both Governments act with purpose to support a successful buyer. Has my right hon. Friend agreed a way forward with the First Minister and the Welsh Government in Cardiff Bay to ensure that that is the case?

Alun Cairns: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing in his constituency, where a number of steelworkers reside, and for the responsible way in which he has pressed issues that are fundamental to a successful steel sale. I met the First Minister earlier this week, and we absolutely agreed that this issue is our priority. We are determined to continue in close dialogue and to work closely together to secure the sale.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): We on the Opposition Benches are solidly with the steelworkers who will be marching through Westminster today. The European Parliament has voted against giving China market economy status. Will the Secretary of State press his colleagues in the Cabinet to agree to higher tariffs on Chinese steel?

Alun Cairns: I look forward, like the hon. Gentleman, to meeting the unions that are marching through Westminster later today. Of course, we are determined to work with the unions and with Tata. However, market economy status for China is separate from the capacity of the European Commission to introduce tariffs. Where tariffs have been introduced, they absolutely work. There are 37 trade defence measures in place at the moment. On wire rod, for example, imports are down by 99%, and I could highlight a range of other speciality steels. So let us not confuse market economy status and the capacity to introduce trade defence measures.

Hywel Williams: Steel was a significant element in Wales’s £5 billion-worth of exports to the EU in 2015—that is in fact a third of the whole Welsh Government budget. Will the Secretary of State now make the positive case for the advantages to Wales’s businesses, jobs and profitability of remaining in the European single market and the European Union?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: 69% of steel produced in the UK is exported to the European Union. Access to that single European market is fundamental to the steel industry, but it is also fundamental to attracting a buyer. That was the very point I was seeking to highlight to business leaders in Swansea last week.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): The steel produced at Port Talbot is transported to Corby and used to produce steel tubs. What steps are Ministers taking to make the case that it is vital to keep that supply chain together as one?

Alun Cairns: I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he represents the interests of his constituents. He recognises the interdependency of all these plants—the site in Corby, the site in Port Talbot and other sites across the UK. We talk to suppliers regularly because we need to maintain confidence that they will be able to continue to buy steel. We are determined to find a buyer that is in the interests of workers and the economy.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Is the right hon. Gentleman inspired by the minor miracle that has taken place in Newport, where Mr Sanjeev Gupta and his enterprising workforce have brought the dead Alphasteel company back to productive life? Is not this spirit of entrepreneurship, co-operation among the workforce, hope and confidence the way to stage a renaissance of the entire British steel industry?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman is right: the interest of Sanjeev Gupta in Liberty Steel demonstrates the dynamism in the industry and the great opportunity that is out there. Liberty Steel has reopened a plant that closed some time ago, and it sees that there is a future in British steelmaking. I hope that we will continue to use that momentum to secure steel for the whole of the Tata operations across the UK.
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Given the Secretary of State’s previous answer on the effectiveness of tariffs, why do the UK Government keep being at the head of a blocking minority for reform of the lesser duty rule? Is it not the case that they simply have not done enough to save the British steel industry?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman is confused about the impact of the lesser duty rule, which relates to the framework. There are currently 37 trade defence measures in place. Where the European Commission has acted within the lesser duty rule, it has had a significant effect, be it in rebar, wire rod, seamless pipes or cold-rolled flat products. I could highlight a whole range of speciality steels where the tariffs are working within the lesser duty rule, because otherwise there would be an impact on other manufacturers and other costs. We need to work within the rule because it currently operates effectively.

Financial Accountability


The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): In order to become truly accountable, the Welsh Government need to take responsibility for raising more of the money that they spend. That is why, as part of the Wales Bill, we will devolve income tax powers to the Welsh Assembly. I look forward to continuing to work alongside the Welsh Government to implement those powers.

Karl McCartney: I hope my right hon. Friend agrees that while the Welsh Government are profligate in many ways, the reinstatement of the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen railway via Llanbedr Pont Steffan will be helpful to the entire Welsh economy. Such spending would be welcomed by all the citizens of Wales, who realise that investment in transport infrastructure is a precursor to economic prosperity.

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are several examples of the strange priorities shown by the Welsh Government. Investment in railways is a priority of the UK Government, as shown by the electrification of the line from Swansea through to Paddington. That in itself will provide greater opportunities for rail travel, such as the upgrade of the valleys lines, which, in turn, provides a knock-on, positive effect on more rural communities.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Air passenger duty has already been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is shortly to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but despite this, the Budget did not propose that it be devolved to the Welsh Assembly. Will the Secretary of State support the devolution of air passenger duty, and if not, why not?

Alun Cairns: Rates of taxation, including air passenger duties, are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who always keeps levels of taxes under review. The hon. Lady will be well aware that the Treasury is looking at this matter and will report in due course.

13. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): A few years ago in Boston, Massachusetts, a few revolutionaries said, “No taxation without representation”, so does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very important that the Welsh Assembly takes advantage of the Wales Bill and applies its own income tax?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Friend for the continued interest that he shows in Wales. I want the Welsh Assembly to be a mature legislator taking more responsibility for the money that it spends by raising money itself. On that basis, it will become truly accountable to the people of Wales, and will have to look differently at the sorts of spending priorities it has and the commitments it makes.

Small Business Support

4. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect in Wales of the Government’s measures to support small businesses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): Small businesses are leading the economic recovery in Wales. There are now 30,000 more small and medium-sized enterprises in Wales, employing 65,000 more people than in 2010. With SMEs accounting for over 99% of all businesses in Wales, the UK Government fully recognise their important contribution to the growth of the Welsh economy.

Sir Henry Bellingham: The Chancellor’s recent Budget announcement that business rates for the smallest businesses will be either greatly reduced or removed has gone down very well. It will have huge advantages for small shops in particular. What steps are the Minister and the Secretary of State taking to make sure that businesses in Wales will also benefit?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is perfectly right to say that the business rates announcement was welcomed by small businesses in England. The Wales Office is calling on the Welsh Government to replicate the steps taken in England, in order to ensure that small businesses in towns and cities across Wales benefit in the same way from the changes that are being implemented in England, which will allow them to grow and to employ more people in Wales.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Welsh Government have done well in attracting inward investment, but in terms of business confidence and Brexit, what will the UK Government do to shore up uncertainties about the Swansea bay lagoon, electrification and supporting Swansea with a city deal?

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Wales Office is working very closely with the Treasury to develop a Swansea city deal, which will include the electrification of the main line to Swansea. We are also proposing a review of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon in order to look at its viability and to ensure that it will provide value to the taxpayer if it is developed.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): Some 242,000 jobs are directly or indirectly dependent on a successful tourism industry. Will the Minister concede that we
could boost those small businesses either by reducing VAT on hospitality and tourism or by raising the threshold on which they pay VAT?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman is a champion of this issue and has been ever since I have been in this place. I share his view of the tourism industry in Wales: it is a success story of which we should be justly proud. It is important that the case is made to the Treasury, but it is a success story of which we should be justly proud.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Minister will have seen this week’s Treasury assessment of the impact of withdrawal from the European Union on the UK economy. Could he give us his view of the impact of withdrawal on the Welsh economy?

**Guto Bebb:** The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of my position on this issue. I believe quite passionately that the Welsh economy is stronger for being part of the European Union. Whether for our manufacturing industry, our agriculture industry or our small businesses, I think the stability and certainty of being part of the European Union are good for Wales.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): The unemployment level in Cardiff North is at a record low of 1.7%. Does the Minister agree that to support this trend and keep unemployment down, the new Welsh Government have to deliver on infrastructure promises such as the M4 relief road and the south Wales Metro, towards which this Government have given hundreds of millions of pounds?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend has been a great champion for the capital city of Wales since he was elected to this place. The £500 million contribution of the UK Government to the city deal in Cardiff will be essential for employment, growth and the continued success of Cardiff, but we need to keep up the pressure. The question marks over the M4 relief road are a barrier to growth in south Wales, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise his concerns about those delays.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A great many people in Wales will be attending to our proceedings, and I must also inform the House that today we are visited by the eminent figure Cardinal Charles Bo from Rangoon in Burma. We want to impress him not only with the quality of our interrogation but with the decency of our behaviour, so a little less noise would be helpful.

**S4C**

6. **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): What the Government’s plans are for the future of S4C.

**The Secretary of State for Wales** (Alun Cairns): I was delighted to visit S4C last week to see at first hand the exciting developments at the channel, including the launch of its HD service in time for the European championship. I am sure we all wish Chris Coleman and the boys well.

**Jonathan Edwards:** What assurances can the Secretary of State give us that the UK Government’s review of S4C will not be compromised, as it will be conducted after the BBC’s charter review? Can he confirm that all options will be on the table, including securing an
independent financial stream for S4C funded from revenues raised for public service broadcasting, and from direct Government support!

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that a fundamental principle is operational and editorial independence. The BBC White Paper offers protection and support for S4C, but, of course, there is a review ongoing that will look at all these matters, such as governance and financing, in order to secure a long-term future for the channel. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us hear Mr Glyn Davies.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): S4C is crucial to Wales, and particularly to the Welsh language. Does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor show the OECD, the IMF, the Governor of the Bank of England and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that ensuring Welsh students can continue to benefit from such programmes is just one of the many good reasons to vote remain?

Alun Cairns: I would like to advise the House and the hon. Gentleman that the Erasmus programme was developed by a Port Talbot man some years ago. It has provided fantastic opportunities for students across Europe to share best practice and broaden the base of their knowledge. Of course, the European Investment Bank has also invested hugely in higher education and the new campus at Swansea University, worth more than £450 million, has benefited from such diversification.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): The Secretary of State will surely have seen yesterday’s Cardiff University report showing that Britain pays nearly £10 billion a year net to be part of the European Union. Does he agree that, under the Barnett formula, that money could leave Wales £500 million better off if we vote leave on 23 June?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend is of course failing to recognise that independent forecasters—whether the IMF, the OECD or the Governor of the Bank of England—have talked about the negative impact Brexit would have on the Welsh economy. A £2 billion reduction in the scale of the economy, costing 24,000 jobs, is a step we cannot afford to take.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Is it the case that Wales Office special advisers recently had a meeting with representatives of the Britain Stronger in Europe campaign, and if so, what did they discuss?

Alun Cairns: We of course discuss a range of issues that affect the Welsh economy. A Brexit vote would of course affect the Welsh economy in a negative way, with a £2 billion cost to the Welsh economy, costing 24,000 jobs. As we speak, we are seeing some spectacular employment data, but they are based on strong economic foundations and access to 500 million customers across Europe.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Given that Wales is already underfunded by the Barnett formula and the UK Government, what detailed guarantees can the Secretary of State give that the £245 million actually reaches Wales?

Alun Cairns: I do not necessarily recognise the basis of the question. The hon. Lady forgets the historic funding floor, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced at 115%. That demonstrates the strength of the commitment that this Government are showing to Wales.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the fact that Toyota has made it clear it will continue to manufacture in the United Kingdom, including at its engine plant in Wales, regardless of whether the British people vote to leave the EU on 23 June?
Alun Cairns: I certainly recognise the comments made by Toyota. It has specifically said that “British membership of the EU is best for our operations and their long term competitiveness.”

Of course, it is not only Toyota; 150 component industries in the automotive sector depend on companies such as Toyota and Ford which all want us to remain part of the single European market.

Mr Speaker: We now come to questions to the Prime Minister.

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne) rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is a bit ahead of himself. There is a process to be followed. He can wait his turn.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905062] Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 25 May.

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker—as always. The Prime Minister is attending the G7 in Japan, and I have been asked to reply on his behalf. This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Maria Caulfield: I am sure Labour Members will disagree, but the first priority of any Government has to be the defence and security of our country, so will the Chancellor outline the steps this Government are taking to replace our Trident nuclear deterrent?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The first duty of the Government is to defend the country. For almost 70 years our independent nuclear deterrent has provided the ultimate insurance for our freedom. We will review our Trident deterrent, and bring forward votes in this House; we ask MPs from all sides of the House to support this vital commitment to our national security. When she stands up, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), representing the Labour party, should indicate that support today.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): We look forward to the vote on Trident—he should get on with it.

Given the overnight news of the French authorities’ dawn raid on Google, investigating allegations of aggravated financial fraud and money laundering, does the Chancellor now regret calling his cosy little tax deal with the same company “good news” for the British taxpayer?

Mr Osborne: It is good news that we are collecting money in tax from companies that paid no tax when the Labour party was in office. The hon. Lady seems to forget that she was the Exchequer Secretary in the last Labour Government; perhaps she can tell us whether she ever raised the tax affairs of Google with the Inland Revenue at the time.

Ms Eagle: Obviously, the Chancellor has done a bit more research this time. I regard that as a compliment.

From that answer, I think the Chancellor is far too easily satisfied with his cosy little tax deal. I note that even the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) labelled that deal “derisory”. The British public think it is even worse. Despite all the rhetoric, on the Chancellor’s watch the tax gap has gone up, and his tax deal with the Swiss raised a fraction of the revenue that he boasted it would. The Office for Budget Responsibility has blamed the lack of resources in Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, so why has he sacked 11,000 tax staff since 2010, and when is he going to give HMRC the resources it needs to do a proper job?

Mr Osborne: We increased resources for HMRC to tackle tax evasion and avoidance. We have introduced a diverted profits tax so that companies such as Google cannot shift their profits offshore anymore, and have made sure that banks pay a higher tax charge than they ever did under the last Labour Government. I come back to this question. The hon. Lady was a Treasury Minister. She stood at this Dispatch Box. She is asking me what we have done to tackle tax evasion and avoidance. When she was Exchequer Secretary, did she ever raise the tax affairs of Google? We should know that before she asks questions of this Government. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Members must calm themselves, and remain calm. Members on both sides should take their lead from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who always sits calmly and in a statesmanlike manner. That is the way to behave.

Ms Eagle: We all have a great deal of respect for the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), The Chancellor of the Exchequer will know that the Exchequer Secretary deals with taxes on vices, not on Google. I did my job in taxing vices when I was in the Treasury. The Chancellor will be judged on results. He has been in office for six years. Given that France is demanding 10 times more from Google than he is, the public will make their own judgment.

Labour is campaigning to ensure that the UK remains in the European Union because that is the best way to defend rights at work as well as jobs and prosperity, but the Conservative party is split right down the middle and is descending into vicious acrimony. Last week the Minister of State for Employment called for Brexit, so that there could be a bonfire of workers’ rights. Does the Chancellor agree with her, or does he agree with Len McCluskey that a vote to stay in the European Union is the best deal for Britain’s workers?

Mr Osborne: First, the hon. Lady has confirmed that when she was in the Treasury she asked absolutely no questions about the tax affairs of Google. As she knows—we agree on this—I think it is better that Britain remains in the European Union, so why not now have some consensus on other issues, such as an independent nuclear deterrent? Let us have a consensus on that, and on supporting, rather than disparaging.
businesses. Let us have a consensus on not piling debts on the next generation, but on dealing with our deficit, and a consensus that the parties in this House should have a credible economic policy.

Ms Eagle: I think the Chancellor has just agreed with Len McCluskey.

The former Work and Pensions Secretary said this week that the Chancellor’s Brexit report should not be believed by anyone, and he branded the Chancellor “Pinocchio”, with his nose just getting longer and longer with every fib. Meanwhile, the general secretary of the TUC said that the Treasury report gives us “half a million good reasons to stay in the European Union”. Who does the Chancellor think that the public should listen to? His former Cabinet colleague, or the leader of Britain’s millions of trade unionists?

Mr Osborne: It is no great revelation that different Conservative MPs have different views on the European Union. That is why we are having a referendum, because this issue divides parties, families and friends, and we made a commitment in our manifesto that the British people would decide this question. If the hon. Lady wants to talk about divisions in parties, I observe that while she is sitting here, the leader of the Labour party is sitting at home, wondering whether to impeach the former leader of the Labour party for war crimes.

Ms Eagle: I am glad that the Chancellor agrees with Frances O’Grady, but it is a pity that he cannot get half his Back Benchers, and most of his own party, to agree with him. Given that the former Work and Pensions Secretary has just called the Prime Minister “disingenuous”, and that the former Tory Mayor of London has called him “demented”, I would not talk about Labour splits. The Chancellor should get his own House in order before he talks about us.

Following the Chancellor’s second omnishambles Budget earlier this year, I see that his approval ratings have collapsed by 80 points among his own party. Given that he seems to be following a similar career path, is it time that he turned to Michael Portillo for advice? [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. This question will be heard.

Ms Eagle: Those prating away should cease doing so. It is stupid, and counterproductive.

Ms Eagle: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last week, the former would-be leader, Michael Portillo, said of the Queen’s Speech:

“After 23 years of careful thought about what they would like to do in power, and the answer is nothing…There is nothing they want to do with office or power…The government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing.”

Even this “nothing” Queen’s Speech has caused a revolt on the Chancellor’s Back Benches, and forced yet another U-turn to avoid the first defeat of a Government on their legislative programme for 92 years. Does that tell us all we need to know about this Prime Minister and Chancellor? It seems that they cannot even get their Back Benchers to vote for nothing without a fight.

Mr Osborne: I will tell the hon. Lady what we have done in recent weeks: we have taken another million people out of tax; we have frozen fuel duty; we have cut business rates for small businesses; we have seen the deficit fall by another £16 billion; we have delivered a record number of jobs; and we have introduced a national living wage. That is what we have been up to. What has Labour been up to? She talks about U-turns. They have turned the Labour party from a party that gave Britain its nuclear deterrent to a party that wants to scrap it; from a party that created the academies programme but now wants to abolish all academies; and from a party that once courted business but now disparages it—the prawn cocktail offensive is just plain offensive these days. As a result, it has gone from a Labour party that won elections to a Labour party that is going to go on losing elections.

Ms Eagle: With 29 days to go until the most important decision this country has faced in a generation, we have before us a Government in utter chaos—split down the middle and at war with themselves. The stakes could not be higher, yet the Government are adrift at the mercy of their own rebel Back Benchers, unable to get their agenda through Parliament. Instead of providing the leadership the country needs, they are fighting a bitter proxy war over the leadership of their own party. I notice there is no “outer” here: all the Brexiteers have been banished from the Government Front Bench. [Interruption.] It is nice to see the Justice Secretary here. I think the Chancellor has put the rest of his Brexit colleagues in detention. Instead of providing the leadership the country needs, they are fighting a bitter proxy war over the leadership of their own party. Instead of focusing on the national interest, they are focusing on narrow self-interest. What we need is a Government who will do the best for Britain. What we have got is a Conservative party focused only on itself.

Mr Osborne: The hon. Lady talks about our parliamentary party. Let us look at her parliamentary party. They are like rats deserting a sinking ship. A shadow Health Minister wants to be the Mayor of Liverpool, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) wants to be the Mayor of Manchester, and the shadow Home Secretary wants to be the Mayor of both cities. When we said we were creating job opportunities we did not mean job opportunities for the whole shadow Cabinet. They are like a parliamentary party on day release when the hon. Lady is here, but they know the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) will be back and it is four more years of hard labour.

Today, we are voting on a Queen’s Speech that delivers economic security, protects our national security and enhances life chances for the most disadvantaged. It does not matter who stands at the Dispatch Box for Labour these days. They are dismantling our defences, they are wrecking our economy and they want to burden people with debt. In their own report published this week, “Labour’s Future”—surprisingly long—they say they are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the working people of Britain.

Q5. [905066] Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): What a privilege it is to be called by you, Mr Speaker. If the remain team have their day on 24 June, I shall have to apply by email to Herr Juncker to ask a question.

Airbus is a wonderful example of European co-operation—European, not EU—with fuselages built in France and Germany and wings built in this country. Planes
cannot fly without wings. Our remaining inside or outside the EU will have no effect on this business, for, as the Chancellor knows, it is trade and the hard work of businessmen and businesswomen that creates jobs and prosperity, not politicians and bureaucrats. It is their job to nurture growth and enterprise—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am looking for a question mark.

Richard Drax: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is their job to nurture and not to make threats to business, enterprise, jobs and aspiration?

Mr Osborne: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that jobs and enterprise are created through the ingenuity of private businesses that we in the House should support and nurture.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Lachlan Brain is seven years old and attends the Gaelic medium primary school in Dingwall in the Scottish highlands. Next week, the Home Office—I see the Home Secretary briefing the Chancellor—plans to deport him and his family, despite the fact that he arrived as part of a Scottish Government initiative backed by the Home Office to attract people to live and work in the region. The case has been front-page news in Scotland and raised repeatedly in the House. What does he have to say to the Brain family and the community, which wants them to stay?

Mr Osborne: As I understand it, the family do not meet the immigration criteria, but the Home Secretary says she is very happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman on the details of the case.

Angus Robertson: I am sorry but this has been going on for weeks and that answer frankly is not good enough. Appeals have been made to the Home Secretary by the Scottish First Minister, the local MP, the local Member of the Scottish Parliament and the community, and it is wall to wall across the media of Scotland, yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer clearly knew nothing about it. The problem in the highlands of Scotland is not immigration but emigration. Even at this late stage, will the Home Secretary and Prime Minister and get this sorted out?

Mr Osborne: As I said, the Home Secretary will write to the right hon. Gentleman with the details of the case, but may I make a suggestion to the Scottish National party? It now has substantial tax and enterprise powers, so if it wants to attract people to the highlands of Scotland, why does it not create an entrepreneurial Scotland that people want to move to from the rest of the UK in order to grow a business and have a successful life?

Q6. [905067] Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Why is the Chilcot report not being published before the EU referendum? Is it because the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do not want the public reminded, ahead of the EU referendum, of how the Government of the day and the establishment are prepared to produce dodgy dossiers, make things up and distort the facts to con the public into supporting something they otherwise would not?

Mr Osborne: No, it is because it is an independent report and the inquiry team decides when to produce it.

Q2. [905063] Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): In the spirit of consensus, may I say that few things unite the House more than a concentration on the periodic reviews of the Boundary Commission, which are studied with fierce intensity and result in covetous eyes occasionally being cast on neighbouring constituencies? We note, however, that the electorates of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster have declined precipitously and against all logic. Does the Chancellor believe that the Prime Minister should be concerned about this? If so, what should he be doing?

Mr Osborne: I thought the hon. Gentleman was the Member of Parliament for Ealing North. The Boundary Commission is doing its work and drawing up boundaries independently—that is a good thing about our country—and we will see its initial proposals later this year, I think.

Q11. [905072] Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Will the Chancellor join me in congratulating Barnardo’s, the UK’s oldest and largest children’s charity, which this year celebrates 150 years of supporting and protecting vulnerable children? Does he agree that young people need support beyond the age of 18 to maximise their life chances and that the Government’s new care leavers covenant, which extends the duty of care to 25, is therefore a fitting way to build on Barnardo’s proud history of giving young people the best opportunities in life?

Mr Osborne: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that Barnardo’s is a brilliant charity and that we should all congratulate it on the work it does. We have a huge responsibility to people who are in the care of the state, which does not end when they are 18 years old. That is why we are announcing new measures in the Queen’s Speech to include support from a personal adviser, for example, until these people are 25 and to make sure that other bodies such as local authorities have a care for those people, bringing all the opportunities to their attention. This is part of the life chances strategy, which lies at the heart of this Queen’s Speech.

Q3. [905064] Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The Chancellor wanted a march of the makers, and today hundreds of steelworkers are marching to Parliament for their future and for their communities. Why do the Government back China’s bid for market economy status against the interests of British steelworkers? Why does this Chancellor block changes to the lesser duty tariff against the interests of British steelworkers? When will he set down an industrial strategy to put British steelworkers’ interests ahead of his own?

Mr Osborne: Our thoughts are, of course, with the steelmakers and their families at this very difficult time. [Interruption.] If we take a step back, we can all...
acknowledge that there is a global crisis in the steel industry, with tens of thousands of jobs lost across Europe alone and many tens of thousands beyond that. We are taking specific action today to help Tata, Port Talbot and related works across the country. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has been to India with the First Minister of Wales in a cross-party effort. Nationally, we have taken action to reduce energy charges on energy-intensive industries; we have taken action to ensure that there is more flexibility with emission regulations; we are doing everything we can to help this industry at a very difficult time, including making sure that there are tough tariffs on Chinese dumping. As a result of the tariffs introduced on rebar steel, those imports are down by over 90%.

Q12. [905073] Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Will the Chancellor confirm reports in the press today that former Labour Minister, Lord Sugar has joined the Government as our new enterprise tsar? Does he agree that this is a sign of people abandoning Labour for the prosperity, security and jobs offered by this Government? Will the Chancellor finally confirm that he has no new plans for a sugar tax?

Mr Osborne: I can confirm that we have hired Lord Sugar to advise on enterprise. He will bring his knowledge and expertise to that task. Apparently, Lord Sugar has told the Labour party, “You’re fired.”

Q4. [905065] Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I have a 14-year-old autistic constituent, who got on very well at primary school, but since moving to secondary school, its uncompromising one-size-fits-all approach has left him with a special school as his only option. What will the Chancellor do to make sure that when the independent expert group looking at initial teacher training reports back, Ministers will ensure that specific autism training forms part of their curriculum?

Mr Osborne: The hon. Lady raises an important issue, and I think she will receive a lot of sympathy from colleagues of all parties. The Education Secretary shares her concern and has personally raised the issue with the chair of the initial teacher training review, Stephen Munday. My right hon. Friend has stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers are properly trained and specifically autism. As a result, the chairman will ensure that teachers are properly trained and create a £10 billion hole in the public finances. It is right for these decisions to be made by local clinicians rather than by politicians, but they must meet the four key tests that have been set out: they must demonstrate public and patient engagement, have the support of GP commissioners, be based on clinical evidence, and take account of patient choice. I expect the local NHS to consider all those options in reaching any decision.

Q7. [905068] Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The House of Commons Library estimates that 4.9 million UK citizens live or work in other countries, yet in my surgeries, week in, week out, I meet constituents from overseas who cannot obtain visas, residency or citizenship here. The whole of Scotland is outraged at the threat of deportation facing the Brain family. What, in the Chancellor’s view, is the difference between an economic migrant and an expat?

Mr Osborne: I think all the hon. Gentleman is demonstrating is that we do have border controls in this country, and that we do have immigration rules that need to be complied with. That is a very important aspect of the European Union’s Schengen area agreement, which we are not part of, and I think that it is part of the special status that we have in the European Union.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Chancellor join me in welcoming the crew of HMS Duncan—the last and best of our Type 45 destroyers, which is currently moored in London for the commemorations of the battle of Jutland—some of whom are watching from the Gallery today? Will he also support the work that is being done by the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant to ensure that all our armed forces and their families have the very best housing that we can offer them?

Mr Osborne: I certainly join my hon. Friend in welcoming the crew of HMS Duncan, and in celebrating all that they do on behalf of this country to keep us safe and to represent Britain around the world. In return, we owe them a duty of care, and the armed forces covenant enshrines that duty. No such covenant existed before we came into Downing Street, and now that we are in Downing Street we are honouring our promises to Britain’s armed services and to the Royal Navy.

Q8. [905069] Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Not content with just trebling tuition fees, the Government want to raise them even higher. Why has the Chancellor changed his view since 2003, when he said that tuition fees were a tax on learning?

Mr Osborne: Back then, the Labour party was voting for tuition fees. The difference is this: we have learnt our lesson, and Labour Members have forgotten theirs. As a result, we have a credible higher education policy that is giving us the best universities in the world, a record number of students, and, crucially, a record number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds—which the Labour party said would never happen—and, in contrast, Labour Members have a completely incredible policy to abolish the tuition fees that they themselves introduced and create a £10 billion hole in the public finances. It is time that they were straight with students and made it
clear that that is completely unaffordable, and that we go on funding our higher education system and asking graduates who are going to earn more, on average, than other taxpayers to contribute to their education.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): St Albans and many other areas in the south and east value their green belt. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics, 3 million people may come into this country if we remain in the European Union. Would the Chancellor like to suggest which bits of the green belt—about a quarter of a million acres—will be needed, and where they will be? We need to provide homes and infrastructure for those people.

Mr Osborne: We have made a clear commitment to protecting the green belt, and the planning laws that we have introduced, and propose to introduce, meet that commitment.

My hon. Friend and I disagree on European Union membership—and I have seen no particular evidence from the leave campaigners that immigration would fall; indeed, they seem to be telling some communities that they would let more people in—but let us at least agree on this. We will have a referendum, and, in the end, it will not be up to my hon. Friend or me to decide. It will be up to the British people.

Q9. [905070] Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): No one should underestimate public support for the BBC. In the last week, more than 200,000 people have signed a petition about the removal of the recipes website. The Government may have been forced to pull back from some of their more extreme proposals, but there is still plenty to cause concern. Will the Chancellor agree to hold a debate and a vote on the Floor of the House, so that Members of Parliament can provide the parliamentary scrutiny that the charter renewal properly deserves?

Mr Osborne: We want a great BBC—a great public broadcaster—and we have agreed a deal with the BBC that it has welcomed. The specific issue that the hon. Lady raises was an operational decision by the BBC, not a decision taken by members of the Government. I have made the observation that we have a great national public broadcaster in the BBC but we do not want a great public newspaper in the form of the BBC. As newspapers increasingly move online, the BBC—as it has itself acknowledged—wants to be careful about what information it has on its website, so that we can also have a flourishing private press. I think that the BBC has got that balance right.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the Chancellor explain why the House of Commons Library and ONS figures for 2015 clearly show that although we export 44% of our goods and services within the single market, we run a disastrous loss or deficit on those exports of £68 billion per annum, up £9 billion since last year alone, in relation to the other 27 member states, whereas Germany runs a profit or surplus of a massive £82 billion in relation to those same 27 states? Is not that a bad deal?

Mr Osborne: We are a massive exporter of services; our services represent 80% of the British economy. We are home to one of the most successful car industries in Europe, and we export cars to the continent. We are also home to the world’s second largest aerospace industry and part of a European supply chain. That is why those leading businesses are in favour of our membership of the European Union. My hon. Friend and I disagree on this issue, but we stood together on a manifesto to have a referendum and to let the British people decide.

Q10. [905071] Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Headteachers and NHS and private sector employers in my constituency are telling me that they have few if any qualified applicants for a range of skilled roles, and that too many experienced staff are leaving. The single most common reason for this key worker crisis is the cost of rental and purchased housing in west London, which the Government’s housing policies will not address. Even the subsidies to buy—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to have to say to the hon. Lady that we now need one sentence with a question mark at the end of it, and it had better be a short one. Sorry, but we must press on.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Chancellor acknowledge this recruitment and retention crisis and do something about it?

Mr Osborne: Of course, we have 25,000 more clinically trained staff in our national health service, but I completely agree with the hon. Lady that there is a challenge of housing in London. I met the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, earlier this week and we are going to see where we can agree on policies that will help to address that issue.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In my right hon. Friend’s enthusiasm to bludgeon the British voter into supporting a European Union that they do not really like, how can he justify planning to break the law? Is he aware that the Public Administration Committee has now published three legal opinions from Speaker’s Counsel—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I hope that this sentence is coming to an end and that there will be a question mark at the end of it. Very briefly!

Mr Jenkin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Public Administration Committee has now published three legal opinions from Speaker’s Counsel that make it perfectly clear that it is illegal for the Government to keep their pro-EU propaganda up on Government websites during the purdah period?

Mr Osborne: Of course the Government will comply with the law and the Government websites will comply with the purdah rules. We are confident that they do so. May I make a general observation? My hon. Friend and I have fought for this referendum and it is now taking place. There are huge issues at stake about Britain’s economy, Britain’s security and Britain’s place in the world, and we have perfectly honourable disagreements on those big issues. Let us debate the substance rather than the process, so that the British people can feel that they have had a range of opinions and can make their own minds up.
Q13. [905074] Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The care sector faces a crisis made worse by the Chancellor’s failure to fund increases in the minimum wage properly. The 2% social care precept does not cover all the costs, so the Local Government Association asked the Chancellor to bring forward £700 million of better care funding from 2019 to this year and next year to help with the increased costs. Will the Chancellor listen to local councils and will he fund his own minimum wage policy?

Mr Osborne: Of course, we always listen to local authorities and are in dialogue with them, but we have given them the power, which many have used, to apply a social care precept, which came in in April in many areas. At the same time, we have put more money into the better care fund, and we are therefore confident that social care is funded. However, I agree with the hon. Lady that more needs to be done to help the social care sector, and the key thing here will be integration with the national health service over coming years so that the service is much more seamless for our citizens.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): At the Conservative party conference last year, our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the future that we, the state, provide for children in care was shameful—the dole and an early grave or the streets. Yesterday, the Prison Reform Trust, of which I am a trustee, produced a report identifying that far too high a proportion of children in care come into contact with the criminal justice system. Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Prime Minister ensure that policies are implemented right across Government to prevent unnecessary contact between children in care and the criminal justice system, so that those children can have a good future?

Mr Osborne: My right hon. and learned Friend speaks powerfully. We of course must have a care system that does the very best for children who find themselves in it. As I said in reply to an earlier question, the Queen’s Speech contains measures in that respect. The other thing that we are doing with my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor is reforming our prison system so that, yes, people are punished for crimes, but that they also have a chance to rehabilitate themselves. That is one of the social reforms of which I am proudest to be part.

Q14. [905075] Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): A Southampton letting agency has recently been banned from trading for three years for not giving tenants their deposits back, using them for other purposes. Letting agencies are almost completely unregulated, and it is pot luck whether Southampton residents actually get a fair deal. Does the Chancellor intend to do anything about that?

Mr Osborne: We are looking at what we can do to make sure that people who rent have proper consumer protection, including protection from landlords who withhold deposits unreasonably.
Points of Order

12.42 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Yes, points of order. It is usually at least a three-course meal in my experience. We will start with Anne Main.

Mrs Main: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I just heard the Chancellor say that we should debate the substance and not the process in our debates on the EU referendum. As I let you know this morning, Mr Speaker, I have tried to do exactly that. I have written numerous questions, but I am basically getting answers that say, “Talk to the hand.” I approached the Procedure Committee, which admitted that I have not had substantial answers, or indeed any answers, to some questions. What more can be done? The Government are trying to muzzle those of us who are trying to get to the truth of all this. They are trying to ensure that we do not get any answers. The Government are acting disgracefully, and I am ashamed at their behaviour.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for her courtesy in giving me advance notice of its thrust. I also note that she has expressed her disappointment in the Government in very forceful terms. She is most assiduous in pursuing this matter, and I say to her that it is, to put it mildly, regrettable that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is late in responding to a request from the Procedure Committee. That should not happen. If there is a Whip on the Treasury Bench, he or she should note that it is frankly unacceptable. If there is not, that message should be relayed to the relevant Whip sooner rather than later. I am sure that the lapse, which will be very unsatisfactory, not least to the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), and his colleagues on the Committee, will have been noted on the Treasury Bench. I hope that it will be duly communicated to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

If the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) has tabled questions that are orderly—they would not be on the Order Paper unless they were adjudged to be orderly—they should receive replies and quickly. My advice to the hon. Lady is to look for those replies each day from now on. If she does not get them, I rather imagine that she will return to the subject. In the interests of propriety, however, the Department should now provide those answers. Its performance is unsatisfactory. I do not want to use the word “shameful”, but it is unsatisfactory.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, the House had a comprehensive debate on the Government’s foreign policy and, in particular, its role in arms deals with Saudi Arabia. I put it to the Government that an urgent investigation should take place, following new evidence showing that UK bombs have been used in Yemen. At yesterday’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions, the Foreign Secretary stated that

the Ministry of Defence is urgently investigating the allegations, and I believe there will be an urgent question on this subject shortly.”—[Official Report, 24 May 2016, Vol. 611, c. 395.]

This morning, the Ministry of Defence gave a statement to the BBC World Service that contradicts the Foreign Secretary’s comments yesterday. The MOD statement says:

“We are not launching an investigation, we are seeking urgent clarification from Saudi Arabia as to whether or not these weapons have been used in the recent conflict and that is our usual policy.”

Have either the Foreign Secretary or his office asked you whether he can come to the House to clarify the position?

Mr Speaker: No, no request to issue a clarification has been made to me. If memory serves me correctly, the line of the Government that no investigation is under way was put by the Defence Secretary in response to the urgent question yesterday—that is my recollection—although, as the hon. Lady says, that is a different stance from that proffered by the Foreign Secretary at oral questions. It is not entirely novel for there to be different statements on the same subject emanating from representatives of different Departments. If a Minister thinks, in the light of the facts, that he needs to correct the record of what he said—I think the hon. Lady has the Foreign Secretary in mind in this context—doubtless he will do so. If he does not, it is presumably because he judges there to be no need. In that situation, the hon. Lady must table questions if she wants further elucidation, but it would be useful to have clarity on the matter.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Thursday 19 May, the shadow Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), visited Sawley in my constituency, where she gave a radio interview in which she described one of my constituents—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Lady what on earth was said outside the Chamber could possibly have to do with me in the Chair.

Maggie Throup: I think it reflects badly on every Member of Parliament—

Mr Speaker: All sorts of things reflect badly or well, but it has got nothing to do with the Chair. If the Chair took responsibility for what people said outside this Chamber, I really would have a very, very large responsibility indeed. It is very kind of the hon. Lady if she wishes to invest me with that sort of imperial power, but I do not think I have it and I doubt the House would want me to either.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) raised the issue of the Brain family in my constituency, the Chancellor of the Exchequer replied by saying that he would write to my right hon. Friend. This family are due to be deported in the next few days, and I am concerned about the timeliness of a letter, if that was to
be written to my right hon. Friend. What routes are open to me to make sure that this case is urgently addressed, through the Home Secretary, to respect what was put in place at the time the family came here—that the post-work study visa would be in place—so that we do not deport this family, who are a credit to the highlands?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. My short answer to his inquiry is that if the matter is urgent, in his judgment, he knows the recourse available to him, and it would then be for the Chair to judge whether the matter was urgent. Perhaps we can leave it there for now. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is stirring in his seat. [Interruption.] No, he does not have a point of order. Well, it is one thing to play with one's own hair, but it is another thing to play with somebody else's. I wondered whether there was a point of order brewing from the right hon. Gentleman, but there was not on this occasion—another time. I am sure he was being helpful.

Debate on the Address

[5TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 24 May).

Question again proposed.

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Education, Skills and Training

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

12.50 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech contained proposals to enable further increases in tuition fees; believe that there should be no further increases in tuition fees; and further believe that no good or outstanding school should be forced to become an academy.”.

I am reeling from the prospect of public hair playing and from considering whether we should have a rule against it in this House.

Last Wednesday, we saw the age-old ceremony of the State Opening of Parliament. It was all done with the usual pageantry, and it was timed and executed to perfection as we have all come to expect. The only flaw was the one thing over which Her Majesty has absolutely no control, and that is the actual content of the Gracious Speech. When the Speech was finally unveiled, after all the build-up and ceremony, it was yet another anti-climax. It outlined a mere 21 Bills—this from a majority Government barely one year into their five-year term of office. They are running out of steam before our eyes.

We could sense the dismay on the Government Benches. The Speech was hastily described as “sparse”, “bland”, “threadbare”, “pretty thin gruel”, “uninspiring”, “managerial” and “vacuous”, and that was the verdict of the Government’s own underwhelmed Back Benchers. Others were less diplomatic. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), so recently a senior Cabinet Minister, called it “watered down”, blaming a Government who have surrendered to the “helter-skelter” of the EU referendum campaign. Former Tory Cabinet Minister Michael Portillo was even more scathing about the first majority Conservative Government elected since 1992. He told Andrew Neil:

“After 23 years of careful thought about what they would like to do in power, and the answer is nothing.”

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Does the hon. Lady think that the introduction of the national living wage is nothing?

Ms Eagle: The introduction of the national living wage is a con, because it is not a living wage. An increase in wages is obviously welcome, but it does not
apply to those who are under 25. The national living wage describes itself as something that it is not, so we have a healthy degree of scepticism about how useful it will be.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Does the hon. Lady consider as “nothing” fairer funding for our schools, which will affect many Members not only on the Government Benches, but on the Opposition Benches? The Labour party once supported this policy. What is its position now?

Ms Eagle: We must look at the policy on schools against what the Institute for Fiscal Studies has called a real-terms cut of 8% in budgets over this Parliament. We have to judge it with that as a background.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Does the hon. Lady accept that the volume of legislation is not an indicator of the quality of government, and a little legislation on schools would not go amiss now?

Ms Eagle: I certainly agree that quantity is not all. I will come on to some of the detail of those Bills as I make progress with my speech.

Michael Portillo went on to say: “The Government is in total paralysis, because the only thing that matters to the Government now is the saving of the Prime Minister’s career” — by winning the referendum.

In what will be a damning epitaph of this Tory Administration, he said that the majority that the Prime Minister secured last year is “all for nothing”. He said: “The Government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing.”

We have this “nothing” Queen’s Speech before us. We have a few eye-catching announcements designed to distract attention from the emptiness of the Government’s programme. We were presented with the possibility of driverless cars on our roads in four years’ time and even private spaceports, but there is still no sign of a decision on the much more pressing issue of airport capacity for the travel that millions must now undertake.

We were told that there would be a legal right to access digital broadband, but there is no clear route to resolve the scandal of this Government’s total failure to provide adequate digital infrastructure for all. Despite being the fifth largest economy, we still languish at 18th in the world for broadband speed.

Perhaps it is a sign of just how toxic things are in the Conservative party that even this self-described “uninspiring, managerial and vacuous” legislative programme has already caused yet another Tory Back-Bench rebellion.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Eagle: No.

The Government have already caved in by agreeing to an amendment to the motion which will exempt the NHS from trade deals, and we are glad that they have now agreed with us.

It is interesting to see what this divided shower of a Government are now able to agree on. The only things on which they seem to be able to unite are flogging off valuable public assets such as the Land Registry, which actually makes us money, and unleashing the full force of the market in higher education. This rebellion on TTIP follows other Government U-turns and defeats on areas such as: forced academisation; cuts to tax credits for the low paid; cuts to personal independence payments for the disabled; pension tax relief reform; the solar tax; the tampon tax; Sunday trading; watering down the fox hunting ban; closing the wildlife crime unit; scrapping their own criminal courts charge; welcoming some child refugees to this country; and housing. The list does not even include the Chancellor’s latest Budget fiasco, which remains unresolved, and seems to be a £4 billion hole in its arithmetic.

Lucy Frazer: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I am surprised that, six minutes into her speech on the subject of education, skills and training, she has failed to mention that the first paragraph of the Queen’s Speech was about life chances. Given that the Queen’s Speech talks about education in prisons, when we know that half of the young people in prison have no education at all, a fairer funding formula for schools and social care, it is clear that it has some real substance.

Ms Eagle: I will get on to those points, but this is a debate on the entirety of the Queen’s Speech, and I am entitled to say what I like about any little bit of it. The hon. and learned Lady can make her own speech if she lets me make mine. I am here to make the point that I want to make, and I intend to do so.

The emptiness of the current Conservative agenda outlined in the Queen’s Speech is apparent in the public relations hyperbole that accompanied its announcement. Once more, we have to “mind the gap” between rhetoric and reality. Although the Government boast about their credentials as a “one nation Government”, they are cutting support for working people and giving the richest a tax cut. They think £450,000 for a starter home is affordable, and they are doing nothing effective to solve the housing crisis or the problem of soaring rents. They boast of a life chances agenda, as indeed the hon. and learned Lady has just done, but this is what is happening in 2016 in Tory Britain: homelessness is soaring; millions are forced to resort to food banks just to eat; Sure Start centres are closing; the attainment gap is widening between different areas of the country; and millions more are struggling to see their doctor, and cuts to funding mean that that is likely to get worse.

The Prime Minister’s self-proclaimed life chances agenda is either a joke or a con. How do the Tories improve life chances by abolishing student maintenance grants for the poorest, increasing tuition fees and barely mentioning further education colleges in their plans? How do they create opportunity by underfunding education and constantly fiddling with school structures while ignoring low morale, the chronic teacher shortages and the growing pressure on school places? The Government’s proposals for improving life chances must be judged in
the context of their funding settlements for education, as I mentioned earlier. The 16-to-19 age group has seen a real-term fall of 14% in its funding provision since 2010, and education capital spend has fallen by 34%.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I hesitate to interrupt such an enthusiastic and positive speech. The hon. Lady is having a busy day. Perhaps she would be kind enough to rally a little support for the Hereford university project, which will deliver the life chances that I know that she and I can unite in supporting.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman should invite me to come and visit the university. We can go together so that I can see what is going on in Herefordshire.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that there is likely to be an 8% fall in funding per pupil between now and 2020 in the schools sector, after a modest 0.6% rise in funding per pupil in the previous Parliament. It cannot be said that I do not put the figures accurately on the record and give the Government credit where it is due—0.6% for the first five years of the coalition, and minus 8% for the next period. Both adult and part-time education have seen huge falls in numbers participating because people cannot afford to pay.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): One of the things that this Government are trying to do through their new Bills is to introduce new universities, which will give so many more people an opportunity to get the education they need. Students across the country are concerned about the current threat to our universities, with unions going on strike and disrupting teaching and exams. One of my daughters is about to take her finals. Does the hon. Lady agree that such strikes are not acceptable behaviour?

Ms Eagle: The first thing to say is that some of the threats are from the so-called new providers, which are untried and untested. We will have to look closely at the detail of the Bill when it is debated, and I am sure we will talk about that aspect.

By the way, I would like to acknowledge the fact that the Minister for Universities and Science has taken the place of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, who is on his way to Mumbai to help talk to Tata about the crisis facing the steel industry in our country. It is about time. I wish the Secretary of State all the best with the work that he is doing. It is a pleasure to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box in his stead.

There is nothing in this Queen’s Speech on the growing funding crisis affecting schools. There is no mention of adult up-skillling, which is a particularly difficult omission. Without action in these areas, we will not tackle the critical skills emergency which is holding back our economy. Unfilled vacancies have risen 130% since 2011, with skills shortages accounting for over a third of unfilled vacancies in key industries.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady, not least for once describing me on the Floor of the House as a Eurosceptic martyr. On skills and technical and vocational education, why does she think it has taken a Conservative Government to open a new university technical college in Peterborough—it is opening in September—whereas in benign economic times we saw under Labour massive increases in youth unemployment and the young people who did not want to go to university left on the sidelines?

Ms Eagle: I am glad to see that despite being a Eurosceptic martyr, the hon. Gentleman is still alive and kicking and doing his thing on the Tory Back Benches. It was the Labour Government who started university technical colleges, and I am glad that he will have one in his own area. He is being rather churlish in talking about our record, when we created the university technical college concept.

The Government have a very large target for apprenticeships, but 30% of those starting do not finish the course, and 96% are level 2 or 3 apprenticeships, with very low numbers attaining higher degree level apprenticeships. I understand and recognise that level 2 and 3 are very important to attain, but even more important for the future health and wellbeing of our economy is expanding the higher degree level apprenticeships, and quickly.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My hon. Friend will remember that in the previous Parliament I introduced a private Member’s Bill, the Apprenticeships and Skills (Public Procurement Contracts) Bill. Is not a real opportunity being missed? With public procurement and major engineering projects in particular, we ought to be getting more bang for our taxpayers’ buck, with proper, decent, high-quality advanced and further level apprenticeships tied into those procurement contracts.

Ms Eagle: I could not agree more. I am an admirer of my hon. Friend, especially as I have seen the recent pictures of him abseiling down a very tall building, so my admiration has grown even more. His Bill was an extremely good one. It is important that the Government think much more carefully than they have done to date about how they can tie in the money that they spend on public procurement with skills creation. The Business Secretary will have to do that if he is to deliver a prosperous future for British steel, and he should think about doing it in many more areas. There is a taboo that needs to be broken.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share the concern of those who are worried that the Government’s 3 million apprenticeships target will be achieved only if the quality of what is offered in those apprenticeships is diminished?

Ms Eagle: I am afraid I do share that worry about the very large quantitative target that the Government have set and, by all accounts, want to pass. When I talk to business, which I do regularly up and down the country, that obsession with quantity rather than quality causes some real worries. I hope the Minister will be able to tell us today that he has ways of dealing with that. I have come across some extremely dubious practice, if I may put it that way, in relation to the term “apprenticeship”. I am glad that the Enterprise Act 2016 has closed that loophole. We now need to see pretty effective enforcement or we will carry on seeing misuse and abuse in that area.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady accept that social clauses within public sector contracts, which have worked very effectively in Northern
Ireland and Scotland, could be used much more widely? They do not contradict EU rules so that excuse cannot be used, and they could be a way of ensuring that public money is used to ensure that the country’s skills base is increased.

Ms Eagle: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman’s comments. It is right that social clauses in procurement contracts have an important role to play. I make one observation, which I have made over my time in Parliament: those involved in public procurement can be very risk-averse. All too often they do not think about the extra things that they can get out of the money that the Government are spending and committing to particular projects, and they often use the excuse of EU procurement rules as a reason for not being creative enough in the way that they pursue procurement.

No one argues with the stated aim in the Higher Education and Research Bill of widening access and participation in higher education. That is what we all want to see. However, the Opposition object strongly to the approach that the Government have taken in both the White Paper and the accompanying Bill. The Business Secretary appears to believe that the solution to widening participation is to inject market forces into the provision of higher education, allowing new untried, untested providers to start up, achieve degree-awarding powers and secure university status, and he wants to force students to pay for it all through higher tuition fees.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a really excellent speech. Does she agree that these reforms to higher education and this deregulation put at risk the excellent reputation of UK higher education institutions internationally—a reputation that helps us to attract so many international students to this country?

Ms Eagle: There is, if I may call it this, a “brand issue” with particular suggestions in the White Paper and the Bill. Again, the Opposition will want to study in great detail, and ask a lot of serious questions about, the potential consequences of what the Minister has suggested in the White Paper and the Bill.

There is absolutely no evidence that such competition will lead to higher standards or a better solution for students; indeed, it is likely to entrench privilege and elitism even more in the system. The proposal before us in the Queen’s Speech deregulates entry to what the Government clearly now see as a market in higher education. There is, if I may call it this, a “brand issue” with particular suggestions in the White Paper and the Bill. Again, the Opposition will want to study in great detail, and ask a lot of serious questions about, the potential consequences of what the Minister has suggested in the White Paper and the Bill.

Ms Eagle: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman’s comments. It is right that social clauses in procurement contracts have an important role to play. I make one observation, which I have made over my time in Parliament: those involved in public procurement can be very risk-averse. All too often they do not think about the extra things that they can get out of the money that the Government are spending and committing to particular projects, and they often use the excuse of EU procurement rules as a reason for not being creative enough in the way that they pursue procurement.

No one argues with the stated aim in the Higher Education and Research Bill of widening access and participation in higher education. That is what we all want to see. However, the Opposition object strongly to the approach that the Government have taken in both the White Paper and the accompanying Bill. The Business Secretary appears to believe that the solution to widening participation is to inject market forces into the provision of higher education, allowing new untried, untested providers to start up, achieve degree-awarding powers and secure university status, and he wants to force students to pay for it all through higher tuition fees.

There is absolutely no evidence that such competition will lead to higher standards or a better solution for students; indeed, it is likely to entrench privilege and elitism even more in the system. The proposal before us in the Queen’s Speech deregulates entry to what the Government have called “teaching excellence”. Nobody objects to teaching excellence; it is like motherhood and apple pie, except that motherhood and apple pie are a lot easier to define. We can see motherhood, fairly obviously, and we can see apple pie—usually we have cut it open to check there are no blackberries in it—but it is a lot harder to know what teaching excellence is.

The Government have chosen various proxies, such as graduates’ subsequent employment records, student retention and satisfaction surveys. There are many reasons why people have good or bad subsequent employment records, and many of those have absolutely nothing to do with the teaching excellence of the schools or universities those people attended. For example, some people with disabilities are routinely discriminated against in our labour market, and is difficult for them to have a successful subsequent employment record. That may have absolutely nothing to do with the way they were taught or with the excellence of that teaching.

Likewise, many women have very different subsequent employment records from what they might have had if they had not left work early to have a family. It is also well documented that those from the black and ethnic minority communities are discriminated against in our labour market. When one looks at the figures, it is clear that many people from those communities who have exactly the same qualifications as others are discriminated against and have less successful subsequent employment records. So using subsequent employment as a proxy for teaching excellence already begins to break down.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Has the hon. Lady seen the clear statement from Universities UK saying that it welcomes the plan to maintain the value of fees and that it looks forward to working with the Government to develop the teaching excellence framework?

Ms Eagle: I have talked to Universities UK, and it has grave concerns and reservations about the route the Government are taking—for some of the reasons I am outlining now. Of course Universities UK will work with the Government—it has a White Paper in front of it, and there will be a Bill on the Table of the House, which it will want to make the best it can be—but I would not take that kind of endorsement for blanket agreement.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Lady also agree that it will be difficult to sell the concept of higher fees for students when many universities have not got to grips with the inflation in salaries at their higher levels? Many students will simply see fees as a means to fund huge wage increases for people at the top of universities.

Ms Eagle: Again, the hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about it when he replies to the debate.

Lucy Frazer: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Eagle: I will give way to the hon. and learned Lady for the last time, because I want to get on and finish.

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady is being very generous with her time. In circumstances where we know that one of the biggest single factors affecting the education of children and young people is the quality of teaching,
does she agree with the principle that it is appropriate to ensure that we have excellence in teaching and that we improve teaching if we can?

**Ms Eagle:** Yes, but I am talking about how we measure excellence and what it means. If the hon. Lady were so concerned about the excellence of teaching, she would be looking at Sure Start and what is happening with early teaching. She would also be looking at the problems we have with teacher recruitment and at a range of other things. Nobody in the House disagrees with the concept of teaching excellence; the question is how one defines and measures it, and that is what I am trying to deal with now.

We have talked about subsequent employment. The other two proxies the Government have chosen are student retention—that is reasonable—and satisfaction surveys. Again, there are reasons why a student is not satisfied with an institution that may have nothing to do with whether it teaches in an excellent way. A lot more work will probably have to be done on these proxies if they are to have any meaning whatever. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say, because the concept is very dubious at the moment.

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), many people have given evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee inquiry into the teaching excellence framework. Many of the university vice-chancellors who gave evidence were very clear that they wanted to work with the Government to make sure that they can prove and improve their institutions’ teaching excellence, but they need more time to make sure that the metrics that are chosen are the correct ones. Does my hon. Friend agree that that would be a more sensible way forward for the Government?

**Ms Eagle:** I do. The Select Committee report outlines the sector’s worry that the reforms are being rushed in, and the way forward for the Government? My hon. Friend agree that that would be a more sensible way forward for the Government?

**Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con):** The hon. Lady has made an argument about teaching excellence. As someone who taught in university for six years, I can tell her that there was really very little ambiguity in student satisfaction surveys even 15 years ago as to whether someone was doing a decent job of teaching, and there is even less now, given all the other modes of feedback. Even if that was not the case, we would be able to tell what was happening from the aggregate of these surveys, quite irrespective of any particular anecdotes she might be able to tell. There really cannot be much doubt, therefore, that teaching excellence can be evaluated, and it is quite proper that, if it can be, it should properly be included in an evaluation for student fees.

**Ms Eagle:** I am saying not that it cannot be included, but that the proxies the Government have chosen have given cause for concern, and I have tried to explain why. We have to think about how this works through, and I will be interested in what the Minister has to say about that.

**Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** Well, let me finish this point first. If the Minister is not careful, he could end up with a range of results he does not want. There could be paradoxical disincentives for excellence. People who always find it difficult subsequently to get a job in the labour market may become less attractive as students to certain institutions because of the way these measurements are used. That would be a really backward step for the opportunities and life chances of large numbers of people who are already suffering disadvantage in our society. The hon. Gentleman should at least recognise that that is a possibility with some of these measurements.

**Jesse Norman rose—**

**Ms Eagle:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), if she will be a bit patient.

**Jesse Norman:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kindness. As a consequence of her argument, it would be impossible to assess the teaching at, for example, the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford, because it teaches disabled people who may suffer in their future life chances, yet no one doubts that that institution can properly evaluate, and indeed it does an excellent job.

**Ms Eagle:** As I understand the White Paper, this also about competition between universities, and there are some paradoxical results there that I would be worried about if I were interested in widening, not narrowing, opportunities. I think the hon. Gentleman ought to accept that.

**Nicola Blackwood:** I am trying to follow the point that the shadow Minister is making. Obviously it is important that the metrics and the process of the teaching excellence framework is right and appropriate, but just as with the research excellence framework, we will go through a process of getting to that point. That is why the White Paper states very clearly that this will be phased in and piloted, and recognises that there will be an important process of consultation and feedback. It is therefore not entirely clear to me why she is expressing the concern that the TEF is going to be imposed with no consultation.

**Ms Eagle:** It is partly about speed. I think that the REF took six years to get into place, and this is all due to be done from a standing start in a couple of years. We have to get it right or there will be consequences that nobody on either side of the House would want to see.

**Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I do not want to get into a Second Reading debate on the Bill—that is probably not wise. I want to get on and finish my speech. I have tried to take a lot of interventions, and it is only fair to those who want to speak in the rest of the debate that I get to the end of my speech.
Education should not be about shackling a generation with yet more debt but about unleashing their talents to build a brighter future. That is why Labour Members understand that while there is a cost to higher education, we cannot allow market forces to let rip through our world-leading universities. If these changes went ahead, it is likely that by the end of this Parliament fees will have risen to £10,000 a year and poorer students could face bills of up to £55,000 just to study for a normal three-year degree. That is unacceptable. Labour will oppose the lifting of the cap and continue to argue for a fairer settlement for students.

I now turn to the Government’s education for all Bill. We all know that this was not the education Bill the Prime Minister wished to include in the Queen’s Speech. Just weeks ago, he assured us that it would contain measures to force every school to become an academy against their wishes. Since then, we have witnessed a humiliating climb-down as the Government finally woke up to the fact that their plans were entirely unacceptable to parents, teachers, and the wider public. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) has done a fantastic job in her Front-Bench position in pointing that out to the Government. Labour Members welcome this U-turn, and we will continue to challenge the Government on their fixation with the forced academisation of good or outstanding schools.

We support the principle of moving towards a fairer funding formula, although it is essential that measures are put in place to assist the areas that are set to lose out. However, a new funding formula cannot disguise that fact that, over this Parliament, school budgets face the highest real-terms cut since the 1970s. It seems that the Government’s response is not to address the escalating shortage of teachers and school places in their Bill, but to continue down the path of forced academisation. This has nothing to do with improving life chances but shows a Government with a rather dangerous obsession with structures at the expense of standards—a Government who are ideological at the expense of our children’s future.

On the Children and Social Work Bill, we will of course support measures to protect and create opportunity for the most vulnerable children in our society. We will look closely at the detail of this Bill and the proposals the Government are putting forward. We need to ensure that when action is taken, it is high quality, has proper oversight, and has the needs of children at its heart. Labour Members are clear that child protection services should never be run for profit. So far, this Government have failed to provide adequate adoption support. Local authorities are being starved of resources, putting further strain on children’s services and social workers. Every child deserves a fulfilling upbringing that provides a path into adulthood—on that we all agree—and we have a moral duty to tackle abuse and neglect wherever we see it.

This is a Government who have ground to a shuddering halt just one year after they were elected. They are a Government becalmed by a referendum of their own making too consumed by their own poisonous infighting to present a compelling vision for our country. The Prime Minister is contradicted by his own junior defence and employment Ministers, and the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is taking time off from his “blunder-bus” tour to offer the keys to No. 11 to at least three different people. [Interruption.] I do not know whether the Minister for Universities and Science is one of them; we know of three, but there might be more. No doubt he will tell us whether the hon. Gentleman has approached him when he gets up to speak. This is a Government who resort to PR stunts and gimmicks, and we will call out their behaviour for what it is.

1.26 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): As the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, the Secretary of State is not with us today because he is in Mumbai, where we would want him to be, attending the board meeting of Tata and fighting for the interests of the UK steel sector. He would want to be here to champion this Queen’s Speech and to expose some of the shortcomings in the arguments we have just heard. I will not dignify the suggestion that the quality of a Queen’s Speech can be measured by the number of Bills in it. We are an avowedly deregulatory Government, and we legislate only when it is strictly necessary. Even if it were a reasonable benchmark, it is worth noting that 21 Bills is more than the average of 18 Bills per Session that we have seen over the past decade—but we are not going to go there.

This Queen’s Speech puts opportunity and life chances through education at the top of the legislative agenda. It ensures that every child goes to an excellent school and that schools are funded fairly, wherever they are; delivers high-quality, employer-led apprenticeships that provide a clear route to employment for young people. The hon. Member for Wallasey talked about quality, and it is worth noting that all apprenticeships must be paid jobs, with substantial training lasting at least 12 months, that develop transferable skills and lead to full competence in an occupation. A high-quality university place should be put within reach of everyone with the potential to benefit. We have made huge progress since 2010, with 1.4 million more young people attending good or outstanding schools, 2.4 million apprenticeships created, and record application rates to university. This Queen’s Speech is the next step in our long-term plan for our economy.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Can the Minister explain, then, why some young people who are going on apprenticeship programmes are not being paid, but are just paid their costs, amounting to about £100 a week? Is that genuine pay, in his view?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, we are committed to a high-quality, employer-led apprenticeship programme in which apprenticeships must be paid jobs with substantial training opportunities that will equip people to take on the full responsibilities in that particular occupation.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): In Macclesfield we were very fortunate, only last year, to see AstraZeneca, a major employer, take on 30 apprenticeships in some of the most important areas of life sciences in our constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that this approach, with colleges taking a keen interest in relevant local businesses, is the way to establish more apprenticeships and take this important initiative further forward?
Joseph Johnson: Indeed, I certainly agree. Employers are at the heart of the Government’s apprenticeship drive and are continuing to drive up quality by designing new apprenticeship standards that provide the skills that young people need. High-quality apprenticeships will be embedded further, with the future establishment of the institute for apprenticeships, and Ofsted will also ensure that providers continue to deliver the high-quality training expected.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Joseph Johnson: I am going to make some progress.

In her White Paper, “Educational excellence everywhere”, my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary sets out this Government’s plan to drive up educational standards in England. The Government’s goal is to achieve a school system where every school is an academy by 2022, so that excellent teachers have the freedom to give their pupils the best start in life.

My right hon. Friend has made it clear that we have listened and will not take blanket powers to force good schools in strong local authorities to become academies, but we will include provisions to convert schools in the lowest-performing areas and where local authorities are unable to guarantee their continued success. We will consult carefully on how those local authorities will be identified, and Parliament will have further opportunities to debate our proposals. That is the basis of the important proposed legislation that my right hon. Friend will present to Parliament.

Peter Kyle: As somebody who has been involved in setting up two academies and who remains chair of governors of one academy, I know full well that academy status can be a powerful tool for school improvement, but it is not the only tool. Interim executive boards, investment in teaching and a new curriculum are all other tools. Why is the Minister so obsessed with one tool at the expense of all the others?

Joseph Johnson: I point the hon. Gentleman to the White Paper, which has one chapter on structures, while all the others are on other relevant aspects of what makes for a great school, including teaching, management and governance.

Turning to our universities, in the last Parliament we put in place the essential funding reforms that have set university finances on a stable footing and enabled us to lift the number controls that have been affecting the nursing profession. We committed in our manifesto to ensuring the continued success and stability of those reforms. We also committed to ensuring that universities deliver the best possible value for money to students, and we said that we would introduce a new framework of incentives to recognise universities offering the highest quality of teaching. The Higher Education and Research Bill, which was introduced in the Commons last week, will deliver on those and other manifesto commitments.

James Cartlidge: Until this month, Suffolk was one of the only counties in the country without an institution that could technically be described as a university. May I, therefore, offer the Minister my profound thanks, and that of my county, for giving permission for the creation of a brand new University of Suffolk? Will he congratulate all those who have worked for it and join me in wishing them well for the future?

Joseph Johnson: I happily join my hon. Friend in congratulating the new University of Suffolk. It is terrific that one of four counties in this country that did not have a full university now has one. There are three other counties and we hope to encourage new institutions of similar quality to the University of Suffolk to come to the higher education cold spots that we have inherited.

Jesse Norman: In that spirit, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on his great leadership on the new university project in Herefordshire, which is now under way? The aim is not only to transform higher education in my county and to create extraordinary economic potential, but to innovate across the country as a whole by tying together academic and vocational education, and by using resources to create greater employability. That is being done with the support of Warwick University and Olin College in America. Does my hon. Friend share my view that, in order to make that vision happen in cold spots, it is really important not just for central Government to give a lead, as he has done in the White Paper, but for local government grants, central Government guarantees and private money to come together as single whole?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I think we will have the Minister. Save your speech for later.

Joseph Johnson: We are delighted to support that great new venture—a new model in technology and engineering—in Herefordshire. It addresses several long-standing problems, including skills shortages in engineering. Herefordshire is an HE cold spot. We welcome the venture and its collaboration with world-leading institutions in the United States, such as Olin, and we want to see more such institutions. I applaud my hon. Friend the Members for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) and for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who has left the Chamber, for their tireless work in championing the new institution.

England’s universities rank among the best in the world. They generate the knowledge, skills and attitudes that fuel our economy and sustain our open society. The world of higher education, however, has changed fundamentally since the last major legislative reforms of 1992 and our system needs to meet new challenges.
A rapid interest in jobs requiring higher-level skills has created a worldwide demand for more graduate employees and for greater diversity of higher education provision. Yet this country is still well below the OECD average for university attendance. We send proportionately fewer people to university to study at undergraduate level than our main competitors: first-time entrants in 2013 were just 48% in the UK versus 55% for the OECD average. We also lag behind when it comes to further study: first-time entry rates to masters courses are only 15% versus 20% for the OECD average.

We are also far from meeting our economy’s needs for graduate-level skills. Between now and 2022, more than half of job vacancies will be in occupations most likely to employ graduates. We have removed the cap on student numbers, but we need to remove barriers to entry for high-quality new entrants who will help to meet the demand for skilled graduates.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Given that the Minister has outlined the desperate need for skilled graduate employees, why is his Government so reticent to reintroduce the post-study work visa in Scotland?

Joseph Johnson: This country has a very successful international education exports sector. We have a global market share of more than 10%, which is holding. Our annual growth in international student numbers is between 3% and 4% a year. We are obviously attentive to the need to remain competitive, but we have a successful international education sector and we want to continue to support it by driving up the quality of the teaching and student experience on offer in all our universities.

Rebecca Pow: On the skills gap, the south-west is below the productivity levels. A university would make a really big difference in my constituency of Taunton Deane and in wider Somerset, because it would help skill-up those young people whom I fear we are losing to other places such as Hereford.

Joseph Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Universities are a great driver of regional and local economic growth. A recent London School of Economics study demonstrates the strong correlation between opening new universities and significantly increased economic growth. The LSE academics estimate that doubling the number of universities in a region is associated with more than 4% higher future GDP growth per capita.

Stephen Timms: It was our understanding that the Government were going to publish a skills White Paper, but that appears to have been downgraded to a skills plan in the documentation related to the Queen’s Speech. Has that change been made, and if so, why?

Joseph Johnson: The right hon. Gentleman should wait a little bit longer to see the full fruits of the work of the Skills Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and colleagues in the Department for Education led by the expert panel that is chaired by Lord Sainsbury.

To return to the question of why our higher education system needs to meet new challenges, the system needs to be more innovative to meet the diverse needs of learners of all ages and employers of all sizes. As promised in our manifesto, we will promote more flexible learning with the provision of, for example, two-year degrees and degree apprenticeships. We need the system to deliver better outcomes for those who go through it and for the taxpayers who underwrite it. While employers suffer skills shortages, especially in highly skilled STEM areas, at least 20% of graduates wind up in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating. This graduate labour market mismatch is a waste of their potential and a brake on our economic productivity.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is also important to use our local enterprise partnerships to invigorate places where those needs exist and work out how we can meet them? My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) has mentioned the new University of Suffolk campus, and West Suffolk College, in my constituency, has just received an £8 million stimulus from our New Anglia local enterprise partnership.

Joseph Johnson: We certainly agree with all that. Universities are at the heart of many of the most successful LEPs, and we want their good work to stimulate economic growth and relevant provision of higher education by universities in their local areas. That is why at the heart of the Bill are powers to make it easier for high-quality new universities and challenger institutions to enter the sector and award degrees, to drive up quality and to give applicants more choice about where and how to study.

Some say, “Close the door to new universities. Put the cap back on student numbers. Restrict the benefits of higher education to a narrow elite.” The same arguments have been made at every period of university expansion. In the 1820s, University College London and King’s were dismissed as “cockney” universities. Today, they are globally renowned. Those arguments were heard when the civic colleges in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Bristol became red-brick universities before the first world war, and when the Conservative Government of John Major took through Parliament the 1992 legislation that created a wave of new universities from the polytechnics.

Ms Angela Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Joseph Johnson: In a minute. We need more universities again today. Universities are great engines of social mobility and formidable drivers of regional economic growth. That is why I was so pleased to welcome the announcement of the new University of Suffolk, and it is why I am so supportive of the Hereford plans. Those are just two good examples of the challenger institutions that we have in mind to open up the sector to new, high-quality entrants.

We welcome support for our proposals from sensible figures, such as Lord Mandelson—now chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan, which is one of those institutions that gained university status, thanks to a Conservative Government, in 1992—who have recognised the essential contribution that a wide range of institutions can make to our economic success and to social mobility.
Ms Eagle: Thank goodness for that. Just to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, Labour Members do not object to expanding the university sector. We do have questions, and rightly, about the speed with which that will be done, how probationary status will work and what kind of gamble that will represent. We will go on asking those questions, but the hon. Gentleman should not set up a straw man or woman and accuse us of being against expansion. We are not, but it has to be of high quality.

Joseph Johnson: I am delighted that the shadow Secretary of State is supportive of new entrants and new challenger institutions. They are exactly what the sector needs, and I am glad that we have established the important point of principle that the Labour party is supportive of new entrants into the sector and believes in competition. That is a good thing, and I am delighted to hear it.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I caution my hon. Friend the Minister not to be so quick to assume that the Opposition will be as supportive as they say they are. We should take a lesson from the experience of the Labour party when it came to introducing competition with free schools. We faced extensive opposition from Labour councils at local level and from vested interests. Although they spoke sweet words about improving quality, they hated the competition that delivered choice to parents and that will, in this case, deliver choice to students.

Joseph Johnson: I hope that my hon. Friend will be proved wrong, but I suspect that he may be proved right during proceedings on the Bill, as we discover the Labour party’s true colours and the reality of its desire to see competition injected into the sector, which I somewhat doubt.

The former Business Secretary is right. The Higher Education and Research Bill, which we introduced last week, represents an ambitious agenda for social mobility. Some, including Labour Members, said when we reformed student finance in 2011 that participation would fall. In fact, the opposite has happened. We have a progressive student loans system that ensures that finance is no barrier to entry, and it is working. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are going to university at a record rate—up from 13.6% in 2009 to 18.5% in 2015. Labour Members were wrong then and they are wrong now. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are 36% more likely to go to university than they were in 2009. If the hon. Member for Wallasey wants to come in on that point, I will happily take an intervention. No? Okay. We are not complacent. The Prime Minister has set us the rightly challenging goal of doubling the participation rate for the most disadvantaged students by 2020.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Has the Minister seen the figures from the Sutton Trust that show that only 3% of disadvantaged young people go to the most selective third of universities, compared with 21% from the richest neighbourhoods? Is he proud of that record?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, indeed. That is why I have just written to the director of fair access, Les Ebdon, giving him all the political cover that he needs to drive further progress in widening participation at the most selective institutions.

We are strengthening the system of access agreements. They will now cover both access and participation, so that students receive the support that they need right through their courses, not just at the point of entry. We will give the new director of fair access and participation, who will be part of the new office for students, a greater set of sanctions to help to ensure that universities deliver the agreements they have made with him.

Some students face additional barriers to accessing higher education because their religious beliefs mean they are unable to take on interest-bearing loans. That is why, subject to Parliament, we will be the first Government to introduce an alternative student finance product that will support those students into higher education. That, combined with other measures, will help us to meet our goal of increasing the number of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds—one third of whom are Muslim—who go to university. We are committed to an increase of 20% in the number of BME students by 2020.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that I have been writing to his Department since 2010 about sharia-compliant loans. The thing that is missing for students, who are absolutely put off by the failure to provide this product, is a timetable for making such loans available. He has committed to legislation, but will he now set out a timetable for when, if the legislation is enacted, students in communities such as mine in Walthamstow will be able to access these products?

Joseph Johnson: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her contribution to the campaign for this important alternative finance product. The coalition Government were the first to consult on the potential demand for such a product. We have a legislative vehicle with which to introduce it, and we are moving at full speed. The sooner Labour Members let this Bill through the Houses of Parliament, the sooner we will be able to crack on and deliver the alternative finance product that they want to see.

In the reforms we are already making to part-time and postgraduate study, we are sending a clear message to people that it is never too late to learn. The Government are transforming the funding landscape for part-time and postgraduate study. We are, for the first time, introducing maintenance loans for part-time undergraduate students, in addition to the tuition fee loans that were made available in the previous Parliament. We continue to reverse Labour’s restriction on studying for a second degree, so that people can get a student loan to take a second part-time degree in a STEM subject. For the first time, we are introducing student finance for postgraduate study, where people from disadvantaged backgrounds are even more under-represented than at undergraduate level. This one nation Conservative Government are giving people the opportunities they need to gain new skills at every stage of their lives.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I welcome the Minister’s support for the idea that it is never too late to learn. For some refugees, coming to this country will be their first chance to learn. Will the Minister outline the Government’s commitment to
supporting their integration, not least in terms of English language courses, which are a crucial component of their learning?

**Joseph Johnson:** We are committed to supporting refugees as they enter the higher education system, and we will look closely at whether there are any gaps in their support with respect to English language provision.

To turn to the Opposition amendment, we have been able to take steps to widen participation in higher education only because of the difficult decisions we have made as a Government to ensure that our universities are sustainably financed. They are. Total funding for the sector has increased from £22 billion in 2009-10 to £28 billion in 2014-15, and is forecast to reach £31 billion by 2017-18. The OECD has said that our approach means that we are one of the few countries in the world to have found a sustainable approach to financing a modern system of higher education. Our economy needs a world-class higher education system, and we cannot allow a situation to arise in which our universities are once again underfunded. The £9,000 tuition fee introduced in 2012 has already fallen in value to £8,500 in real terms. If we leave it unchanged, it will be worth £8,000 by the end of this Parliament. We want to ensure that our universities have the funding they need and that every student receives a high-quality experience during their time in higher education.

I am not the first Minister to note the variability of teaching quality, or indeed the imbalance between teaching and research in our higher education system. Labour Ministers in many Governments have made exactly the same point, but a Conservative Government will actually do something about it. We want to shine a spotlight on good practice, to give applicants more information about the type of teaching and graduate outcomes they can expect, and to raise the status of excellent university teaching. That is why we are implementing our manifesto commitment to introduce a teaching excellence framework to drive up the quality of teaching and spread best practice throughout this sector.

In relation to the Opposition amendment, it is worth noting the irony that it was a Labour Government under Tony Blair who, in 2004, sensibly put in place the new legal powers that have allowed Governments to maintain university fees in line with inflation. For the 2017-18 academic year, I can confirm that the rate of inflation we are using is RPIX, as set out in regulations which, again, were introduced by Labour in 2006. The Labour party may have changed its views on that entire era and may no longer support the policy it introduced, but the Conservatives will refuse to allow students learning to suffer.

As Universities UK and GuildHE have made clear in statements ahead of today’s debate, allowing the value of maximum fees permitted by legislation to be maintained in real terms is essential if universities are to continue to be able to deliver high-quality teaching.

**James Cartlidge:** My hon. Friend is making a very credible case. Does he agree that if we do not fund better degrees and the growth of higher education through the current system, the only alternative will be to do so through taxation—or borrowing—levied across the whole populace, including those who do not necessarily benefit from higher education?

**Joseph Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes the point perfectly. It is hard to improve on the way he put it. The alternative to what we are doing would be to place a greater burden on general taxpayers whose lifetime earnings will be lower than those of people who have benefited from a university education. In the case of women, graduates’ lifetime earnings will be £250,000 higher than those of non-graduates, and in the case of men, graduates’ lifetime earnings will be £100,000 higher than those of non-graduates.

**Jim McMahon:** I was beginning to get a complex, having been trying to grab the Minister’s attention for some time. It is interesting that the Minister accepts that there is a need to keep in line with the increasing costs in the university sector, but does not accept that the same is true for further education or for our school system.

**Joseph Johnson:** Our FE budget has been protected at the £4,000 level, and we continue to prioritise apprenticeships. That is one of the most important Government policies, and we are fully committed to achieving our 3 million high-quality apprenticeships over the course of this Parliament.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Joseph Johnson:** I will make a bit of progress, if I may. Universities UK and GuildHE are clear in their support for our intention to link access to the limited inflationary uplift to an assessment of quality, which is a principle we have long accepted for the funding of research in our universities. It was a Conservative Government who brought in the first research assessment exercise in 1986, and there is no doubt that our rigorous system of only funding excellence has driven up the quality of our research over the past three decades. Let us take a look at the statistics. The UK has recently overtaken the US to rank first among comparable nations for our field-weighted citations impact. With just 0.9% of the world’s population and 3.2% of its research and development expenditure, the UK accounts for 16% of the most highly cited articles. Now is the time to extend that principle and link funding to the quality of teaching—as assessed by the teaching excellent framework, not just student numbers—as we have long and successfully done in research.

**Ben Howlett:** There were two very interesting omissions in the speech of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). There was not one mention of what students want, which is higher quality teaching. The other huge omission was the fact that if teaching quality decreases, the fees of course decrease as well, which gives all universities a massive carrot to improve the quality of their teaching.

**Joseph Johnson:** My hon. Friend is quite right. We are putting in place the reputational and financial incentives to drive and spread best practice throughout this sector, and the teaching excellence framework will be an important part of our doing so.
The inflationary uplift we are allowing to universities that demonstrate high-quality teaching is a £12 billion investment in the skills base of this country over the next decade. It is now for the Opposition to explain how they would make up for such a significant shortfall in university funding. To do so would either mean cutting resources from our universities, risking the sustainability of our world-class sector and leading to the reintroduction of aspiration-limiting student number controls, or the classic Labour response to any policy challenge—[Interruption]—we are already hearing it articulated: of more spending, more taxes, more borrowing and more debt. Labour Members might well heed the words of Ed Balls, who recently told Times Higher Education that Labour “clearly didn’t find a sustainable way forward for the financing of higher education”.

He described that failure in the run-up to the last general election as “a bit of a blot on Labour’s copybook”.

Indeed, it is, and the shame is that they clearly still have not learned the lesson.

We are fulfilling our manifesto commitment to ensure the continuing success and stability of our reforms, balancing the interests of taxpayers and students. We have struck the right balance: numbers of disadvantaged students are at record levels; university funding is up; and research funding is protected. This is a one nation Queen’s Speech, from a one nation Government. Through our proposals, we are extending the benefits of a great education to school pupils and students across the country, and we must never let the Labour party put that at risk.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. May I remind the House that, after the SNP spokesperson, there will be eight-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches?

1.58 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate on the Government’s legislative programme for the coming year. Given the subject of this debate, I should, before I begin in earnest, declare that my wife is a primary school teacher in Scotland.

I want to put on the record my welcome for the new Scottish Government team, which was announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon last week; particularly new members of the cabinet, Derek Mackay and Fergus Ewing. I also wish to congratulate newly promoted Ministers, Jeane Freeman, Kevin Stewart, Mark McDonald and Shirley-Anne Somerville. I look forward to working with all my friends and colleagues in the interests of the people of Scotland.

It would be remiss of me at this stage not also to pay tribute to colleagues leaving the Scottish Government. Richard Lochhead, who was Scotland’s Rural Affairs Secretary for nine years, stood up for Scottish farming and fishing interests and the food and drink sector in an inspiring way. My constituency counterpart in Airdrie and Shotts, Alex Neil, was Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights from 2014, after driving the infrastructure and health portfolios in his typically imaginative and diligent way. I wish Alex and Richard all the best.

I now turn to the subject of today’s debate. So far, the successive days of debate on the Queen’s Speech have had far more substance than the Government’s programme in itself. It was an utterly vacuous Queen’s Speech, with very little cheer, and even less of relevance to the people of Scotland. The Scottish National party, as the widely acknowledged effective Opposition in this place, put forward an alternative Queen’s Speech—an alternative programme for government and an alternative to austerity. We have proposed 15 Bills that we believe the Government should have considered as part of their programme. They are Bills of substance that would have made a real difference to people up and down these islands who have been hammered by Tory austerity—a political and ideological choice, not an economic necessity.

Although the Bills in the Queen’s Speech on education, skills, training and access to employment—the subject of today’s debate—relate mainly to England or to England and Wales only, they serve to highlight the contrasting approach to these important matters between the SNP Scottish Government, who have independent powers over education, and the Conservative UK Government. The great spectre hanging over the higher education and research Bill is of students facing fees of up to, and now more than, £9,000 a year, while Scottish students access their university education without fees. I am sure that Members will be interested to note that the Chancellor of the Exchequer promised in a letter to a constituent in 2003 that when next in government the Conservative party would “scrap tuition fees altogether”. Oh, what a damascene conversion we have seen! He now wants fees to rise even further.

Following the elections in Scotland it is now clear that the Government’s Tory colleagues up the road are following suit, as they are all about backdoor taxes for students as well. Government Members and their colleagues in Scotland who benefited from free tuition now wish to pull the ladder up behind them. The SNP Government have guaranteed free university tuition in Scotland, and that they will maintain the principle that access to university education must be about the ability to learn, rather than the ability to pay. It is also worth pointing out that 60% of the population in Scotland is educated beyond school than in any other European country, with 46.5% educated at tertiary level, and that a higher percentage of young people in Scotland now leave school for a positive destination than at any time on record.

One area where the UK Government sadly retain control over education in Scotland is non-EU graduates’ right to remain and work in the UK after studying here. The abolition of the post-study work visa for students from outside Europe in 2012 was a regressive step that has reduced our ability to retain world-class talents for highly skilled and much-needed positions. It seems foolish to take the position that it is a good idea for those students to benefit from our world-class universities, but then disallow ourselves from benefiting from their skills and talents once they have finished their education here.

The Smith commission report stated that the Scottish and UK Governments should work together to “explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity for a defined period of time.”
At the time of the Smith commission’s discussions, representative organisations, including Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland, sent it a joint letter warning that the removal of the UK-wide post-study work visa in 2012 had resulted in a significant fall in the number of international students coming to Scotland. At a time when it is crucial—as we heard from the Minister for Universities and Science, who has left his place—that we address skills shortages in key areas of industry to improve productivity and economic growth, it is extremely disappointing that this Queen’s Speech makes no mention of the reintroduction of the scheme for Scotland.

In 2015 the Post Study Work working group—set up by the Scottish Government to provide a view from the business and tertiary education sectors on the impact of the removal of the post-study work scheme in Scotland and on how such a scheme should operate if reintroduced—concluded: “Reintroducing a post study work route in Scotland would benefit both Scottish economic growth and business development, as well as enriching the learning experience for all students, by attracting more international students to Scotland.”

In February this year, the Holyrood devolution committee, made up of MSPs from the five political parties represented there, unanimously recommended that the Home Office change its policy on this issue. It is extremely disappointing that the UK Government seem unwilling to listen to the views of a diverse range of political parties and organisations in Scotland. In our alternative Queen’s Speech we have proposed a migration Bill, which would include the reintroduction of the post-study work visa. As was highlighted at Prime Minister’s questions by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and after Prime Minister questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who is the family’s local MP, the disgraceful treatment of the Brain family shows the desperate need for the reintroduction of the visa.

There is also an urgent need for changes to the Government’s approach on access to employment, employment support, training and skills, which have all been damaged by this Government’s actions and their reckless cuts to public spending. We want an emergency summer Budget, to boost investment in public services, stimulate GDP growth, support wage growth, increase tax receipts, support trade and exports, and boost productivity. For all the Tories’ rhetoric about the long-term economic plan, the Queen’s Speech contains no indication of how the Government will improve productivity, employment and growth in the long run.

Many Government Members will, I am sure, feel betrayed that there was no mention of the much-vaunted White Paper on health and work, which was supposed to compensate for the savage cuts to the work-related activity group element of the employment and support allowance and to universal credit work allowance. A number of Tory Back Benchers were promised jam tomorrow by their Ministers if they withdrew their opposition to those cuts, on the basis of the White Paper being published this year. Some were right to say, as I and others on the SNP Benches did, that the White Paper should have been published before the cuts were made, because of exactly the scenario that we now see unfolding.

The cuts to ESA WRAG and universal credit have been made, reaping all that social damage, and now the supposed replacement has been scrapped. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions used his appearance at the Work and Pensions Committee on 11 May to announce that he was scrapping the proposed White Paper and taking more time to consider a Green Paper. He said that he had made it clear in his first statement to this House as Secretary of State that he was looking to “push the reset button”. That statement was on 21 March; I asked him directly that day when the White Paper would be published, given that his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), had told me at his last appearance at the Dispatch Box that it would be “well before the summer”, and how much money would be committed to it. The new Secretary of State could not answer my questions, so he made a commitment from the Dispatch Box to write to me on the matter. As a follow-up, I wrote to him on 30 March to remind him of that and request a meeting, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford). I am still waiting for a reply, despite repeatedly chasing the matter up. Perhaps one will now be forthcoming.

The UK Government have wasted precious time by not publishing the White Paper. I urge the Secretary of State to come to this House with a date for the publication of the Green Paper. Any success in this matter will ultimately be determined by the Government’s willingness to engage with community and voluntary organisations, as well as experts, to help shape any new framework.

The new Secretary of State at the DWP hopes to have changed the tone of the debate, but what we really need is substance. He talks about pushing the reset button; why, then, has he not gone back to the brutal cuts to ESA and universal credit, or to the lack of assistance to women born in the 1950s regarding their repeatedly delayed and mishandled state pension entitlement—an issue that has been commendably spearheaded by the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—or to the immoral bedroom tax? Why has he not gone back to the much-needed reforms to work capability assessments for those with mental health issues and with long-term conditions, who face the stress of constant unnecessary reassessments, and to the waste of money and time, as well as additional stress to the claimant, because of decisions that should never have been made in the first place that are then overturned at tribunal? Why has he not gone back to the two-child rule, or to the rape clause, or to any of the other decisions taken by his predecessor? Of all those disastrous policy areas, why did he choose to review the White Paper?

We are concerned that valuable time to make progress on disability employment is being lost as a result of that delay, and believe that Ministers should bring forward proposals as soon as possible. The announcement of the Green Paper should be welcome, if it is brought forward with urgency, meaningful engagement with the community and voluntary sector, and with experts to shape the new framework. However, we remain sceptical that the Tories will rise to that challenge, and they cannot be allowed to kick this any further into the long grass. The Minister must formally make a statement of his intentions, and lay out the road map for the development of the new programme with a timeframe. With cuts coming down the line for disabled people, the Tories...
must act now. Tory Back Benchers will be interested—as we are—in why the Minister has abandoned the White Paper, and we hope that they will join us in calling for progress on the Green Paper to be introduced with haste.

Forty-nine DWP inquiry reports into the deaths of social security recipients were finally released after a long two-year freedom of information battle. Forty of those reports followed a suicide, and in 10 of those cases the recipient had been sanctioned. Peer reviews do not make a direct link between DWP policy and those sad deaths, but they do highlight the serious problems that are faced by claimants with complex issues, mental health challenges, or learning support needs. I hope that we can now see an end to the unwillingness of Ministers to accept that their policies, however well intended they may think they are, are having serious consequences and could be costing lives. There must be a full, urgent review that includes the impact of current work capability assessments, the punishing sanctions regime, and further cuts to disability support.

The SNP has proposed a social equality Bill to restore work allowances for low-income workers and single parents, to end maternity discrimination, to consider further shared paternity rights for individuals and employers, and to address barriers to employment for disabled people. That would bring matters in line with the principles on which the Scottish Government will found the new Scottish social security agency, by treating people with dignity and respect.

Although the Queen’s Speech did not have anything useful to say about those matters, at its tail end we were informed that the Government would hold a referendum on membership of the European Union which, despite the lacklustre campaign so far, will not have come as a revelation to many people. That was followed by the vaguest of sentences, notifying us that “proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights.”

Given the vast differences that exist in the Cabinet and on the Government Back Benches about membership of the European Union and the European convention on human rights, with many people losing track of who is an in-out, an out-out, or an out-in, it is difficult to imagine how they could find enough common cause to agree on what such a Bill would contain, and the Queen’s Speech gave no further insight into that. For that reason, the Bill of Rights is as likely to be brought before the House this year as it was after being mentioned in last year’s Queen’s Speech.

The briefing notes for the Queen’s Speech on the Bill of Rights added only that:

“These rights would be based on those set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, while also taking into account our common law tradition.”

That suggests that although the Government are sensibly distancing themselves from the Home Secretary’s personal views on the ECHR, they have little of substance to say about the purpose or need for such a Bill.

Professor Mark Elliott from the University of Cambridge stated that in the Queen’s Speech,

“there is no hint of any developed thinking about how the perceived shortcomings of the HRA ought to be addressed, or of how reform in this area would be reconciled with the UK’s remaining a party to the ECHR.”

If the Government are unable to provide detailed answers to those points, they should question whether attempting to appease some of their own Back Benchers is worth more than having sensible legislation. For Scotland, the key concern is that the Government have shown little consideration about how that decision will affect the Scottish Parliament, and the other devolved legislatures of these isles.

Briefing notes for the Queen’s Speech addressed that issue—to pardon the pun—only briefly, and stated that:

“Revising the Human Rights Act can only be done by the UK Parliament, but we will consult fully before bringing forward proposals.”

Although it is true that the Scottish Parliament does not have power to alter the Human Rights Act, the Law Society of Scotland has argued:

“Under Devolution Guidance Note 10 (DGN10), when UK legislation will alter the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or the Executive Competence of the Scottish Ministers the consent of the Scottish Parliament is needed. Repeal and replacement of the Human Rights Act 1998 would in our view, require the amendment of the Scotland Act 1998 in those respects which would affect the competences of both the Parliament and Scottish Ministers. Any change to the Scotland Act concerning the Human Rights Act 1998 which affects the competence of the Parliament or the Scottish Ministers will in terms of DGN10 require the consent of the Scottish Parliament.”

Therefore, not simply consultation with, but consent from the Scottish Parliament would be needed, and given that a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament do not support such a change, that consent is unlikely to be forthcoming.

President Theodore Roosevelt famously said that “the credit belongs to the man who...spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly”. Unfortunately, in this case, I believe that the Prime Minister and the Government have neither succeeded nor dared greatly, but instead have offered a weak and poor programme that will do little to address the needs of the people of these isles.

Although some measures are to be welcomed, such as the likely delivery of a universal service obligation on broadband, this Queen’s Speech is yet another missed opportunity from the Government to address the key issues. Instead of offering clear solutions and innovative ideas, I am afraid that in years to come, this Queen’s Speech will be remembered as an empty, vacuous and largely irrelevant sideshow from a governing party that is more concerned about patching over internal divisions on EU membership, and jockeying for who will be next Tory leader, than about delivering for the people.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. A large number of Members have withdrawn from the debate, so I will now raise the time limit to eight minutes. We will see how we get on—better up than down.

2.16 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Thank you for that splendid news, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I can only carry on as I normally do.
I want to talk about the actual Queen’s Speech, which is a one nation Queen’s Speech because it mentions opportunity for everybody and productivity for our economy. Behind those 21 Bills lies the demand for and interest in having more, fairer opportunities and a better economy that delivers more productivity.

I wish to mention two Bills in particular, including the Children and Social Work Bill. The Education Select Committee has done some work in that field, and I invite the Secretary of State to consider what it will say about social work—I will not let any cats out of the bag now because we have not yet published our conclusions, but they will be of interest to those who wish to consider the issue in more detail as the Bill develops. I am pleased that we will have a care leavers covenant, which is one thing that came out of the Committee’s early discussions about children in care who had mental health difficulties, and who felt that they were falling off a cliff edge. The covenant will clearly prevent that from happening.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the Committee’s work on care leavers, it was not just those with mental health problems who felt that they were falling off a cliff? Many care leavers felt that the support that children might ordinarily receive from their own families was suddenly missing when they got to the age of 18.

Neil Carmichael: I completely agree, and my hon. Friend was a member of the Education Committee when we did that early work. The whole point is to ensure that those children do not fall over that cliff edge. Children who are looked after by the state are particularly vulnerable to that, and we must do all we can to stop it happening. The Committee also covered regulation in its early inquiries. I will not comment in detail on what that framework should look like, but we agreed that we need an improved regulatory offering for social work.

On the education for all Bill, I first note that “for all” means for absolutely all children. However, there are some unregistered children in unregulated schools, and we need to think about them, too. How will the Secretary of State respond to the thought, expressed not least by Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, that there are ineffective schools beneath the radar which are not doing a good job? We need to ensure that when we say education for all, we mean all.

The White Paper talks about a school-led system, as it absolutely should. Those of us who support the academies programme welcome its continued growth. Obviously, it is important to be sure that academies feel comfortable once they are out there. The Education Committee will be considering what a good multi-academy trust looks like precisely with that thought in mind. We need to encourage academies to come together to support each other in partnership and co-operation—schools taking the initiative to help other schools. I believe that combination will work to drive up standards, especially in areas—we know there are pockets—where standards are not high enough.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains? At the moment, the Government prevent it from doing so, so we do not know what their overheads are, we do not know how much they are putting into each school, and we do not know what they are spending on the chief executive’s salary. Is he in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains?

Neil Carmichael: The Education Committee was quite forceful on this matter in the previous Parliament and I expect it will comment on it again. I am personally in favour of multi-academy trusts being inspected. The Committee will look into it when it conducts an inquiry and comment on it in due course. I will not pre-judge what that inquiry will say.

It is important to recognise that in some areas—for example, in Yorkshire—some local authorities have not delivered adequate education for young people. It would be helpful if the Department set out data and maps, so Members and others can see where the problems are and calibrate the need for more academies. That would be really useful.

We need an improvement on fairer funding. This is, rightly, implicit in the White Paper. Schools in Gloucestershire need to be confident about fairer funding. I say Gloucestershire because I represent Stroud, but the point applies to a whole range of shire counties and to urban areas, too. Fairer funding is essential. I am pleased that the Education Committee will have the opportunity to check the Department’s proposals. That is extremely helpful and we will conduct an inquiry in due course. It is very good of the Secretary of State to enable us to do that, effectively through the timescale she has set out, just as she responded when the White Paper was launched and there was something of a furore over the scale of ambition in relation to academies.

It is in the same vein that I make my next point about co-operation and the opportunity to consider the Bill. It would be really helpful if the education for all Bill is published soon, so that we can have pre-legislative scrutiny. It would be useful to look at the detail behind the definition of a failing local authority, one that is beneath capacity threshold and would be fined or cease to be a provider of schools. That opportunity would help all Members to understand more clearly the direction of travel and perhaps see a way forward. I invite the Secretary of State to consider that proposal. I know the legislative programme is tight and that there are few opportunities for delay, but I think this would be a good contribution to the debate.

I want to end on something I think is very important. I was reading with interest the thoughts of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent and authoritative organisation, on whether we should be in the European Union. It noted that if we left the EU our economy would be smaller by about £15 billion within about two years. These figures are bandied about frequently and understood by many, and the IFS is not the only leading organisation, on whether we should be in the European Union. The White Paper talks about a school-led system, as it absolutely should. Those of us who support the academies programme welcome its continued growth. Obviously, it is important to be sure that academies feel comfortable once they are out there. The Education Committee will be considering what a good multi-academy trust looks like precisely with that thought in mind. We need to encourage academies to come together to support each other in partnership and co-operation—schools taking the initiative to help other schools. I believe that combination will work to drive up standards, especially in areas—we know there are pockets—where standards are not high enough.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains? At the moment, the Government prevent it from doing so, so we do not know what their overheads are, we do not know how much they are putting into each school, and we do not know what they are spending on the chief executive’s salary. Is he in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains?

Neil Carmichael: The Education Committee was quite forceful on this matter in the previous Parliament and I expect it will comment on it again. I am personally in favour of multi-academy trusts being inspected. The Committee will look into it when it conducts an inquiry and comment on it in due course. I will not pre-judge what that inquiry will say.

It is important to recognise that in some areas—for example, in Yorkshire—some local authorities have not delivered adequate education for young people. It would be helpful if the Department set out data and maps, so Members and others can see where the problems are and calibrate the need for more academies. That would be really useful.

We need an improvement on fairer funding. This is, rightly, implicit in the White Paper. Schools in Gloucestershire need to be confident about fairer funding. I say Gloucestershire because I represent Stroud, but the point applies to a whole range of shire counties and to urban areas, too. Fairer funding is essential. I am pleased that the Education Committee will have the opportunity to check the Department’s proposals. That is extremely helpful and we will conduct an inquiry in due course. It is very good of the Secretary of State to enable us to do that, effectively through the timescale she has set out, just as she responded when the White Paper was launched and there was something of a furore over the scale of ambition in relation to academies.

It is in the same vein that I make my next point about co-operation and the opportunity to consider the Bill. It would be really helpful if the education for all Bill is published soon, so that we can have pre-legislative scrutiny. It would be useful to look at the detail behind the definition of a failing local authority, one that is beneath capacity threshold and would be fined or cease to be a provider of schools. That opportunity would help all Members to understand more clearly the direction of travel and perhaps see a way forward. I invite the Secretary of State to consider that proposal. I know the legislative programme is tight and that there are few opportunities for delay, but I think this would be a good contribution to the debate.

I want to end on something I think is very important. I was reading with interest the thoughts of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent and authoritative organisation, on whether we should be in the European Union. It noted that if we left the EU our economy would be smaller by about £15 billion within about two years. These figures are bandied about frequently and understood by many, and the IFS is not the only leading organisation, on whether we should be in the European Union. The White Paper talks about a school-led system, as it absolutely should. Those of us who support the academies programme welcome its continued growth. Obviously, it is important to be sure that academies feel comfortable once they are out there. The Education Committee will be considering what a good multi-academy trust looks like precisely with that thought in mind. We need to encourage academies to come together to support each other in partnership and co-operation—schools taking the initiative to help other schools. I believe that combination will work to drive up standards, especially in areas—we know there are pockets—where standards are not high enough.
Jo Churchill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Neil Carmichael: I therefore suggest it is really important that we remain in the European Union, so that we can deliver our ambitions.

I have just realised that somebody must be trying to intervene, as an hon. Friend has helpfully informed everybody that I am completely deaf in my left ear. I can find that quite useful, certainly in family situations and often in politics, but not when my hon. Friend wants to intervene.

Jo Churchill: That must also be the reason why my husband sometimes does not respond when called. He is obviously deaf in one ear too.

It is important that we are a part of the European Union not only for the reasons my hon. Friend outlines, but to ensure that our young people have access to broader educational environments, such as the Erasmus programme.

Neil Carmichael: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention.

2.27 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I am pleased to follow the Chair of the Education Committee. I agree with much of what he said—on our membership of the EU and on his invitation to the Secretary of State to publish the education for all Bill in time for the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

It start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.
from their multi-academy trust. One primary headteacher told me that he did not want to academise specifically because the multi-academy trust his school would likely join would not allow the degree of autonomy for his school that his local education authority does. We are starting to see some bad old practices creeping into education administration through multi-academy trusts, and the Sutton Trust is absolutely right to point out that the speed of their expansion makes the problem worse.

I welcome the Secretary of State’s assurance to the Select Committee that multi-academy trusts should be allowed to expand only when they have a track record of success and improvement at their existing academies. I hope that that will be reflected in the Bill, when it is published, and that she will tell us that that will be the case. When she came before the Committee, she also recognised the importance of parents being able to secure an academy’s transfer to a different trust, where the existing trust has demonstrably failed to deliver adequate standards and improvement in a particular academy, as is starting to happen in some instances. If, with the appropriate standards, parents were allowed to do that, it would be an important protection. She fully recognised the value of such a provision in her evidence to the Committee. Will that be in the Bill as well?

Finally, the Bill will also deliver the national school funding formula. The House recently discussed the impact of that on schools in London in a debate initiated by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed). Ministers seem to have given exclusive access to their deliberations on this topic to a group of largely rural authorities, and I am worried that we might end up with an unfair formula as a result. In particular, no London authorities at all were included in that group. I am particularly anxious that the high rate of pupil mobility in some authorities should be included in the formula.

2.36 pm

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), who as a Minister in the Labour Government was respected by Conservative Members as somebody who listened and engaged.

I support the Gracious Speech. It contains a good programme for the Government and plenty of important, decent Bills that we can support. I will start with the referendum. When I was first elected, I voted for a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty, and was defeated; then I voted for a referendum on the Nice treaty, and was defeated; and then I voted for a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, and was defeated, even though Messrs Blair and Brown had committed to having one. It is refreshing, therefore, to have a Prime Minister with the confidence to put one in his manifesto, win an election, legislate and give the British people a choice. I am 59. I voted in the referendum in 1975. I suspect there are very few people in the Chamber who voted in 1975, and it is right and proper that the British people consent to the future arrangements. I lean towards the leave side, but nevertheless it is a real “shock horror—politician does what he said” moment, so we ought to give the Prime Minister credit.

The education Bill will be a game changer, particularly because of the fair funding formula, which I know London Members are worried about. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who campaigned throughout the last Parliament to get the Government to look at this. It is not that we do not believe people in some urban areas should have more money; it is that when they sometimes have two, three or four times as much money, children in places such as Dorset and Poole are being undervalued by the nation. We need to move in a new direction while being aware that, as with all these things, there clearly are winners and losers and that it cannot be done quickly. Nevertheless, the Bill is a good start.

I am also pleased with the NHS charging Bill, particularly for visitors to the UK. As the Secretary of State for Health often says, we have a national health service, not an international health service. There are occasions when I think we should be more vociferous in pursuing people who use the service who should not. Part of the problem with recouping money from people is that the service is not really set up to do it. We need to think very carefully about how to recoup the £500 million a year that the Bill expects from those using the service who should not do so. We all know that people sometimes come to this country with the express purpose of taking advantage of the NHS. We all know that there are shortages of resources, and that in these tough times it is right and proper for the British Government to stand up for British interests by ensuring that people pay their fair share.

I believe a range of Bills in the Gracious Speech will make life chances better for people in the UK. As mentioned in the House yesterday, children in care are being given a higher priority. John Hemming, who used to be a Member of Parliament, spent a lot of time campaigning for the rights of children in care. Sometimes they get lost and their life chances can be somewhat less than those of others. It is right and proper for these sometimes forgotten children to be looked after and given the best start in life—at least a better start than could be expected in their circumstances.

I have a slight word of criticism. I visited one of my successful local companies, Sunseeker Yachts, which employs nearly 2,000 Dorset people and currently has 40 apprentices. It worked out that the apprenticeship levy would cost the company a quarter of a million pounds, but they have not yet seen how to claim any money back against that. It appears as a dead-weight loss in its forward plan. It is anxious for the Government to explain very soon the procedures and the criteria that will apply so that it can plan for the future. It exports well over 95% of its turnover, and the company is well regarded internationally. In common with many businesses employing apprentices, it is a little worried that the devil in the detail has not yet become known, and it needs more evidence to be able to plan.

I support a whole range of Bills. The modern transport Bill is innovative, and talking about driverless cars is better than having a leaderless Opposition. We have a good programme for the next four years. We will make people’s life chances substantially better. The Prime Minister has put forward a one nation progressive programme, which we can all rally around. It will lead to a better situation for our citizens and a Government that we can be proud of.
Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms), although I disagree with him not only about the contents of the Queen’s Speech, but about Europe.

While measures to improve the national citizenship scheme, to support donations to charities, to provide the right to broadband and to protect cultural property are welcome and laudable, the measures in the Queen’s Speech fail as a whole to address the huge challenges that the country faces. These include the huge problems of underfunding and marketisation caused by the top-down restructuring of the NHS. There is nothing to deal with the chronic shortage of doctors and nurses—never mind the investment in social care that is needed properly to protect and look after older people with the dignity they desire.

On education, there is nothing to address the chronic teacher shortages, the shortage of school places and the need for capital investment to create the 21st-century schools that our constituents need. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said from the Front Bench, this is a Queen’s Speech with emptiness at its core. Some measures that are in it are deeply worrying, and I shall concentrate on two specific issues.

First, I have to say I am really disappointed by the higher education Bill. The measures in it could see fees climb even higher, saddling young people who want to go to university with even more debt. Some students are already coming out of university with £40,000 to £50,000 of debt—where will this end?

On the teaching excellence framework, we support a focus on teaching quality. However, if this is simply a framework with parameters already set to enable the removing of the fees cap, it is not something we should support. I say yes to the focus on quality in teaching, providing the metrics are right and the risks of doing so are properly managed, but why is there the link to higher fees? As I said, we need to be very careful about what we are doing because of its impact on the reputation of higher education. We are therefore concerned about the deregulation of the establishment of new universities and the lack of safeguards, which could undermine the excellence of our HE institutions.

I hope that the Minister recognises that this is not because we are against the expansion of higher education. I am very much in support of it and I would like to see more of our young people going to universities. However, we are simply not sure that the Government are going about expansion in the right way. We are not the only ones to have concerns about that. As million+ has said:

“Competition can undoubtedly promote innovation but lowering standards to help new, inexperienced or small, single-degree providers with no interest in being research active, to gain degree-awarding powers and university title is not opening the market but lowering the bar.”

It emphasises the huge risk of the marketisation approach, and points out that UK universities trade globally on the basis of a national quality assurance system, high student satisfaction rates and high quality teaching and research. It states:

“The assumption that institutions with UK university title or degree-awarding powers should be allowed to fail and exit the market is potentially at variance with the Government’s ambitions to promote UK higher education internationally.”

We share that set of concerns, and Universities UK argued along the same lines in its briefing to Members.

We will need to hear a lot more from the Minister when we reach this Bill’s Second Reading about what safeguards will be in place.

The Minister said quite a lot today about improving participation in our universities and increasing social mobility. However, a briefing from the Open University has pointed out that the Prime Minister’s target to increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university is likely to fail because the number of part-time disadvantaged students entering part-time HE is falling, not increasing. Part-time HE is often the most common way for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or places to enter universities. The Open University also pointed to the lack of clear opportunities for lifelong learning—another issue that the Minister will need to address. I am astounded that there is nothing in the Queen’s Speech to tackle the reduction in the number of part-time students, to promote lifelong learning or to promote upskilling and reskilling opportunities for adult learners. What we know is the budget for that has been massively cut by £335 million. One can only hope that the White Paper we are expecting in June or the autumn will address some of these issues.

Moving on, I want to comment briefly on the NHS measures. We know that the Government are ploughing ahead with the seven-day care objective, but I think they are refusing to accept the reality of what is happening in the NHS. Patients are waiting longer and therefore suffering longer. Waits are increasing and it is getting much harder to see a GP. Instead of providing measures to tackle this and the crisis in social care, we get more cuts to older people’s services. We also know of record visits to A&E, mainly because of the breakdown of services elsewhere, and £22 billion-worth of efficiency savings are not going to help. Over the last five years, my own local authority of Durham has had to make £43 million-worth of cuts to adult care, and is going to have to make a further £25 million over the next couple of years. I really want to hear from the Government what they are going to do to tackle this crisis in social care.

Lastly, I want to say a brief word about the northern powerhouse, which Ministers and, indeed, some sections of the media talk about as if it were a reality. Mine is one of the constituencies that should be benefiting from it, but I see absolutely no reality. The devolution deal brings with it very little money to promote the economy and skills development in the north-east. It would be great to know what the northern powerhouse is actually delivering, but, at present, I see nothing at all.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods).

I went into politics because I was that bored 16-year-old growing up in rural Norfolk, frustrated by the lack of opportunities and keen to do my bit to make things better. I had loving and supportive parents and encouraging teachers, but little access to people and places. Indeed, it could be said that, at that time, I did not even know what I did not know. However, I am a Conservative today because I believe that it is not where we are coming from that counts, but where we are going. That call can only
be answered by opportunity: by ensuring that every person has a chance to make of themselves what they want. Conservatives believe fundamentally in people and their freedom, because people are enterprising and can choose their own course best of all, but those people need the opportunity to do so.

As has been argued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, over the past few generations we have seen some incredible and dramatic changes in society. Never before has so much information been at the fingertips of so many, never before have we seen such a decline in social difference, and never before have previously elite preserves such as universities been a realistic option for millions; yet we are not living in a golden age of social mobility. Today, far too many people have their life chances determined before they have even had an opportunity to explore all that life has to offer. So I am proud that it is a Conservative Prime Minister, a guy from a council estate in Pembrokeshire and the capable Ministers who are here today who are proposing action that will span families, the early years, education, treatment and support, opportunity, and an end to discrimination.

We should listen carefully today, so that we hear the hopes and quiet wishes being expressed by mums and dads throughout the country—rich and poor alike—for their children, every minute of every day. We should seek to give all children the chances and the choices that they need to live their lives. That is why I welcome the Bills in the Queen's Speech that promote life chances through better education.

Let me begin with the Higher Education and Research Bill and its further expansion of higher education. The origin of the university in my fine city of Norwich, the University of East Anglia, lies in the great university expansion of the 1960s, and I welcome the Bill's emphasis on making it easier for more high-quality universities to enter the sector and boost choice for students.

Higher education is one of our greatest engines for social mobility, and we should celebrate the record application rates that we are seeing among students from disadvantaged backgrounds; but there is a great deal more to do. In January this year, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified the life chances of a poor child growing up in the Norwich City Council area as some of the very worst in the country. That is something that I am determined to confront as a constituency MP, for it is not something to be proud of, but I know that it is something that the Government are determined to confront as well. The provisions to ensure transparency of data provide a key tool. If we do not have data, we will be—in the words of the commission—trying to make progress blindfolded. We need evidence-based policies, and we need the data that will enable us to prioritise our efforts.

The Bill also provides for an access and participation plan. I welcome the broadening of the definition from "access agreements" to "access and participation plan", which means that universities will be expected to welcome students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and take steps to support them throughout their courses. If we can do all those things, we will achieve the goals that the Government have rightly set out to ensure that more people participate in higher education.

I welcome measures in the Children and Social Work Bill, particularly the mentoring measure. The Bill sensibly requires local authorities to publish a local offer giving information about the support that is available to care leavers, and ensuring that they have access to a personal adviser up to the age of 25. I should add, however, that that must be done well. I recently heard about a personal adviser in my constituency who, it appears, was rarely able to meet his charge, and when he did so—unbelievably—the meeting usually took place at the side of the road or in a pub car park for 10 minutes. That is not what should be happening. The state must do better as a parent and a mentor.

I welcome measures in the Bill providing greater support for those at school, and I also welcome measures in the proposed national citizen service Bill to promote volunteering and social action. There is, of course, more that we can all do. We need to work together in the same way as Universities UK and its social mobility advisory group, which was formed following Green and White Papers. They are rightly bringing together people from the education and social sectors to take a proper look at the systemic issues relating to people's chances and choices. In my constituency, I am proud of the response to the social mobility index. Educationists and business representatives, local authorities and the voluntary sector are coming together to analyse what we can do locally. Much good work is already taking place, but we want to identify the extra actions that we can take in order to make a difference. We know that the factors involved are complex and deep-rooted, and that we can solve them only if we work together.

The proposed education for all Bill conveys the lesson that we must be willing to look at what works. I support the Government's education reforms, because schools in my constituency must improve if our children are to have the best possible start in life. There is no room for complacency, given the evidence of the index to which I referred earlier. If children in the Norwich City Council area do indeed have some of the poorest life chances in England, the years spent at school must be absolutely crucial.

There is some improvement to be seen in the performance of schools in Norwich and Norfolk, but we must not rest there. I believe that the academy structure can help, I want the Government to focus on building capacity in good trusts and good leaders, and recruiting, retaining and developing good teachers. I also want local leaders in schools to continue to use pupil premium money in the most imaginative and ambitious ways to help the poorer students break out. I think that there is much good work to be seen in the Sutton Trust's toolkit.

I welcome the promise in the Queen's Speech to make school funding fairer. Schools with the same kind of pupils should receive the same kind of funding, and that brings me back to my starting point. Wherever people come from in this country and whatever background they start from, they should expect the same opportunities. Norwich children should have the same chances and choices as children from Newcastle, the New Forest or Nottingham. As I said at the beginning, that is what brought me into politics in rural Norfolk, and it is what inspired many of us into Parliament. It should spur us on afresh today to ensure that the chance of a decent life is universal, available in all communities, in all parts of the country and in every household—regardless of background, but especially for the poorest.
Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I always think of the first Queen’s Speech that you and I attended, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was the last occasion on which I spent any real time with my good friend Robin Cook. I think that most Members in all parts of the House would agree that he was a fine parliamentarian, and I wonder what he would make of this shambles of a Government today. A former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has described the Business Secretary as disappointing, his own Prime Minister as disingenuous, and his own Chancellor as nothing short of a liar, even calling him Pinocchio. Meanwhile, the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the former Mayor of London and the former Defence Secretary are all saying, “Look out, look out, the Turks are coming!”, although 10 years ago they were saying, “We want Turkey in Europe.”

It is against that background that the most wasteful use of parliamentary time in history went ahead last week. It showed what we are used to in this place: contempt from the leader of this country towards the House of Commons. Worse, however, it showed contempt for our Queen to bring that woman here, in her record-breaking 90th year, to deliver such a piece of rubbish. And even worse than that, it showed contempt for the people who do not just send us here, but pay for the privilege of doing so.

It is that contempt that I want to reflect on now, in relation to something that will have a huge impact on the people in my part of the world. I refer to the ludicrous programme of English devolution. It is a farce, it is a joke, but sadly, it is deadly serious.

The Labour party is and always has been the party of devolution, in Scotland, in Wales, in Northern Ireland and in London, all of which have been given real powers, real democracy and real accountability. Crucially, all those arrangements were agreed through genuine engagement and democratic decision-making involving the people affected. What have we got now? Devolution drawn up on the back of a fag packet; decisions taken behind closed doors by Treasury officials, local government senior officers and leaders of councils; the imposition of elected mayors without asking the local people if they want one, often ignoring the voices of those who have already rejected mayors in their towns and cities; the cobbled together of geographical areas that bear little resemblance to each other; meagre resources being given to areas that have been coerced into signing up—areas where huge sums of money have been taken away from local government as austerity goes on and on; an insistence on getting full agreement on structures even before the legislation has been agreed by this House and the other place; a funding stream that has no basis in fairness or transparency; and locally elected representatives being cajoled into agreeing these poor deals as the only game in town, telling them, “You take this or you get nothing.” All this is being cobbled together under the crass PR tags of the “northern powerhouse”, the “midlands engine”—and God knows who is in the back of the car in the boot.

The people of England deserve better than this; more, and more and more people are recognising that, as are more and more politicians of all colours. Indeed, I have sat in amazement over the past few weeks as I have heard people disagree with almost every day on almost every issue saying how concerned they are in their part of the world—in East Anglia, the south-west and the west midlands—about how this is going through the House. People are asking, “Why, oh why, is this happening in this way? Why must we in the north-east be told we can’t have this kind of authority without having a mayor, yet people in Cornwall can?” Why can we not have a proper consultation and a referendum, as has quite rightly happened everywhere else in the UK?

Why have we not got a fair funding system? I will give the House a great example of the need for one in my part of the world. Tees Valley, in the south of the north-east, has agreed to proceed with a mayoral combined authority, as is its right. The north-eastern part of the north-east has not as yet fully agreed to do the same. One of the sticking points is resources. We are asking why the Tees Valley, an area that is much smaller than ours geographically and with about a quarter of the population, is getting £15 million a year dedicated to its so-called powerhouse while we in the northern part are getting only £30 million. It might just be a coincidence that the Tees Valley contains the constituency home of the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse. Surely that could not have anything to do with this decision. That would be almost as absurd as to suggest that the arrangements in the greater Manchester area have anything to do with the fact that the Chancellor of the Exchequer lives on the fringes of that area. Surely even Pinocchio would not want us to agree to that.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I represent one of the constituencies in the Tees Valley, and I want to make it clear that we deserve that £15 million and will spend it wisely. However, we are also deeply opposed to the imposition of an elected mayor.

Mr Anderson: I have no doubt that the people of the Tees Valley should have that money; they deserve a lot more, given what they have gone through over the past 30 years. They have been through deindustrialisation in the 1980s and they have taken other hits lately, and £15 million is meagre corn for the people of the Tees Valley. I am in no way having a go at them. I am asking how it can be fair for a population of that size to get that amount when another area with a population four times the size does not get proportionally more.

I am a huge fan of devolution. I really believe that we in the north-east know what will work for us better than the old Etonians do. I also believe that we should be allowed the freedom to decide what is best for our part of the world, but to do that we need sufficient resources to match the responsibilities that are given to us. We need the funds to meet our needs. We need structures that are transparent and fully accountable, and this should not be negotiated by people with vested interests. The leaders of the council are decent honourable people, but they should not be the ones sitting around the table in saying, “Yes, this is what we want and we will agree to it without any recourse to the people in the local area.”

In Gateshead, the council carried out a consultation of 200,000 people, but only 38 people replied. A poll was carried out in the north-east a couple of weeks ago and, out of a population of 600,000, only 511 replied. The majority of those who replied said that they did not really know enough about what was going on to make a valid choice. What on earth does that tell
us about the way the Government are pushing through this programme, which has nothing to do with real transparency and real democracy? We need genuine buy-in and commitment from the people. Without that, this is going nowhere. We need a range of powers that recognise the vast differences between the needs of people living in, for example, rural Northumberland or the Durham dales and the people living in Tyneside tower blocks. They are different and they will have different demands.

None of these questions has been fully addressed to our satisfaction and, as I said earlier, people in other parts of England are similarly dissatisfied, including those in a number of places that have already signed up to these dodgy deals. I want to make it very clear in relation to my borough of Gateshead, which has refused to sign up to a deal that other people in our part of the world have agreed to, that we are not walking away from this. We want this to work, but we want it to work properly. There is nothing in this Queen’s Speech to make me believe that it will do anything to improve the situation we have been landed with.

3.6 pm

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), although I am afraid that I cannot agree with his every statement.

I would like to focus on the welcome emphasis on research and innovation in the Gracious Speech. Properly drawn, the Higher Education and Research Bill, the digital economy Bill, the education for all Bill and the modern transport Bill should work together to upgrade the very foundations of our knowledge economy, unlocking a UK robotics revolution, boosting our space sector, laying the infrastructure for our data-hungry economy and, crucially, underpinning all this with a pipeline of core science, technology, engineering and maths—STEM—skills, and investment in research and development.

I am sure Members will be devastated to hear that I cannot go into detail on all those Bills, but I hope they will be overjoyed to hear that the Science and Technology Committee will shortly be publishing its report on space and satellites, including its conclusions on a spaceport, and that we have just begun our inquiry into artificial intelligence and robotics, which will be looking at driverless cars. We will ensure that we report in time to inform the progress of the modern transport Bill.

Whether we are talking about artificial intelligence and robotics, about the space sector or about our digital economy, the scarlet thread running through the evidence that we are receiving is that we have a STEM skills crisis in the UK, especially in digital skills, which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. So while I welcome the ambition of the education for all Bill and the infrastructure investment that will flow from the digital economy Bill, I urge the Government to produce their long-overdue digital strategy and to ensure that they not only take into account the findings of the Shadbolt and Wakeham reviews but meet the scale of the skills challenge that we are facing.

I know that the Minister is aware that the Science and Technology Committee has been taking a keen interest in the higher education and research Bill. I am glad to see that a number of the concerns raised by the community have been taken on board already. In particular, I am glad to see that the timetable for the teaching excellence framework has been amended and that the technical paper has been published alongside it, although, as we have heard, there will be a rigorous debate not only on the timetable but on the quality and metrics measures that will be appropriate to ensure that the TEF delivers what it is intended to deliver.

I also welcome the restatement of the Haldane principle and the Government’s intention to enshrine the dual support system into law, but bringing all funding into UK Research and Innovation—UKRI—will require a separation in practice as well as in principle if we are to preserve the excellence-based allocation on which our world-leading system is founded. The quality of leadership, not just at UKRI level but at research council level, will play a key role in delivering this, but we cannot leave the health of our science and innovation system to the whim of personality. We have to ensure that the structures we set in place safeguard the autonomy and the strong voices of our existing research councils while achieving the stated goal of better interdisciplinary working. With a single accounting officer, I fear that this will be challenging.

There has also been concern about merging Innovate UK into UKRI, some of which was based on the fact that Innovate UK’s budget is not ring-fenced and some on fears about annexation. Many have welcomed the renaming of Research UK as UKRI as it puts innovation right at the heart of the organisation’s agenda and, obviously, innovation funding has been hypothecated. In practice, however, questions still remain. How will Innovate UK retain a clear, separate, business-facing focus and not become research facing? In the new structure, how will we stimulate our innovation sector so that it comes to match our research sector for excellence and efficiency? To achieve that, we need to know where we are going. What is the vision for not only the Higher Education and Research Bill, but this clutch of innovation-driven Bills? How will we ensure that we join them up seamlessly against all the natural impetus of the Whitehall machine?

On higher education, the Government have been clear about their intent that competitiveness and the TEF will raise teaching standards, increase transparency and drive improvements in diversity. Few would argue with those aims. In research and innovation, however, the scale of change does not seem to be matched by the ambition of merging all research councils to improve interdisciplinary working. We can do better than that. Reform on such a scale is disruptive and requires buy-in. To get that buy-in, the Government need to articulate clearly their vision for the future of research and innovation and explain not only why the disruptive changes will be worth it in the end, but how we will safeguard our science and innovation ecosystem—a national treasure—from unintended harm during the process.

I welcome the fact that the proposed office for students will have oversight of the sustainability of HE, but given the effective removal of the structural link between teaching and research—one of our innovation systems’ key strengths—I would like to know who will have responsibility for monitoring the health of the whole system as we progress through the reforms. It is possible that that job is envisaged for the Council for Science
and Technology in lieu of the ministerial committee, but I question its capacity to deliver in its current form. Sir Paul Nurse proposed that UKRI form closer links with the Government through a ministerial committee with a Government-wide perspective on research priorities, but the committee was supposed to be about not just horizon-scanning and health-checking, but high-level leadership and accountability for science and innovation across Government. It is not clear how the CST will be able to deliver that function.

The Chancellor has long prioritised science and innovation spending, even in times of austerity, because he recognises that the science and innovation budget is a strategic national investment, not a state subsidy. We now have a major programme of cross-Government reform to match that ambition. I congratulate the Government on recognising that we have no time to lose in backing science and innovation as a key strategic asset and a driver of our national knowledge economy, but we should be under no illusions. The Higher Education and Research Bill alone is the most far-reaching reform since the 1960s, which should not be taken lightly.

In this place, we often mention that the UK punches well above its weight in science and innovation and that we have four of the world's top six universities, and we should be proud of our research base's exceptional impact, but we should never forget the responsibility that that brings. As we contemplate new structures and regulations, it is our responsibility in this Chamber not only to guard jealously the health and vibrancy of our science and technology base as a strategic national asset, but to go further and ensure that our decisions do more than maintain the status quo. The decisions that we make with these innovative, forward-thinking Bills must ensure that we take this extraordinary jewel in our crown and supercharge it, matching infrastructure with skills and excellence with efficiency, and delivering in the process a science and innovation ecosystem that not only drives our economy ever more productively and creatively, but fuels the very discoveries that will unlock the great global challenges of our age.

3.13 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am grateful for being allowed to speak during this debate on the Queen's Speech. It was a one nation speech, and I will be speaking mainly about my nation, Scotland, and my hopes to improve legislation here. This is a UK Parliament, I am elected as a Member of a UK Parliament, and—for the benefit of Government Members—I come from Scotland.

There are many things to welcome in the Queen's Speech, but many more things could be improved on given our experiences in Scotland. It would appear that the Secretary of State for Education's U-turn is complete and that there should be no forced academisation of schools in England, which is good. However, I have heard it rumoured that cuts to local authority education resource funding might mean that authorities do not have the cash that helps them to improve school services in their areas and that that would lead schools to become academies anyway. No proof has been provided that academisation improves educational attainment—I did not say that; Michael Wilshaws said that. The free schools model came from Sweden, where it has now been decided that such schools are a political failure. I am glad that we have neither academies nor free schools in Scotland.

Turning to the Higher Education and Research Bill, which is mainly for England, it at least has the laudable aim of improving access to higher education, which should be welcomed across the United Kingdom. However, I find it difficult to believe that widening access can actually happen under a Government that have systematically cut funding to poorer students since 2015 and before. Maintenance grants are being abolished. Disabled students’ allowances are being cut. The National Scholarship Programme has been abolished. The educational maintenance allowance, which helps poorer students in both schools and further education, has also been abolished. How can such students possibly move on and access higher education if they are crippled by debt? In England, the number of part-time students has been reduced by 38%, and there are 180,000 fewer mature students in higher education since 2010. As a former further education lecturer, I find that unconscionable. Mature students bring so much to higher and further education, so it is impossible to understand why any Government would want to reduce their chances.

In Scotland, we do not charge fees. We still pay the education maintenance allowance. We actively encourage students to move forward in higher education. We do not simply ask universities to publish information on the types of students from deprived backgrounds who are accessing their services; we have actually legislated that universities must show that they are improving access for our most disadvantaged students. That is an absolute must, and I encourage the Government to look at what Scotland has done. It is important that they not only ask, but tell universities to encourage people from BME backgrounds, disabled people and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

One reason why many disadvantaged students do not go to university is the cost. In Scotland, we believe that students should access university based on ability, not the ability to pay. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has had that sentiment carved into a rock in Edinburgh at Heriot-Watt University—my alma mater. It is a subject with which the majority of people in Scotland totally agree.

Jenny Chapman: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying, but before she gets too smug, will she promise to go away and read the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's report on elitism in Scotland?

Marion Fellows: I most certainly will, but I remind the hon. Lady that the First Minister, who has been re-elected on a huge mandate, has put education at the heart of her Government and has asked to be judged on her progress.

Many people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland would agree with me that university fees are a huge barrier to higher and further education.

Rebecca Pow: I have great respect for the hon. Lady as she has taught within this system. However, it does not seem like a good one nation system, because if my son were to go to university in Scotland, not only would
[Rebecca Pow]

he have to do a four-year course rather than a three-year one, but he would have to pay whereas his Scottish colleagues would all be going for free.

**Marion Fellows**: If Scotland was independent, that would not happen, because we would be members of the European Union. So the answer is: give us our independence.

Although I welcome a lot of what is in the Bill, it is important to say that encouraging mature disadvantaged people to go to university only increases the standing of any country within the UK. Everyone from across the Chamber should agree with that. Education does not just benefit the person who gets it. I stand here as someone who went to university in 1967, at a time when women did not go to university and when women of my background did not get a chance; I had very far-sighted parents who actively encouraged me to make the best of what I could. As a result of that, I have been able to contribute back to Scotland greatly. As I have said, I ended up working in further education. I do not want to name names, but for someone in this Chamber to say that education benefits only those who get it is a total piece of nonsense.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): I totally agree with the hon. Lady that having more and more of our fellow citizens in higher education is good for the whole nation, which is why we are here to promote that. Does she therefore welcome the fact that the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education has increased from 13.6% in 2010 to 18.5% in 2015-16?

**Marion Fellows**: I welcome any increase in access for people from poorer backgrounds, but I do not think accessing education should come at the risk of being in debt for the remainder or quite a long part of someone’s adult life.

The National Union of Students in Scotland and in England has said that it is really likely that higher education fees will rise yet again here, and that just underlines my point.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): I listened with great interest to what the hon. Lady has been saying. The points she is making are all well and good, but I wish to ask one simple question: where would the money come from if the fees were taken away?

**Marion Fellows**: Government is about choices. May I suggest that the Government get rid of Trident and plough the money into education? That is a simple choice, and it is the obvious choice for me. It may not be the obvious choice for Conservative Members, but there are other things that can be done. Being in government is about choices and this Government need to look at the choices they are making by increasing the likelihood of higher fees for university students.

Let me discuss another of the Bills in the Queen’s Speech—the Children and Social Work Bill. The Chair of the Education Committee has alluded to the fact that our Committee has a report under commission, although it is not yet ready to be published and so I have to be careful about what I say. A former report examined the situation of looked-after children and their mental health needs, and that was quite an eye-opener for me. Everything I do on the Education Committee tends to be an eye-opener, because a lot of what I do I do not understand until I have gone through the process of writing a report with the Committee, as I am dealing with a totally different situation. In Scotland, we have a system for looked-after children, and all children in fact, called “Getting it right for every child”. Our system is very child-focused and is based on an understanding of the wellbeing of the child. It tackles inequality and—[Interruption.] Sorry, I realise that I have run out of time, but thank you for allowing me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker** (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I call Kit Malthouse.

3.24 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have to say, however, that prior to your arrival you missed a parade of relatively churlish speeches from Opposition Members, which I found surprising, as the Queen’s Speech appears to be a smorgasbord of legislative delights. It is a legislative Milk Tray, filled with hard and soft centres, from which one can take one’s pick—perhaps the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) was worried that he would get the coffee cream. In the Speech that he described as “rubbish” I found a huge amount of value, and I wish to take the opportunity today to run through some of the issues that will be important in the months to come.

The Children and Social Work Bill, to which the hon. Lady referred, is possibly the most important Bill in this Session. In his conference speech from October of the year before last—I believe it was then—the Prime Minister electrified the room by painting a fairly bleak picture of the lives of children in care. They are four times more likely to commit suicide, and 70% of all prostitutes in the UK have been through the care system. He told us all then that the care system shamed us all as a nation, and he was quite right. It is therefore a tribute to him and to the Minister for Children and Families that this Bill has appeared. That Minister said at the outset that his mission was to put children in care front and centre of the political debate, and he appears to have achieved that.

The Bill contains many measures that will be vital to those children’s lives in the future, but let me mention two in particular. The first is the focus on getting local authorities to realise that they are corporate parents—that these children are their charges and should not necessarily be competing for attention and resources with other issues, be it potholes, refuse or whatever it might be. We would not put our own children second to other requirements in our house, so why would we put children in care second, third or even last on the list in the priorities for a local authority? Defining more clearly for local authorities what their responsibilities are to those children, what their obligations are and the fact that they have to publish those and consult on them locally with people will be vital in creating transparency on the way these children live in all our communities.
The second measure is the concentration on leaving care. It may well be that we are not looking after these children terribly well or that we are looking after them patchily in the care system, but when they leave care our obligation to them does not cease. Providing each of them with an adviser up to the age of 25, improving leaving care services and, in particular, getting local authorities to publish their plans for leaving care and to consult on them, allowing local people to see what is being done in their name to all of our collective children, will be vital to driving standards up.

I would, however, like to see two areas added to the Bill, so I put the Minister on notice here. First, if it is right that children leaving care should have an adviser up to 25, surely it is also right that we look earlier in their lives at how we might be able to influence their outcomes in their adult life. In particular, I am thinking about what happens where educational attainment is extremely low. It strikes me that a sensible thing to do for those children who are underachieving—this is what any parent would do—is to try to look for assistance outside of school. In London, there is this strange phenomenon whereby parents of underperforming children who are entitled to free school meals are still managing to scrape together the money to pay for a tutor. I do not understand why officials in local authorities do not look at children in care as they would their own children and say, “If they are underachieving, we should be providing them with tutors.”

The Government have done lots around designated teachers, and there is more to come in this Bill, and lots around virtual headteachers, but there is no substitute for one-to-one assistance for children in care as they go through education, particularly the early years. Four, five, six and seven are critical ages for setting the foundation for future life. If those children were to get one-to-one tuition, as the most privileged kids—and often non-privileged kids—do in our society, it would make a big difference.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Do you think that your suggestions about the care of children would link very well with our reforms of the prison system. Too often, people in prison have gone through many care systems themselves.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am really sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but now that we are in the second Session of this Parliament, I cannot allow Members to use the word “you” when they mean the hon. Gentleman. If one says “you”, one means the Chair. We were quite easy on that during the first part of this Parliament, but from now on, Members must observe these niceties correctly please. The hon. Lady may finish her intervention.

Rebecca Pow: Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say that you make an exceedingly good point? I am suitably reprimanded. The point that I was trying to make is that these suggestions in relation to the care system link very well with our reforms of the prison system. Too often, people in prison have gone through many care systems themselves.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to some of those points a little later. Incidentally, Madam Deputy Speaker, “youse” is a term of abuse in Liverpool, so you absolutely should not allow that in the Chamber.

Secondly, private schools have charitable status, and I wonder whether there is more we can do to encourage them to take on children in care. By my maths, if each private school were to take about 20 children, which is not a huge amount in a school of 400 to 600, it would mean that every child in care could go to a private school. Given that those schools benefit from charitable status, they should look a little further than their local community and consider allowing some of our more disadvantaged children to take advantage of the facilities that they provide. I look forward to helping that Bill through its passage, as it will be incredibly valuable.

Let me rattle through some other issues. The initiatives that are proposed on prisons, courts reform, and policing and crime, which allow for greater innovation, will be vital. As a famous Labour politician once said:

“I bear the scars on my back”

from trying to do a moderate amount of innovation in the criminal justice system at Feltham. We attempted to look at youth offending from a different point of view. It was an incredibly difficult and bureaucratic process. In the end, the attempt foundered in a morass of something like 19 organisations that were required to agree and a Ministry of Justice that was broadly reluctant. Getting innovation into the criminal justice system and giving people on the ground the ability to create and design their own solutions to the problems that we face, such as education in prisons, will be absolutely key.

The Digital Economy Bill is incredibly exciting for those of us who have rural constituencies, as it recognises that 25% of all small businesses—that is half a million small businesses—are registered in rural area. Allowing people to have the right to demand a universal service obligation of 10 megabits for their internet is absolutely critical. Twelve per cent. of GDP now comes to the internet in the UK, so, if we are to grow as an economy, it is vital that we connect up all the people.

Many of us have neighbourhood plans in our constituencies. I have several going to referendum this year, and one is going through already. If the Government are to get people to take up their planning policy, it is vital that neighbourhood planning is strengthened and protected. I understand that the neighbourhood planning Bill is designed to do that. In particular, it will allow local authorities greater scope to protect their own five-year housing supply figures, so that developers cannot constantly challenge them, or wear them down by a war of attrition in the courts and with the planning inspectors, to get their way on speculative developments. There will be many Members from rural communities and elsewhere who will be watching that Bill with care.

The modern transport Bill is very exciting. If we are to be at the forefront of developments, we need to grab this technology for ourselves, rather than, as the British normally do, allow the Japanese to miniaturise it and the Americans to consumerise it. We should take some of the things that we have invented and try to exploit them. Although modern transport is largely focused around autonomous cars, I urge Ministers to look at the hydrogen economy. There is absolutely no doubt that the fuel cell is coming. In California, Toyota has already launched the Mirai, the next generation Prius. It is a hydrogen fuel cell car. Powered by hydrogen, the car emits only water. Hydrogen is the most abundant
element in the universe and holds out the option of extremely cheap power for all of us, and so using this Bill to accelerate our adoption of that technology is key.

Finally, the better markets Bill holds out enormous promise for consumers, in particular those who want to shift banks. I have one plea: please may we use the Bill to get rid of the requirement to produce utility bills wherever we go? For those of us who pay by direct debit and are paperless, those things are anachronistic, and the foresters of Britain will rejoice at the trees that will not be required to be felled as a result.

3.34 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse). I agree with much of what he said. It is also good to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), who made a powerful speech about the current devolution offer from the Government. He is right to raise concerns, but the deal that has been presented must be a stepping stone to the real devolution that the north-east deserves. I hope that Gateshead can find its way back to rejoin the process, as we are much stronger together as a region.

I, along with many Members on both sides of the House, cautiously welcomed the climbdown that appeared to have taken place from the nonsensical idea of forcing all schools down the path of academisation by 2020. It is true that the education for all Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech did not include the wholesale forced academisation of all schools down the path of academisation by 2020. It is true that the education for all Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech did not include the wholesale forced academisation of all schools through legislation, but the Government continued to state that the Bill was being brought forward “to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life”—an aim which every Member in this Chamber shares—but that this will be done by moving “towards a system where all schools are academies, and all schools are funded fairly.”

Despite there being no evidence that academisation leads to improved performance, we are informed that one of the main “benefits” of the Bill will be to “convert schools to academies in the worst performing local authorities and those that can no longer viably support their remaining schools, so that a new system led by good and outstanding schools can take their place.”

Given that the education services grant, which funds local authority spending on school improvement services, the management of school buildings and the tackling of non-attendance, was cut by £200 million, or 20%, in 2015-16, and is to be cut by £600 million, or 75%, from 2016-17 to 2019-20, it would be helpful if the Minister could clarify which councils the Government expect will still be able to support their local schools viably in such financial circumstances.

As the National Association of Head Teachers has pointed out, the Bill will mean that “good and outstanding schools can still be made to convert, regardless of the professional judgement of school leaders, the opposition of parents and the best interests of local communities. Schools have had the chance to convert over many years, and many have considered and rejected this as a way forward.”

Of course, we know that many other schools are already “choosing”—I put that non-modal verb in inverted commas—to go down the path of academisation because they would rather jump before they are pushed. Many will have started down that path following the announcement of forced academisation of all schools at the Budget, and will continue down it because they can see that the Government’s professed U-turn and promises of having listened to everyone’s concerns are clearly not all that they are cracked up to be.

The education for all Bill also promises to make school funding fairer, with a national funding formula that will ensure that “schools with the same kinds of pupils get the same funding.” Can the Minister clarify whether the Government intend to go ahead with the area cost adjustment multiplier to the formula, which would see schools in my region, the north-east, losing out?

As the Director of Schools NorthEast commented:

“Ironically, the Government risks fuelling the North-South divide in education by proposing to fund schools with similar characteristics differently, based on their location. This means that our region will be losing funds to the south, where most high-cost areas are located. The rationale behind this is flawed.”

These concerns are extremely timely, given the findings of an IPPR North report earlier this week that secondary schools in the north of England—or the northern powerhouse, to give us our correct title—are receiving £1,300 per pupil less than schools in London. The situation needs rectifying, and quickly, if the northern powerhouse is ever to become anything more than an empty announcement.

The Children and Social Work Bill seeks to shorten the time it takes for children to be placed in a secure, stable, loving family, as well as placing additional duties on local authorities to ensure that children and young people leaving the care system are provided with support.

Again, there is not a Member in the House who would not support those aims.

We have only to look at the Prison Reform Trust report by Lord Laming, which was published this week, to be reminded that too many of our children in care are being let down. The report found that up to half the children in custody in England and Wales have been in the care system at some point. Indeed, 23% of the adult prison population have been in care, which suggests that something has gone badly wrong in our system.

As Barnardo’s has highlighted, the Bill is the second piece of legislation to address adoption in as many years, so the Government’s rhetoric really must now be translated into action on the ground. However, as Barnardo’s also made clear, this is a complex challenge.

Three thousand children in the UK are waiting to be adopted, and they are waiting an average of two years, although some wait as long as three and a half years if they are older. I therefore strongly welcome any measures that will genuinely and sustainably help to speed the process up.

For those leaving the care system—about 10,000 young people in England each year—the Government pledge to ensure there is greater support, as well as the right to a personal adviser up to the age of 25. Everybody would welcome both those moves because current service provision simply does not meet demand, and I would argue that that is because one crucial piece of the jigsaw
is missing. The “It’s time” campaign by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has powerfully highlighted that almost two thirds of children and young people entering the care system have experienced abuse and neglect, and they are more likely to have mental health needs. However, we are not properly counting and tracking abused and neglected children, including those in the care system, so we do not know whether they are receiving the correct therapeutic support, at the time they need it, to rebuild their lives.

The findings of the Education Committee’s inquiry into the wellbeing and mental health of looked-after children, which was published last month, were truly stark, and they simply must be addressed if the Government are serious about tackling this issue. The Committee heard incredibly powerful evidence from a 16-year-old woman, who told us she had been waiting for child and adolescent mental health services for more than two and a half years but that she had been unable to access them because she had not been in a stable placement—indeed, she had been moved 13 times during that period. CAMHS are often unwilling to treat a child if they move placement, even if that is within the same local authority area. That is clearly unacceptable and, indeed, counterproductive.

It is no good pledging support to children and young people leaving the care system if they are not provided with the support they need on entering it. That is why the Education Committee rightly recommended that all children should have specialist mental health assessments on entering care and regularly throughout their time in care and that they should receive timely and appropriate advice before they reach crisis point. We need to see that key change if we are to increase the number of successful adoptions and long-term placements and to improve the outcomes for those leaving the care system. That is a fundamental building block in achieving the aims I have set out—it is not an added extra—and I strongly urge the Government to consider including it in their reforms.

3.42 pm

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Education is the building block of our society; it is the foundation of all opportunities. That is why I am delighted the Government are putting at the heart of these proposals the objective of achieving greater social mobility and of ensuring that we have a fine education standard for all.

Delivering on the Conservative party’s manifesto pledge of a new national funding formula is something I am proud of and something that will ensure that all schools in Chippenham get the money they deserve. A fairer funding system is something I have campaigned for for a long time—from well before the election—and I pay tribute to all the members of the fairer funding campaign 140, as well as to the thousands of pupils, parents and teachers in my constituency, and in constituencies up and down the country, who put pressure on the Government to achieve a fairer system early.

For too long, school funding has been extremely unfair towards pupils, particularly in rural areas and market towns. Successive Governments have done generations of children a disservice and, fundamentally, an injustice. The effects have been exacerbated in rural areas, where services are far more expensive to deliver.

The most important aim of the new education Bill is to close the productivity gap between the UK and other countries. The skills plan represents an ambitious reform of technical education to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills they need to succeed. The simple fact is that an under-skilled workforce limits a company’s growth and prospects, and, in turn, the prospects of the country. If our labour supply does not match our jobs market, companies are forced to locate elsewhere, or to close. This threat is real and pertinent in my constituency, and I hear of it week in, week out.

The UK is the 11th-biggest manufacturer in the world, and I was delighted to hear measures in the Queen’s Speech to support the electric car industry. That is a massive opportunity for us that I hope will help Wiltshire businesses. I hope that we can capitalise on it, as can other areas of the country.

Investment in research and development is certainly welcome, but it will be successful only when it is coupled with a further improvement in our education and when we address the skills gap to ensure that we remain competitive in research and development. We must not forget about our severe shortage of engineers. According to the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the country will need almost 2 million extra engineers over the next seven years. This shortage could severely limit our ability to make the most of the Government’s investment.

There are, yes, more teachers with degrees and more pupils studying maths and sciences, but there are still massive shortages. The number of females and those from socially deprived backgrounds in STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—careers remains drastically low. The proportion of women in engineering is just 6%. Something needs to be done to address this, and I hope that the new education Bill will go some way towards that.

We need to improve our career education system. I am delighted by what the Government have already done to join up the link between business and schools. Sheldon School in my constituency, which I visited last week, has just launched an excellent and innovative scheme that focuses on a membership of local businesses that support career education, advice and opportunities for young people, in turn funding their work experience programme. This is the blueprint of what we should be doing up and down the country. I would like to invite the Minister, or the Secretary of State if she has the time, to the opening on 5 July of this programme, which we could utilise elsewhere. It would place an emphasis on local labour market intelligence and inform young people about the local jobs available. Informed education and career choices will ensure that areas such as Wiltshire retain some of its young so that we can reverse the draining away of youth that is happening in constituencies like mine and safeguard our high-tech and engineering hub to ensure that young people have the skill sets to do the jobs available.

It is quite simple, really: to make our economy productive we need to have an education system that is productive. The Minister will know full well that I have regularly campaigned to get design and technology made part of the EBacc. For too long, design and technology and engineering subjects have been misunderstood, stigmatised and stereotyped. If we are to plug the ever-growing skills gap, we need to address this, and the widely
acknowledged productivity crisis, head on. We must listen to business and take urgent action. I am confident that the education Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech will take some good steps towards addressing our productivity crisis.

Jo Churchill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very important that we look to all businesses? I have been approached by bakers and clockmakers in my constituency who find that the apprenticeship scheme needs a little more flexibility in order to cope with small business needs as well as those of the large ones she has mentioned.

Michelle Donelan: I am delighted by my hon. Friend’s excellent point. We do indeed need to make sure that we are supporting all businesses. Bakers, plumbers, electricians and so on are the backbone of our economy, and very important to constituencies like ours.

The Government are rightly pushing ahead with ensuring that education is rigorous and that students get the key skills and core skills that they need in the workplace. I fully support this, and I would never, ever suggest that it is anything but a robust and clear plan. However, the push towards the EBacc in its current form threatens to undermine the progress being made and does not address the stigma against design and technology and engineering.

I hope that the new education Bill will address this. I would like the vastly improved, highly academic, highly scientific design and technology GCSE that we now have to include the option of a science element. There is huge support for this within the business community, who are crying out for change. Let me be clear: this would not represent a U-turn on policy but would be a minor change to strengthen, improve and safeguard the EBacc. Given the scientific and academic nature of the new design and technology GCSE, which this Government have invested heavily in and done a great deal of work on, there will be no outcry from other vocational subjects, because this is a totally different matter.

There is also a precedent with computer science, which was introduced to the EBacc because of shortages in the field. Yet that does not make a lot of sense when the shortages in design and technology, manufacturing and engineering are far greater than those in the digital industries.

What I am proposing is that design and technology be included as a science-based option, just like computer science, but that there should be an either/or choice so that students can pick between the two. That would ensure that it does not water down the EBacc or its academic rigour; instead, it would enhance it. It would also enhance the status of the excellent route into research, development, design and manufacturing provided by design and technology, as well as highlight that this Government have yet again listened to the business community and acknowledged the needs of our future economy.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): That is an excellent suggestion, but does the hon. Lady agree that there is an overlap between design and technology and IT, and that that might be affected by her proposal?

Michelle Donelan: Design and technology is the only subject that puts maths and physics to practical use, and there is no comparable IT-based course for a career in the industry. In fact, design and technology is one of the only subjects that produces a clear pipeline to a career in that sector. We all believe in giving students a choice and the best opportunities for their future.

The simple change I am proposing would be about what businesses, the economy and, if we are honest, students need. It would highlight that the Government understand the need to align our education system more with the economy and give the young the best opportunity in life. If we are to remain at the forefront of global product design, we must take action. I believe that bolstering the design and technology GCSE for inclusion in the EBacc would be an important step towards addressing the skills shortage, safeguarding the future of the subject and supporting skills and British businesses.

As I have said to the Prime Minister in Prime Minister’s questions, the skills shortage is a ticking time bomb. In my constituency, it is one of the key challenges that we face, and I am confident that the measures announced in the Queen’s Speech will take some significant steps towards addressing the skills gap and boosting our productivity. I hope that the measures in the proposed Bill will go far enough to tackling this very important issue.

3.52 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who made passionate speeches about the importance of our young people.

It is difficult to discuss skills and education and the Queen’s Speech, given what is going to happen on 23 June—which is not so much the elephant as the circus in the room—and the effect it will have on the choices we make, but I am going to give it a go. It is remarkable to hear this Government now saying that increasing the life chances of the most disadvantaged is a priority for them. Given the choices they have made over the past five years, that is like a dentist offering someone anaesthetic after he has taken out their wisdom teeth for no reason.

“Life chances” is one of those phrases that we often use but seldom define, but definition and detail matter, as does determination—the determination to do what it takes to ensure that every person from every background has every opportunity to achieve their potential. I want to set out my fears about how, in today’s ever-changing world, we are running out of time to acknowledge that that means doing things completely differently.

Everyone in this House is proud of the young people we represent. We see their ability and the factors that make the difference between them realising it and wasting it. I do this job because I think that somewhere in my community is a kid who could cure cancer, if only they had the right opportunities to unlock their talents. Imagine how we would all benefit if that happened. That is where we come in: our job is to make sure that they have those pathways to be the kinds of people they can be and change all our lives.
That is where this Queen's Speech misses the mark. We act as if opportunity is the ladder we have all known and that, to improve life chances for all, we simply need to get more of the next generation to repeat the same steps we took—go to school, go to university and settle into a career. If we are honest, we will admit that it was not that simple or open for us. Most of us can point to the points in our lives when we had a helping hand up that ladder, including good parents, good teachers and good networks. They all opened doors closed to others, by which I mean not just schools and universities, but internships and job interviews, too. The world is changing so quickly that if we are really to change the life chances of today's 15-year-olds, we need to do more than open up the old boys' or old girls' network. We need to see opportunity as less a ladder than a maze, with many different doors, directions and routes to take.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Is it not the case that to give young people opportunity we really need more good and outstanding schools, producing fantastic standards, so that they can go on and fulfil their dreams? That is what we need, and that is what the Government are delivering, is it not?

Stella Creasy: If the hon. Gentleman will let me continue, I hope I will convince him to think bigger. When I was involved in the scouts, we always said that the key to understanding youth work was to recognise that although everybody has been a 15-year-old, not everybody has been a 15-year-old in today's world. If we really want to improve the life chances of today's young people, they do not just need our help to get them a job. They do not seek an industry or a profession. They live in a world in which, it is predicted, they will hold seven different careers, two of which are yet to be invented.

Each generation has faced change, but this generation will see it not just in their lifetime, but within a decade. The real challenge to their future prospects is not Romanian immigrants, but robots. Just as Friends Reunited was overtaken by Facebook, so technology is replacing not just manual labour but skilled labour—prescriptions filled, legal forms checked, cars driven and retail services replaced. It is a time of peril and potential: adapt or fall behind. There is little certainty to be had and little time to catch our breath. But the fact that the world moves so quickly means that people can keep learning new skills or reapplying those that they have to the new opportunities that arise. There are more second chances than ever before.

Not only are we failing the next generation by not acting to help them to navigate the world that is to come, but I fear that the measures in the Queen's Speech could reinforce the inequalities that already define life chances for so many. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has demonstrated that graduates from richer family backgrounds earn significantly more than their less wealthy counterparts, even when they take similar degrees or reapply those that they have to the new opportunities that arise. There are more second chances than ever before.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for tackling some of the inequalities in our education system. She will know of the huge benefits that were derived from the London challenge. Does she recognise that model ought to be replicated outside London, in places such as Greater Manchester? Indeed, a Greater Manchester challenge was created, but one of the first acts of this Government was to scrap it.

Stella Creasy: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are good opportunities to create a change in results to the benefit of young people, but the Government seem to have missed them. The student loan book is bust, and university is not the only door in the maze to open other doors. The education Bill is a case in point, with its obsession with turning every school into an academy, rather than turning every young person into an achiever. It works against partnership, isolating schools rather than linking them with local businesses and local communities. The Higher Education and Research Bill will put more resource into the “ladders” approach just when young people need more access—to apprenticeships, to further education and to paid internships—to open other doors. The Bill comes at the same time as the area-based review of further education seeks to close down those institutions.

Although the Government’s restatement of their commitment to sharia-compliant loans is welcome, if we fail to deal with the inequalities in resource that affect the poorest in our society in the early years, those people will continue to get a worse deal than their more affluent counterparts even if they make it to the same schools and universities.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for tackling some of the inequalities in our education system. She will know of the huge benefits that were derived from the London challenge. Does she recognise that model ought to be replicated outside London, in places such as Greater Manchester? Indeed, a Greater Manchester challenge was created, but one of the first acts of this Government was to scrap it.

Stella Creasy: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are good opportunities to create a change in results to the benefit of young people, but the Government seem to have missed them. The student loan book is bust, and university is not the only door in the maze to open other doors. The education Bill is a case in point, with its obsession with turning every school into an academy, rather than turning every young person into an achiever. It works against partnership, isolating schools rather than linking them with local businesses and local communities. The Higher Education and Research Bill will put more resource into the “ladders” approach just when young people need more access—to apprenticeships, to further education and to paid internships—to open other doors. The Bill comes at the same time as the area-based review of further education seeks to close down those institutions.

Although the Government’s restatement of their commitment to sharia-compliant loans is welcome, if we fail to deal with the inequalities in resource that affect the poorest in our society in the early years, those people will continue to get a worse deal than their more affluent counterparts even if they make it to the same schools and universities.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for tackling some of the inequalities in our education system. She will know of the huge benefits that were derived from the London challenge. Does she recognise that model ought to be replicated outside London, in places such as Greater Manchester? Indeed, a Greater Manchester challenge was created, but one of the first acts of this Government was to scrap it.

Stella Creasy: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are good opportunities to create a change in results to the benefit of young people, but the Government seem to have missed them. The student loan book is bust, and university is not the only door in the maze to open other doors. The education Bill is a case in point, with its obsession with turning every school into an academy, rather than turning every young person into an achiever. It works against partnership, isolating schools rather than linking them with local businesses and local communities. The Higher Education and Research Bill will put more resource into the “ladders” approach just when young people need more access—to apprenticeships, to further education and to paid internships—to open other doors. The Bill comes at the same time as the area-based review of further education seeks to close down those institutions.

Although the Government’s restatement of their commitment to sharia-compliant loans is welcome, if we fail to deal with the inequalities in resource that affect the poorest in our society in the early years, those people will continue to get a worse deal than their more affluent counterparts even if they make it to the same schools and universities.
Money and contacts matter, as does flexibility, but none of these pieces of legislation will fundamentally tackle the inequalities that too many in our country face in accessing such skills and real-life work experience. We need to bring together not just the institutions, but the networks that can help our young people to thrive in the world to come. Ministers may tell me that the answer to the first point is their savings plan in the Queen's Speech and all such proposals. It is certainly true to say, “Save more and you can make more choices about studying”, but lifetime ISAs will mean nothing to families who have no savings at all—those who have no spare money in the week, let alone the month.

In 2010, I stood in the Chamber and fought for the child trust fund to be saved. It was a scheme proven to help those from the poorest income backgrounds the most. In 2020, the first of them will mature, giving all 18-year-olds something—perhaps not much, but something. Instead, with the lifetime ISA, such inequalities in wealth will become even more about the difference between having money to spare and having no money at all.

Recent research shows that the bank of mum and dad bails out grown-up children an average of four times, to the value of £6,000, even after they have left home. Indeed, one in three parents have been left cash-strapped after lending money to their children. One in seven parents have had to borrow money themselves to bail out their grown-up children. This Government are reinforcing inequality, wasting potential and failing one generation while locking another into debt to try to help them. If we want to stop lagging behind our counterparts, if we really want to give our children more life chances, if we want to benefit from their potential, we have to learn to compete in the global economy, not to capsize, and that means taking a completely different approach.

Instead of what this Government are doing, we need to bring different services together. We need to link universities, businesses, schools, further education colleges and communities, not segregate them. We need to break down the old divisions between education and working life, and between conventional academic achievement and lifelong employability. We need to move away from teaching functional skills that are outdated almost as soon as they are learned. Instead, our young people need real-world learning experiences and transferable talents, such as complex problem-solving and team-working skills, much as the hon. Member for Chippenham set out. We need fundamentally to rethink how we spend resources and share them, offering loans and support not just to 50% of young people, but to 100% of them. That will end their need to have the bank of mum and dad on their side if they are going to survive the 21st century.

I therefore urge Ministers not to assume that their own life choices should define the life chances we offer all young people, but I fear that plea will fall on deaf ears. That is why this Queen's Speech proves that, under this Government, we will always be a nation playing catch-up with our present, not shaping our own future—getting the public further into debt to keep going, not to get going, and making the bank of mum and dad the only hope to the detriment of too many and to the cost of us all.
more university places are being made available and record numbers of students are going to university. That is excellent news. However, the number of graduates going into non-graduate work is concerning. All too often, we hear students, parents and businesses ask a very worrying question: is a degree really worth it? The Higher Education and Research Bill gives us a blueprint for making what is already a great university sector even better. To date, the higher education sector has been too heavily geared towards academic research. The Bill will sharpen the focus in universities on quality teaching and on getting students into good graduate opportunities.

Alongside the Higher Education and Research Bill, the new teaching excellence framework will put in place incentives designed to drive up the standard of teaching in all universities and provide students with more clarity on where teaching is best and on the benefits that they can expect to gain from their course. That will create more competition, ensuring that all universities raise their game. The link between the TEF and tuition fees is crucial, as it provides a mechanism for ensuring that universities can remain financially sustainable, but only if they continue to drive up the quality of their teaching.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee looked carefully at the plans for the TEF earlier this year in our inquiry into teaching quality in higher education. Our report recognised the role that the TEF could play in ensuring that universities meet student expectations and improve on their leading international position. However, we urged the Government not to rush the TEF’s introduction, so I am pleased that the White Paper confirmed that 2017-18 will be a trial year. I am sure that the sector will welcome the opportunity to have further input into the TEF technical consultation that the Department has launched.

Our report also called on the sector to work with the Government to help develop the TEF. I hope it does so, because it is important for the sector’s future, its financial sustainability and the employment and career opportunities of our graduates, as well as for our economy. We will scrutinise the details of the Higher Education and Research Bill in the coming weeks, but it is increasingly clear—not least from their amendment—that the Opposition do not have a credible plan for higher education other than to threaten the financial sustainability of our world-class higher education sector.

Addressing the skills of our young people will be key to helping us solve the productivity puzzle. That is why I welcome the many measures set out in the Queen’s Speech that are designed to ensure our young people have the skills to get on in life.

4.9 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), and I enjoyed picturing her as a blonde on a wire. I am sure she will not get stuck, and I admire the gusto with which she undertakes her role as a constituency MP. However, she did make me reflect on the introduction of the National Citizen Service, alongside the demise of our youth service. I wish the NCS well, but I regret that my local community no longer has a targeted, effective resource to deal with real and immediate problems, not just for young people, but for the wider community.

It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), although I wish we had conferred a little earlier because I found myself scratching out large segments of my speech. She did a great job of explaining why the credibility of the life chances strategy will be questionable when it emerges, given the Government’s record.

I find myself pondering the term “life chances”. It is a much better term than “social mobility”, which is not particularly widely understood. I looked it up, and found that “life chances” was initially coined by Max Weber, the famous sociologist, and it is a positive thing that the Tories are taking reference from his work. My concern, however, is that the term “life chances” will become rubbishified because the Government will mess things up, and will not deliver any meaningful improvement in life chances to most people in the country. The term could well go the way of “localism”, “the big society” and—increasingly in my part of the country—“the northern powerhouse”. That term is treated with utter derision and contempt, and I would hate that to happen to “life chances”. I am no one’s class warrior, but I am Labour, and we are about life chances and widening equality of opportunity. That is what we are here for—all Labour Members are in the Labour party because they are interested in life chances. [Interruption.] I am happy to take an intervention if someone wishes to make one.

It is difficult to see how the Government intend to proceed with improving life chances. They are still paying for a social mobility and child poverty commission, which writes excellent, first-class reports and commissions superb research, yet there is precious little sight of that in any Government policies. The commission makes specific recommendations that relate directly to the issues under consideration, but the Government ignore them.

We have heard from many Members who are worried about the quality of apprenticeships—I know I am, and I have seen extremely questionable examples of short, poor-quality apprenticeships that do not lead anywhere. According to the commission, we should have a target of around 30,000 higher level, level 3 apprenticeships. Life chances differ depending on what someone does when they are 16. The decisions they make then determine their life chances for the rest of their life. If they take a non-academic route, their chances of doing well later in life are greatly diminished.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend reminds me of the Aimhigher scheme that operated in my constituency in 2010. It was all about encouraging young people from deprived backgrounds to think that higher education was something for them—basically, it did the things that my mum and dad did to encourage me to go into higher education. Is it not a travesty for those young people that one of this Government’s first actions was to scrap Aimhigher?

Jenny Chapman: It is. Our universities do not do nearly enough to encourage a broader range of people to attend their institutions. There are little schemes—I am sure there are some lovely pockets of good practice around the country; I have seen some gorgeous things with primary school children wearing hats around local universities—but their long-term impact is very weak.
We find that the life chances of non-graduates, the people who do not go on to university, are limited. Some 42% do okay: they find themselves in the top half of occupations, are relatively well paid, and receive further training and progression throughout their careers. However, men in lower-half occupations are low paid, with no progression. They make up 16% of non-graduates. They are mostly younger men and they work in low-paying occupations. There are then the skilled but stuck. Generally, they are women in part-time work. They, too, make up 16% of non-graduates. They are mostly mothers working in low-paying occupations, such as sales and customer service, because they are unable to retrain, get childcare or part-time work in occupations for which they may well be qualified.

About 26% of non-graduates are young, tend to have children and have low qualifications. Again, they are mainly women. They are at real risk of getting stuck. They may have messed up and not done so well in their GCSEs. Perhaps they did not get any advice on what was best for them and made a poor choice. They may have ended up doing hairdressing, beauty therapy or going into another low-paid profession because their friends were doing it and the alternatives were not explained to them. It is now almost impossible for them to get out of that profession and into something with a real chance of progression. If we are talking about life chances, it is this stage in education—if I could fix one thing—that really needs to be addressed. It is underfunded and ignored. There is no decent advice for young people before they make these decisions.

One recommendation from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission is for a common access point. For young people going to university there is the UCAS system. They make their application and are supported through the process. There are deadlines and they understand the process. There is a whole host of information about the outcomes, routes and destinations available on the internet. There is nothing like that for those trying to get on a further education course and that needs to be addressed.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an extremely interesting and apposite speech. As the father of five children who have gone through the age of 16, your point—sorry, the hon. Lady’s point; forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I deserve to be hanged—about the age of 16 being a crucial time for decision making is so very important. I just want to reinforce that point, having watched five children go through the age of 16. It is so incredibly important. People should recognise that 16 is the golden age.

Jenny Chapman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is great to have support across the House on this point.

On GCSE and A-level results days we send out tweets congratulating young people, schools and parents. In our constituencies and nationally, there is a sense of an event. There is nothing like that attention, celebration or recognition for non-academic, post-16 qualifications. We do not have the same sense of a nation coming together to recognise the achievement of our young people when they receive their NVQ level 3 in whatever it might be.

Such an inequality of status in qualifications at that age is wrong and something we need to address if we are serious about promoting non-graduate routes into the professions. Let us be honest: most of us will be encouraging our children to take a certain route, involving A-levels and university, because we know that that is how a person gets the best chances. Until non-graduate or non-academic qualifications post-16 bring with them the same opportunities, life chances, employment opportunities and pay, life chances will remain desperately unequal and how well someone succeeds will have nothing to do with what they know but will depend on who they know, who advises them and—even worse—who their parents know. We will not have equality of life chances until we address that simple issue.

4.20 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the considered tone of the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), whose speeches I always greatly enjoy.

Every year since I was elected in 2010, I have been overwhelmed by the pageantry associated with the Queen’s Speech, particularly the horses and the evocative sights and sounds that accompany the occasion. For a variety of reasons, however, I have never been able to speak in the Queen’s Speech debate, so I am pleased to do so today.

I welcome the legislative programme, especially the focus on life chances, which has featured so much in today’s debate. The focus on the life chances of the most disadvantaged is widely welcomed across the House. In some ways, it is becoming a competition to see which party can be the most progressive, which is a terrific way to proceed. I particularly welcome the proposed Bill on prison reform. Clearly, time in prison is designed to punish, but just as important is rehabilitation, as we are acknowledging more today than ever before, so that Bill will be hugely important.

The theme of today’s debate is education, skills and training, but because those policy areas are devolved in my constituency, they are not matters on which I want to contribute directly. It is logical, however, that I speak about the Wales Bill, which will cover education in Wales. The House might have observed the growing tradition of having a Wales Bill in every Queen’s Speech—pretty much every Queen’s Speech has had a Wales Bill since I have been here. We do not know what will be in the Wales Bill, but we have a fair idea, because the last Parliament considered a draft Wales Bill in great detail. We can hazard a pretty good guess, therefore, about what will be in this one.

We expect to see the Bill fairly soon—the rumour is that it will be finished before the summer—and that its aim will be to deliver a stronger, more stable and financially accountable devolved settlement in Wales. The journey towards the institution of government in Wales began many decades ago, but the first major step was the 1997 referendum on whether to establish it. I did not support the idea of a Welsh Assembly in 1997—I campaigned against it—mainly because I thought we were being sold a pup: an unstable and illogical institution that, as it stood, was doomed to failure. But Wales voted yes by the narrowest of margins.
I was driving home from the count in the early hours of the morning on 19 September 1997 and I did what Conservatives tend to do. I came to terms with the new situation—something that some of us might find ourselves doing on 24 June. It was decided that there would be a Welsh Assembly elected by the additional member proportional representation system, which virtually guaranteed a Labour or Labour-led Administration. I committed to the Assembly and became a Member. I was a Member for eight years and probably would still be, had it not been for how the PR system works. I sometimes look on serving as an MP as compensation for losing my position in the Welsh Assembly.

I look forward to participating in the debate on the Wales Bill, and I know there will be many differing opinions, including within my own party. Fundamentally, my position on what change is necessary is that we need devolution of responsibility for income tax. That is the main reason why I want to speak in today’s debate. I believe it to be crucial to a stable Welsh Government.

When I first began raising this viewpoint, perhaps two or three years ago, I recall gaining very little support for it and I felt quite isolated, but that is not the case today. My view is informed by my experience as a Conservative spokesman for finance in the National Assembly for Wales. Every year we went through what we referred to as a “budget process”. It was not really that, however; it was a spending plan. A budget needs consideration on both sides of the ledger—how to raise money and how to spend it. That is where I want the devolutionary process to move so that we can reach that position.

One proposal in the Wales Bill will be to rename the National Assembly as a Parliament—“the Welsh Parliament”. I agree with that and I am supportive of it, but it cannot be called a genuine Parliament if it does not have responsibility for raising part of the money it pays in spending. We have just had a Welsh general election, in which parties other than the Conservative party were basing their campaigns on attacking the Conservative Government at Westminster for not providing enough money for what they wanted to do. That is fine, but it is not what a Welsh general election should be based on. Both sides of the ledger need to be available.

My personal view—quite a strong opinion that I have expressed before—is that unless the Wales Bill includes granting the Assembly the responsibility for levying income tax, and a significant amount of it proportionally, the Bill will deserve to fail. Without financial accountability for the Welsh Government, not one iota more of power should be transferred to the Welsh Parliament. That is absolutely my view.

There will be other red lines when the Wales Bill comes before us. I hope that all parties will come together—this will be necessary—to consider positively how to take the Bill forward. We know that significant changes will be made to the draft Bill, and that the number of powers reserved to Westminster will be far fewer than we were expecting on the basis of the draft Bill. The necessity tests that were in the draft Bill and caused a great deal of concern on the part of the Welsh Government, are now gone. There are two changes, but there will be other disputed areas where we will need good will to come up with an answer.

The establishment of a Welsh jurisdiction is one area. Over the last three or four years, a body of Welsh law has been developed. Do we need a separate Welsh jurisdiction to deal with it? I think not, but all parties will have to come together to decide how to take that forward in the Bill. What of policing? Should it, along with other emergency services, be devolved? There will be a big dispute about that, so we will have to come together to think about how to deal with it. The same applies to broadcasting. Many people think broadcasting should be devolved, but equally, many people do not.

Delivering a new Wales Bill will not be easy. It is going to be a big challenge for a new Secretary of State for Wales. It is going to need Members of all parties to look positively about how to reach a new agreed position. This will mean working positively here in Westminster and indeed in Cardiff Bay if we are to deliver the stable government in Wales that we all want.

4.28 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I apologise for missing the Minister’s opening peroration. I am sure it was very impressive and persuasive.

Politicians are, generally speaking, good talkers but poor listeners. However, I and many others listen carefully to the Queen’s Speech. I also try to listen to the Minister for Schools, the Secretary of State for Education and the Department. Indeed, I listened carefully to their avowed policy aims: excellence, opportunity, development and employability—and I applaud them. It is the explanation of their methods, their solutions and their prescriptions that I have a problem with: the restructuring, the tinkering and the arbitrary diktats. Frankly, that is what most people have a problem with when it comes to this Government’s particular policies, but I still try to listen carefully to the arguments even for this. I have picked out three features of their standard arguments that trouble me—what I would call three persistent fallacies, or three repeated mantras—which I shall briefly sketch. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond, because I mean this to be a helpful critique.

First, I do not know whether the Minister is familiar with the great Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, but he drew a distinction between good and bad theories. Good theories are testable and, in principle, falsifiable, while bad theories can never be tested, and are never falsifiable. Mindful of that, I have listened when the Minister has cited learned or professional opinion in support of Government policy, and I have heard good evidence and good support; but I have also listened when the Minister has declared that the total absence of any learned or professional backing for some policies is sure evidence that the Government are doing something challenging, difficult and important and, of course, right. Either way, the Government are correct, and the policy is simply unfalsifiable.

The second fallacy follows on from that. When Government policy prompts howls of protest from professionals and teachers—as it often does—that tends to suggest to the Government that the provider interest is being challenged in the interest of the pupils. Recently, they have dealt darkly with “vested interests”. That assumes, erroneously, that it is, or could be, in the interests of teachers not to deliver lessons that are relevant, appropriate and interesting to pupils, and
aligned with pupils’ development and capabilities. Well, just try doing that—not delivering good lessons—if you are a teacher. Teachers who try not to do it, in any educational context, generally crash and burn. The conflict of interests is simply an illusion.

The third fallacy to which I wish to draw the Minister’s attention is the tendency to announce a policy with a laudable objective, which is designed to solve a problem but which is of doubtful efficacy, and then to suggest that rather than its being subjected to proper assessment, it is necessary to press on with it immediately and imperatively. That was the language that surrounded the “coasting schools” debate. No day could be lost, it was said, or the pupil would suffer irrecoverably and would never catch up. Unenvisaged policy must be applied forthwith. We can imagine how much harm would be done if the same policy were applied in medical circles.

I have invented none of that. Those are the standard arguments that I have heard put by a beleaguered Department from the Government Front Bench—and I do, genuinely, try to listen.

Let us forget the dogma and the prejudice behind the policy for a moment, and look only at the logic. The logic of the Government’s position is quite troubling. Dark talk about specific vested interests—I do not know whether that refers to the unions, the teachers, the parents or the academics—or talk of what used to be known as “The Blob” smacks of paranoia rather than rationality and critical thinking, of which the Government are supposedly in favour. Always seeing critics as enemies is the mark of a zealot, not a feature of sane, leisureed policy making. Let me impress on the Government that I am in favour of sane, leisureed policy making, and of buying in from as many stakeholders as possible.

4.33 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), although I cannot say that I agreed with all his analytical comments about logic.

Unlike many Opposition Members, I find much to recommend in the Queen’s Speech, given the cornucopia of Bills that it contains and all the opportunities that they will engender. I am delighted to see that education is at the heart of the Speech. As many Members have said, we owe it to our children to give them the very best education that we possibly can, and the Government are transforming education by extending the principles of freedom and accountability, particularly in the Higher Education and Research Bill. One of the key roles of higher education is, of course, to equip our young people with the tools that they need to enter the working world, thus benefiting businesses and enabling those young people to earn a good living—and, even better, a fulfilling living.

In Taunton Deane we have a number of excellent higher education institutions, including Richard Huish College, which is among the top 10 sixth-form colleges in the country, and Somerset College. Despite their excellent contributions, however, it is clear from my many discussions with businesses and with students themselves that there is something of a skills gap in Taunton Deane. The same point has been raised by many other Members, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan). Too often, we are losing the brightest and best of our students. They are going elsewhere, despite Taunton Deane being a lovely place to live. This is affecting the productivity of the area, which is slightly below the average for the country, and we need to address that. How are we going to do this? The idea is to get a university, to retain our young people and even to draw others in from elsewhere.

So I welcome the provisions in the higher education and research Bill to aid the establishment of new universities, to provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds. A university education is one of the best ways of improving the life chances of young people. I was delighted to raise this with the Prime Minister last week on the opening day of debates on the Queen’s Speech, and to get a resoundingly positive response from him. Hon. Members will have guessed that I have just the place for a university. It is of course the county town of Taunton. I am not just making this up; many discussions have already taken place with the various stakeholders.

The essential thing will be to ensure that a university provides the courses that will give the students the skills that are required. I suggest that it could focus on such subjects as health training and community health, given that we have the excellent Musgrove Park Hospital just down the road. The local college is already running some courses of that kind. Similarly, there could be an emphasis on nuclear or low-carbon energy, as we have Hinkley Point just over the way. A university could also build on our aeronautical strengths, given that we have a number of such businesses in the area. It is early days, but I am optimistic that we might be able to move this forward under this exciting new Bill.

While I am on the subject of universities, I must add that I support the Bill’s endeavours to make universities and, particularly, lecturers more accountable for what they deliver. I declare an interest: I have two daughters who have been through the university system, and the amount of input they got from their lecturers was often a subject for discussion around our dinner table. I shall not name any names, but they told me that they were sometimes getting as few as one or two lectures a week, even though they were paying hard-earned money for their courses—or they will be later, when they start paying it back. I therefore absolutely support that measure. We must ensure that our universities are delivering what our students need and that that is aligned to what business requires.

I shall turn now to the proposals on the education of younger children in the education for all Bill. Last week, I had a lovely visit to North Town Primary School, a beating heart in the centre of Taunton. It is surrounded by houses, but it was a lovely visit not least because the school has an excellent garden. I shall digress slightly here but I want to say that children can learn a great deal by being taught about gardening. It is good for their mental health and for health education, and they can learn about pollinators and about where their food comes from. I urge the Minister to tweak the arrangements so that we can get this into schools’ curriculums if we can.

Praise must go to the hard-working headteacher of the school, who is leading by example, and he has a team of very enthusiastic teachers. Fairer funding for
schools was at the top of his agenda when he spoke to me. Many other Members have mentioned that today, and I am delighted that this Government are going to make thatquirer funding issue forward. Our students in Taunton receive £2,000 less per pupil than those in the best-funded schools, which is clearly ridiculous. Our schools are doing a grand job, but just think how much better they could do if we sorted the system out. I applaud the fact that the Government are going to do that.

I want briefly to mention academisation. Madam Deputy Speaker, did you know that that word is not in the dictionary? It is not a real word, yet we are talking about education. Perhaps it will get into the dictionary now that we have mentioned it so often. Academisation really is the way forward. North Town is a primary academy and it is working really well. The staff are very pleased with their ability to take charge of their own budget and to drive their own ideas forward. Almost all the schools in Taunton Deane are now academies, and they are good models. I would just like to bend the Minister's ear and say that an injection of capital would not go amiss for many schools, because some would love to update their facilities or indeed just have a lick of paint.

To return to my starting point, a sound and well-planned framework for education will ensure a positive, productive and fulfilling future for students, whatever their background, with the consequent benefits to the economy. With the education for all Bill and the Higher Education and Research Bill, I am confident that we will move forward and sort out the skills gap and productivity issues in Taunton Deane.

I have a few more seconds, so I will just mention the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill. So many people have come to me because they want more say in local planning, so I applaud what is coming forward. I do not know whether we can get a view on that, but my people in Somerset will be delighted if we can move it forward. I commend the Bill and all its excellent opportunities.

4.40 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate, which provides an opportunity to make observations and comments on the entire Gracious Speech. I was pleased to see that the Government intend to bring in legislation to deal with reform of the prison system and bring forward provisions regarding adoption and children in care. Previous Labour Governments spent billions and billions of pounds on the education and health sectors, and put money into rehabilitation programmes and detoxification centres, so I am pleased about these provisions, which should help to tackle some of the issues and challenges in our prison system.

I am disappointed, however, that several things are not included in the Gracious Speech, and I will touch first on a couple of international issues. All Governments, irrespective of their political complexion, have systematically failed to deal with two of the oldest historical disputes that followed the collapse of the British empire after the second world war. On Palestine and Israel, the Prime Minister has accepted that the state of Israel has undertaken half a million illegal settlements and the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. It is one of the biggest festering wounds in the middle east, and it needs to be resolved properly. On Kashmir, a UN resolution from 1948 states that Jammu and Azad Kashmir should be restored democratically through a free, impartial plebiscite, encouraging both the nuclear states to come together to deal with the issue. As a state that was involved with the two countries, we should be able to bring the two parties together and help to find a resolution.

I was concerned, and perhaps dismayed, when I heard about the counter-terrorism proposal and how the Prevent strategy will become even harsher. The way in which the strategy has been rolled out over the past few years has shown it to be ineffective and counter-productive. It has traumatised many young people who have been subject to it, and 90% of referrals have had no follow-up action. Even when such action has happened, it did nothing much apart from traumatising young children. The Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who is present, must have heard about the numerous examples of young people being taken into the system. For example, one young person called a terraced house a “terrorist house” and another was carted off for talking about Palestine. Young children of six, seven or eight are completely traumatised by the experience of having to sit with intelligence officers and police officers. Even if they were not thinking about anything, they will certainly start thinking something after that.

I am not saying that radicalisation, of any sort, should not be dealt with or that it should be ignored, but it can be dealt with under the rubric of internet safety and teaching about online dangers, such as sexting, online bullying and child predators. One component of such training could be on violent extremism. It is a safe, sensible way of dealing with the situation, rather than trying to criminalise people. Even Sir Peter Fahy, the former chief constable of Manchester and head of Prevent, has said that Prevent is a waste of time, and the National Union of Teachers has also passed a motion to that effect. I therefore urge Ministers to re-examine the whole of Prevent, how it is being rolled out and how it is being dealt with in schools and universities. We all want to be safe. I was out of the country when the July bombings happened in London, but I used to take that bus route frequently when going to my chambers and I travelled at about that time of day. If I had not been out of the country, I could have been directly affected by that bombing. Obviously, the safety of people in this country is paramount to me and to everybody else, but the things we put in place to deal with these issues have to be effective.

I was also disappointed that the Queen’s Speech contained no mention of house building; the abolition of the current system for personal independence payment assessments; whether steps are going to be taken to get more GPs and nurses into our NHS system; and reversing the rules on pension rights for women in their 50s. There was also nothing to do with the pension rights of pensioners who live abroad. There seem to be two sets of pensioners, with one getting inflation-linked pensions and the other not getting them, despite having paid in...
It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi). I am sure that she and I agree on several measures to do with the care system and prison reform. I also wish to congratulate her because she managed to keep off the subject of the European referendum, as I shall do.

I wish to focus on education, training and skills, by which I mean all types of education and training. Sometimes I worry that we concentrate too narrowly on higher education and on those young people who are following a path to university. We must be conscious that education can happen at any age and, pretty much, in any place.

We should celebrate the fact that a teenager today might have as many as seven different careers in their lifetime and each one of those will require learning, change and an ability to adapt. Those essential life skills are introduced at school, but carry on throughout our lives. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science say that it is never too late to learn, and in this place I am sure that every single one of us can say that every day.

One of my constituents, Paul Brinklow, with whom I met at one of my surgeries, is a powerful advocate for post-16 education, by which he means not just FE colleges and universities, but the whole way education goes on throughout life. People have to update to use new technology, to change careers, to do apprenticeships, to take part in remote learning, and to attend language schools. The list goes on and on. Very little attention is given to that aspect of learning, and there is too little understanding of it. It does not matter whether it is a jobseeker undertaking retraining, an elderly person learning to use the internet, or a prisoner learning new skills on the path to rehabilitation, it is all part of the learning journey.

My constituent Jim Davidson does amazing work with his charity Care after Combat, specifically working with former service personnel within the prison system to enable them to be rehabilitated. He helps to find them useful and productive work, somewhere to live, and someone to mentor them, and he helps to put them back on the path to being part of society. He has worked with several prison governors. Specifically, in my local prison in Winchester, the governor, David Rogers, was one of the early pilot champions of Care after Combat’s work. When combined with education, this sort of initiative can and does have a real life-transforming impact. The success rate of the charity is quite phenomenal, and I commend the Justice Secretary for the support that he has given it. The charity is involved in a new scheme, the Road to Logistics, which helps ex-offenders who have been service personnel gain new skills and HGV licences with the haulage industry. That is all part of training and education to help them become a productive part of the workforce.

The Justice Secretary has plans to transform the prison estate, to increase the work opportunities for those in prison, and to make sure that an effective rehabilitation programme combined with educational opportunities will help to equip former prisoners for employment opportunities when they are released. Forty-six per cent. of people entering prison have literacy skills no higher than those broadly expected of an 11-year-old child. We have to use their time in prison to improve their skills and life chances—just like the 25% of prisoners who have been through the care system.
I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in her place today and has heeded the concerns that some of us expressed to her about forced academisation, especially in places such as Hampshire where the local authority provides a great service to our local schools, which is recognised and appreciated by teachers, parents and governors alike. She will know that one of Romsey’s headteachers described the education White Paper as the best he had ever read. She will also know that I support academies and that the two highest performing schools in my constituency are both academies. They do a brilliant job of supporting bright young people to fulfil their potential. They collaborate with local businesses, foster talent, and encourage students to learn music and languages, to travel and to play competitive sport. That does not mean that the schools in my constituency that are not academies do not do the same. I welcome the fact that they are to be given more time to make choices about whether to academise.

I welcome the freedoms regarding the school day, and the plans to make it longer. Many private schools provide a much longer school day than those in the state sector, and they use those additional hours for sport, music, art, the combined cadet force and the Duke of Edinburgh award. They are the sort of enrichment activities that give their pupils an advantage on their UCAS applications and an advantage in life. Heather McLroy, headteacher of The Mountbatten School, is always challenging herself and her school to provide every advantage for her pupils that they would find in the private sector. The longer day will provide more chances and is part of that picture.

Finally, I want to talk about the other end of the age spectrum. If we are talking about education for all, it is important that we look at the life chances of our pre-schoolers. A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting Chilbolton Pre-School, a typical small village pre-school with a professional staff, but in effect run by a team of incredible and dedicated volunteers. We all know that the first 1,000 days after conception are the most important in a child’s life, so we must look at early years provision and how we can make that most effective.

The set-up at Chilbolton is similar to many pre-schools up and down the country. Run out of the local cricket pavilion, it operates five days a week, but with set-up and take-down required at the beginning and end of every week. In many ways it is better off than the pre-schools that operate out of village halls, which have that burden every day. The school’s challenge comes in finding staff, especially when many of the villages are not easily accessible by public transport; finding volunteer chairmen and women and treasurers; and being able to offer the hours and flexibility needed to cater for the needs of children and parents, and also to meet the quite proper rigours of Ofsted.

I welcome the extension of free childcare to 30 hours. I know it is a good thing for parents seeking to return to work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make sure that the 30 hours is sustainable not just in large-scale nurseries, but in small rural locations, and with her commitment to educational excellence everywhere, to make sure that rural provision, which is where we are nurturing the life chances of the next generation in some of the most incredible environments, is looked after.

4.56 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Queen’s Speech and to follow the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I agree with her about the importance of early-years education. She made an important point.

There was a major omission from this Queen’s Speech. Following the Government’s U-turn on forced academisation, we will have a Bill “to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools,” whatever that may mean. We had the promise of legislation to support the establishment of new universities and “to promote choice and competition across the higher education sector.”

Yes, following the Government’s failed £9,000 a year tuition fee experiment, which was never intended to have the result that all universities would charge the maximum £9,000, this Government are now going to give universities the freedom to charge even more, making a university education even more inaccessible to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not recognise that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a much greater opportunity to go to universities in England and Wales than in Scotland, where the fee system means that it is a subsidy for the middle classes and not for poorer students?

Liz McInnes: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, and that is certainly not what is going on in my constituency, which I will elaborate on. The number of part-time students and mature students applying to go to university has plummeted since the introduction of tuition fees.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I cannot let the comment about Scotland pass. It is true that if we look at direct routes into university, Scotland has slightly lower numbers going from disadvantaged backgrounds, but if we look at more interesting routes into university through further education, Scotland is doing extremely well with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Liz McInnes: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I will go on to talk about further education, which is a key part of my speech.

The Minister for Universities and Science is no longer here, but I would like to point out that Labour is not opposed to new universities, despite the Minister’s assumption. For his information, it was the Tory press that dubbed University College London “cockney college”, not anybody from the Labour Benches.

What was missing from the Queen’s Speech was the vital link between schools and universities—further education. Not a mention of it, yet it provides a vital
service to our young people, giving them opportunities, skills, training and the possibility of using FE as a stepping stone to higher education. Hopwood Hall College in my constituency, which serves Heywood and Middleton and the wider borough of Rochdale, has its own particular issues, none of which were addressed in the Queen’s Speech. The lack of literacy and numeracy skills is a massive issue in the borough, and some students require an extra year at Hopwood Hall to improve on English and maths, but funding reduces once the learner hits 18, with no allowance made for that catch-up year.

The borough of Rochdale was one of the most affected by the cut to education maintenance allowance and by reduced payments to disabled learners. At this stage, I should declare an interest: my partner used to teach at Hopwood Hall College. When the coalition Government scrapped EMA, my partner had students coming to see him to say that, although they were enjoying the course and the opportunities it gave them, they simply could not afford to keep attending—with EMA, they could not afford the bus fare to college. What a lamentable state of affairs to leave our students in—denied an education because of the cost of a bus fare. With the area review of post-16 education, the problem is likely to be exacerbated, as courses are forced to combine. Some students could find themselves having to travel 30 to 40 miles to access their college courses.

The Greater Manchester area review is causing great concern in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education because of ongoing delays. The chair of the steering group—the chief executive of Tory Trafford Council—warned that the process would lead to “a fragmentation of the colleges in Greater Manchester”.

The borough of Rochdale also has one of the lowest rates of people going to university. Replacing maintenance grants with loans, and the thought of a £50,000-plus debt, have served as a massive deterrent. Students in England leave university with more debt than students anywhere else in the English-speaking world. They now owe an average of £44,000 on finishing, while Americans run up half that debt, and Canadians a third of it. When maintenance grants are abolished, the poorest students will end up owing more than £50,000, or over half the average price of a terraced house in my constituency.

How many working-class parents will talk their children out of ending up with such a huge debt? Well-off parents, who can afford to pay private school fees, will simply see the cost of a university education as a continuation of those fees, and their children will continue climbing the ladder, untroubled.

While we are talking about student debt, I would like to mention the proposal in the BBC White Paper to close the so-called iPlayer loophole. Doing that will force students living away from home who do not have a television but who access online BBC content to spend yet more money purchasing a yearly TV licence—as if our students were not in enough debt. A Change.org petition against the proposal, which was started by a student at Loughborough University, has now reached a staggering 16,847 signatures. I have asked the Culture Secretary to consider the particular situation students are in; so far, he has evaded my questions, but the petition shows the strength of feeling among students and their families, and I hope he will agree to be bound by it.

Hopwood Hall College provides many innovative courses to help students who aspire to go to university. However, while students continue to face ever-mounting debts, there will be no answer to the social mobility problems in my constituency. The formation of new universities is not the solution, and the Government’s own assessment shows that the number of FE college students applying for higher education will be lower than it is at present.

Further education is sandwiched in the middle of schools and higher education, with key stages 4 and 5 massively underfunded. Yet Hopwood Hall College and many FE colleges like it continue to succeed, seemingly against all the odds. We have 4,000 people in the borough doing vocational courses or A-levels who would previously have travelled outside the borough. We also have a lower level of NEETs—people not in education, employment or training—than neighbouring boroughs. Demand for courses in science and technology, and in health and social care, is increasing, and the college is responding to this, but there is a real challenge across the FE sector in attracting good teachers, especially in maths.

It really is time that this Government recognised the essential role of the FE sector and took some genuine action to address gaps in funding and the problems of recruiting and retaining good-quality teachers in order to achieve their stated aim of educational excellence for all—and that includes for my constituents in Heywood and Middleton.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): It is pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who are both great champions of their constituents. It is a great honour to speak in this debate on the Gracious Speech.

Many hon. Members have spoken passionately about education, skills and training. It is absolutely vital that, as a nation, we get these elements right if we want to build up a cohort of our fellow citizens who are ready to face the world of work at 18 or 22, but also later in their lives as lifelong learners, because our workforce is changing, and our economy is changing, in a profound and long-lasting way.

I pay tribute to the Federation of Small Businesses for its excellent report, “Going it alone, moving on up: Supporting self-employment in the UK”, which provided many of the statistics that I will use in the next few minutes. Today 15% of the workforce is self-employed, compared with 8% in 1980. To support this strong and growing economy, we, as legislators, need to be as nimble as those entrepreneurs—that 15% of our constituents. There is always a balance between laissez-faire and red tape, and in our legislative programme we need to adapt to the changing economy.

I have great hopes of some of the Bills in the Gracious Speech, but I also have some questions for Ministers, and some suggestions on three Bills in particular. I would like to begin by speaking briefly on the better markets Bill. Competition law is always one step behind
the market; I speak as somebody who spent part of my training in a competition law department. I very much welcome this Bill to keep pace with the changing markets. I welcome the “faster switching” principle for energy suppliers. I have done that myself, as have many other right hon. and hon. Members, I am sure. I particularly welcome the clarification of the roles of economic regulators. We are dealing with very adept businesses—people who are highly lawyered—and if, as legislators, we want to protect consumers, we need strong measures in place.

I want to speak briefly about the regulation of one market that is quite unsexy but utterly vital—the water market. Last summer, my constituents in South Ribble, along with another 300,000 households in Lancashire, had no drinkable water for one month. The contamination of cryptosporidium in our drinking water had a massive effect on consumers and, particularly, on small businesses in the catering industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) has spoken about this because, of course, he has many cafés and restaurants in his constituency. That incident highlighted very clearly the monopolistic nature of the water market.

I am therefore happy that from April next year a new non-household retail water and waste water market will be opening up. However, I am concerned about the implications of this new regime for small businesses and sole traders, because after the cryptosporidium outbreak many small businesses found it hard to access the compensation—the process was not quite as simple as for domestic consumers. Ofwat has clearly stated that part of its remit in this new water market is to ensure that the market operates effectively. It has made representations to DEFRA Ministers that the guaranteed service standards should cover all non-household customers in the market. Unfortunately, there are no Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers present, but I am sure we will be told whether anyone from that Department has discussed the issue with DEFRA and whether the guaranteed service standards will be rolled into the better markets Bill.

From one unsexy subject—water and sewerage—to another, namely savings and pensions. Our national statistics on savings are woeful compared with those of our EU neighbours. The French save about twice as much as we do.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that, if we are to address that issue, it is extremely important that financial education on both savings and financial management is taught at school?

Seema Kennedy: I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Lady. Some 21 million people in this country do not have £500 of savings. As she has said, part of the reason for that is lack of financial education. I welcome the lifetime savings Bill, which will provide a flexible product that enables young people to save for a home and for their retirement, and the increase in the individual savings account limit.

The statistics on savings for the self-employed are even worse than those for the nation as a whole. Only 31% of respondents to the FSB survey said that they are saving into a pension, compared with 59% of people who are employed. The remaining respondents intend to rely on their business and existing savings, and about 15% of them have absolutely no savings or pension plan. The lifetime ISA is welcome, but are there any plans to adapt it to suit the new and growing cohort of the self-employed? The age restriction limits it to the under-40s and there is growing evidence that more of the self-employed are aged 45 or over. I hope that the Government will consider finding ways of encouraging and normalising savings for the self-employed, because they do not get the same nudges that auto-enrolment gives people who are employed.

On the pensions Bill, I will not repeat the statistics of self-employed people who have no pension or savings plan, but I urge the Government to consider carefully the needs of the self-employed. The Work and Pensions Committee has made submissions about the issue, particularly in relation to the National Employment Savings Trust auto-enrolment scheme, to which MPs have signed up our own employees. It is very good, but it also needs to include a solution for the self-employed.

In an ideal world, the self-employed will go on to become micro-employers, or perhaps even large employers, and set up their own pension fund. There needs to be adequate communication with micro-businesses about their obligations under auto-enrolment, which can be burdensome. Once small businesses do set up pensions, robust regulation needs to be in place to ensure that such funds give good returns and are adequately protected.

The Bills on which I have touched briefly are welcome in adapting to our changing workforce. I look forward to seeing the detail as they progress through this place.

5.13 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the House that, at its heart, the Queen’s Speech has bold reforms to remove all barriers to opportunity for our young people. Let us see whether his rhetoric matches the reality.

Nearly 4 million children are growing up in poverty, and 500,000 of them live in London. In my constituency, 42% of children live in poverty—the highest rate in the country. Social mobility is in reverse, with young people suffering from what the Equality and Human Rights Commission says are “the worst economic prospects for several generations”.

More than 850,000 young people remain not in education, employment or training. The reality is shocking, given that the UK is the fifth richest country in the world. Fighting inequality is not just about social justice; it is also in our economic interests.

If we look at the Government’s record over the last six years, we see that they have cut work experience entitlement and independent careers guidance and advice, and they have cut further education budgets by 24% since 2010. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) highlighted earlier, that has devastated the lives of many people. Some 4 million people study in further education, and a high concentration of those are from working-class backgrounds. The cuts have hit ethnic minority students from London extremely hard, because of the disproportionate concentration of those groups in further education. In view of the work that the Minister for Universities and Science is doing on monitoring, transparency and tackling inequality, I ask him to look at the impact of those cuts on the
FE sector. Many further education colleges, including Tower Hamlets College, have had to shrink student numbers and courses that many of my constituents attend.

The Government have tripled university fees and scrapped the education maintenance allowance. The Secretary of State and Ministers heard earlier about the devastating impact of those measures over the years and across the country on some of the poorest students, including those in my constituency. Student nurses’ bursaries have been slashed, as have maintenance grants for poorer university students.

The focus in the Queen’s Speech on life chances will prove to be meaningless without a parallel attempt to eradicate child poverty. Tired, hungry children cannot learn effectively, and it is shocking that millions of children come from families who rely on food banks. Poverty is not inevitable, and the Government have the tools to fix the problem if there is the will to do so. The last Labour Government cut child poverty by almost 1 million to the lowest level since the 1980s, but increases over the past six years under this Government have undone much of that progress. I call on the Schools Minister and the Secretary of State to continue to pay attention to this important issue, because it will affect educational attainment and the achievements of young people.

Let us look at the education for all Bill. As my hon. and right hon. Friends have mentioned, real-term cuts will be about 8% of funding per pupil by 2020, despite the Conservative party’s manifesto commitment that funding would not be cut for schools and children. That is a betrayal of that manifesto commitment. Last year, more teachers quit than entered the profession. Almost 50,000 teachers quit—the highest figure since records began. Applications to teach are falling in every region, and they are down in key subjects such as English, maths and IT.

London’s schools face unique challenges. London has some of the highest levels of inequality and child poverty in the country, and school budgets and classrooms are at breaking point, with one in five London secondary schools full or overcrowded. Yet London shows that it is possible to create outstanding urban schools in demanding circumstances. Thanks to the work of the last Labour Government, nine out of 10 schools in London are now good or outstanding. That is a huge achievement, which took a generation. The changes to the funding formula put that achievement at risk, so I call on the Schools Minister to look carefully at the funding formula put that achievement at risk, so I ask the Schools Minister to look carefully at the funding formula to make sure that we do not go back on those achievements. London schools will lose nearly £240 million a year under the proposals. Schools in the midlands and the north of England will also be hit hard by the changes. We need to look at the needs of children in those schools and ensure that fairness genuinely means fairness.

On academies, the Government’s obsession with structures rather than attainment is wrong-headed. The climbdown is welcome, but it is clear from what the Universities and Science Minister said earlier that the attempt to academise all schools still exists, although it will be done via a different route. That is likely to cost £1.3 billion—money that could be focused on tackling underachievement rather than obsessing with structure. Where there is a problem and a need for innovation, of course that innovation should happen, but it should not be a wasteful process.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Does the hon. Lady greet with the same happiness as I do the fact that 1 million more children have gone to good or outstanding schools since 2010?

Rushanara Ali: Any improvement in attainment is welcome, but I am making a point about London, where huge amounts of work has been done to improve schools. When I was at school in the east end of London in the 1980s and 1990s, most schools achieved a rate of less than 20% for GCSEs. It took over a decade to transform schools, and that was not just in Tower Hamlets. In Tower Hamlets, we have only four academies, which shows that there are different models of improvement.

I call on the Secretary of State to look at how such improvements have been achieved through different approaches, including collaboration, investment in teacher quality and standards, and training and leadership. She knows very well that the model used in Tower Hamlets and across London is recognised around the world, and I hope that the new funding formula will not put that at risk.

Jo Churchill: I just want to point out that London schools have had a 26% uplift, whereas rural schools have had only a 9% uplift, so it is only fair, right and proper to address the basis of the funding.

Rushanara Ali: My point is not that schools in need of support in rural areas—there is poverty in rural areas as well—should not get support, but that we should not set schools and areas against each other or create divisions. The Government should look at where we need to target resources to improve schools, but should not turn regions or schools against each other. That is one of the major risks, as has already been reflected in this debate. We need to consider how to improve standards across the country without damaging the achievements of schools in London. We still need to raise the attainment of 40% of school kids.

I want to move on to the universities Bill. The Sutton Trust recently unearthed the fact that our young people leave university with the highest levels of debt in the English-speaking world. The Chancellor wrote to one of his constituents in 2003 that fees are “a tax on learning” and “very unfair”. Yet he has since tripled university fees to £9,000 and scrapped the student maintenance allowance. He now wants to lift the fees cap even higher, which will reverse some of the achievements of the past and saddle poorer students with huge amounts of debt. We all know that people from asset-rich families are more likely to take risks and more likely to be secure when they enter the labour market, and that the outcomes for graduates in the labour market differ according to social class and ethnic background. Saddling poorer students with debt therefore has real consequences for what they will go on to do.

Will the Minister for Universities and Science therefore look carefully at such outcomes? The data he is collecting will be useful only if he matches them with action to tackle the fact that inequalities are built in by students
being left in debt. The Government have ignored the evidence published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in 2014 showing that a £1,000 increase in maintenance grants led to a 4% increase in participation. The Minister says that participation is increasing, and when that happens, it is welcome, but I ask him to look at this area to see how to increase participation further.

I welcome the aim of increasing the number of apprenticeships to the target of 3 million, but there is a question, which has been raised by several of my hon. Friends, about the quality of those apprenticeships. I appeal to the Minister to look carefully at how we can make sure the system works well by focusing on quality. A sizeable number of young people are still on courses at level 2 and level 3, for which they have parallel qualifications. We need to make sure that they genuinely progress and that apprenticeships are a genuine alternative.

5.25 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali).

I welcome wholeheartedly the programme on life chances—not only the measures on education, skills and training that we are debating, but the interconnectivity between the other Bills. In proposing the Humble Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) reminded us that bringing up children is an inexact science, with a definite beginning but certainly no definite end date. There is also no guarantee of success, however that might be measured, and there most certainly is not a handbook. My children have attended their state schools and are now at university, acquiring debt. I hope that we, as parents, have instilled in them an aspiration for a better life. That is why I believe that life chances are so very important.

We have an excellent education system in this country, which helps parents and carers through the minefield that we hope will level the playing field for all our children to ensure that every child reaches their full potential. The 30 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds—with the caveats outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes)—the 1.4 million more children now taught in good and outstanding schools, and the measures to drive aspirations and skills, coupled with 3 million apprenticeships, mean that this is a coherent lifetime learning package, and much more than is being put to apprenticeships, mean that this is a coherent lifetime learning package, and much more than is being put to

I appeal to the Minister to look carefully at how we can make sure the system works well by focusing on quality. A sizeable number of young people are still on courses at level 2 and level 3, for which they have parallel qualifications. We need to make sure that they genuinely progress and that apprenticeships are a genuine alternative.

5.25 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali).

I welcome wholeheartedly the programme on life chances—not only the measures on education, skills and training that we are debating, but the interconnectivity between the other Bills. In proposing the Humble Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) reminded us that bringing up children is an inexact science, with a definite beginning but certainly no definite end date. There is also no guarantee of success, however that might be measured, and there most certainly is not a handbook. My children have attended their state schools and are now at university, acquiring debt. I hope that we, as parents, have instilled in them an aspiration for a better life. That is why I believe that life chances are so very important.

We have an excellent education system in this country, which helps parents and carers through the minefield that we hope will level the playing field for all our children to ensure that every child reaches their full potential. The 30 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds—with the caveats outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes)—the 1.4 million more children now taught in good and outstanding schools, and the measures to drive aspirations and skills, coupled with 3 million apprenticeships, mean that this is a coherent lifetime learning package, and much more than is being put to apprenticeships, mean that this is a coherent lifetime learning package, and much more than is being put to
higher education establishments—

down the road to addiction, looked after children, and might have had the odd brush with the law or started

which they grow in confidence and team build. It attracts

which provides young people with challenges through

would it be a positive move if the Government were to introduce that adoption Bill in conjunction with educational projects?

Jo Churchill: I totally concur. The ability to look cross-departmentally at all the different issues that challenge people from the beginning to the end of their life would enhance us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) mentioned excluded children, and those who struggle with formal educational attainment. Before I came to this place, I worked on a “Solutions 4” programme with excluded children, and we must remember all our children when introducing these Bills. With a background in the construction industry and a love of life sciences, I believe that apprenticeships are important in helping all children to lift their abilities and attainment rates. For some apprenticeships, however, we must recognise that more functional levels of core subjects should be acceptable, and we run the risk of losing able youngsters who cannot cross the C-grade barrier in maths and English. I am delighted that a Government taskforce has been set up, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), to consider apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties.

I recently met a lovely young woman who had been part of a very innovative scheme. When I asked what it had given her she said, “It’s given me confidence and a job”, and then she whispered, “a boyfriend as well, but please don’t tell my Dad”—that is probably too late. It struck me that a basic entitlement for all young people leaving education is, perhaps not the boyfriend, but the right to feel valued and equipped for the workplace. I applaud the work that we are doing to ensure that employment and apprenticeships are accessible to all, but we should also consider young people’s mental health as we drive these Bills forward, since such issues cannot cross the C-grade barrier in maths and English. I alluded earlier to the fact that we must recognise that attainment is not purely from an academic standpoint.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The hon. Lady spoke about the difference between rural and urban, and I fully support her outlook on the rural negativity that sometimes exists. She mentioned the joined-up approach, and we should consider the proposed legislation on adoption for looked-after children. Would it be a positive move if the Government were to introduce that adoption Bill in conjunction with educational projects?

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and the many other hon. Members who have spoken about their concerns and problems relating to education. The same problems exist in Northern Ireland and I can learn a great deal by listening. I thank all hon. Members who have spoken.

It is a pleasure to be able to respond to the Gracious Speech. Earlier, one Member, when trying to choose what to speak about, described it as a cornucopia. Another, rather closer to my heart, described it as a box of chocolates—that might explain why I have to wear a double-breasted jacket. There are so many things I want to talk about and welcome, but I will start by saying that if we are looking to increase fees for universities, it is vital that we ensure—this was raised earlier—that students receive a quality education. I have four children. One is through university, two are at university and one is about to go. The same issue comes up again and again: how do we ensure value for money while keeping the costings right so that everyone has the chance to go to university?

In Northern Ireland, we have had a major battle on STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. We want to get these subjects into the education system, so that science is a part of pupils’ lives right from the early days. It is not working well in Northern Ireland at the moment. This leads me to another point. Hon. Members know that I passionately believe in holding the Union together, and in working together and learning from each other. There is very good education on STEM here for teachers; indeed, we send one or two from Northern Ireland to that college. We need more. We need to all start working together.

When we look at the difference in cost of different universities, what worries me is that in Northern Ireland something like 46% of students do not want to leave Northern Ireland. That is lovely from the point of view of not having a brain drain, but it means that no one moves away from home. I want the Union to work so that we all share and all thrive and people can move to different parts, whether to England, Wales or Scotland. It is essential that people get used to moving and having independence while at the same time being at home.

The same sort of thing happens with the exam system. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland all have different exam systems, so people are judged in different ways. Can we put something in place to make our education systems all talk to each other and all learn from each other? Fantastic things are happening in education in Scotland. I know that because I went there with the Northern Ireland Committee for Education. There is so much we can share. Let us put something in place that means we do all learn from each other.

I watched the plans on academies to see how they work and many of the things going through here. That is what we should all be doing: we should be learning from each other. Academies seem like terrific ideas, but we have to be careful how we put them together to make sure they allow everyone to achieve.

Hon. Members discussed a fairer funding formula. We have exactly this problem in Northern Ireland and we have debated it twice in the past five years. I want to share with the House a huge problem we have at the

Mr Speaker: Order.
moment, so Members realise that in Northern Ireland, although we have a great education system, things are not working particularly well. In my patch, 19 of the top principals came to see me the other day. All were complaining that they have to deal with an 8% cut or increase in costs. They are being told they must come up with new budget plans for one year and for three years. They cannot do it. They are refusing. They are looking at stopping special needs teaching, removing classroom assistants, moving office staff and having bigger classes—all the things that are just wrong. We need something to change. What I found most frightening is that the principals are not taking their pay rises so that the school can afford other things. Even worse, funds raised by parent-teacher associations are being used to pay for the normal things in schools. I go back to my main point: let us start sharing and learning from everyone. There is a change today in Northern Ireland: there is no longer a Sinn Féin Education Minister. As from today, the Education Minister is a Unionist. I hope things will change.

I turn now to a passion of my heart. Last year, I led a debate on how Stormont was not working. I was proud of my party leader for then moving into opposition at a time when opposition did not really exist. Opposition now does exist, as part of the Stormont House agreement, and I am proud to say that the Ulster Unionists, under my party leader, have moved into opposition, as has the SDLP, which I am pleased to have with us. Our devolved system of government does not work well, and I need support from the UK Government and everyone in the House to get the opposition system working and resourced. To give one simple example, in this place, on which we model our Assembly, the Chamber is laid out so that we oppose each other, but Sinn Féin and the DUP, although working together, refuse to sit on the same side, for obvious reasons. We have to learn and improve. I hope we can get somewhere but we need the House’s help.

I was always annoyed to hear the Secretary of State say that all parties agreed to the Stormont House agreement. That was not the case. They talked to us at the beginning but only the two major parties were really involved. We must all start working together and helping each other. We can push and coax to make things work, but I need the UK Government to listen, not to bury their head in the sand. We still have problems—we have the troubles—but we want a level playing field. Certain things came through in the Belfast agreement, and we thought we were moving forward with consensus, but I am concerned that the legacy issues are sitting there ready to bubble up.

We hear that the DUP and Sinn Féin might already have done a deal on the legacy issues. We must talk to servicemen and ex-servicemen and make sure that whatever we put in place works and is fair and justified. I do not ask that people who have done something wrong in the military not be prosecuted; I ask that we choose the right cases and not hound every serviceman. We must find a just way forward that is about reconciliation, understanding and putting the past to bed. For that, I need the House’s help.

In the remaining 30 seconds, I want to touch briefly on Europe. Please, let us get as many of the facts as we can on the table and avoid the hype, so that people can sit down and learn. The message I got on the doorstep was: “We want to learn, we want the facts, but please don’t overhype it, or we’ll all switch off.” People just want the yes and no campaigns to lead quietly, put the facts on the table and let people decide for themselves.

5.42 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I welcome the Minister back to his place and suggest that he reads Hansard later, because he missed a very good Front-Bench speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray).

This alleged legislative programme lacks imagination, is lacklustre and ultimately fails to address the challenges facing the country. The Queen’s speech was 937 words long, lasted less than nine minutes and has been rightly condemned for being uninspiring and offering no vision. Is this the sign of a Government who have run out of ideas in facing up to the challenges the country and our constituents face, or is the Prime Minister just too busy fighting his party’s internal EU civil war? The country cannot wait for the Government Benches to kiss and make up. We need a Government focused on building a fairer and more prosperous country, not one at odds over the EU referendum or distracted by its election expenses.

Ultimately, the Queen’s Speech does nothing to help realise the potential of our young people, our students or our education sector. Last week, amid all the doom and gloom of the UK Government’s Queen’s Speech, the SNP, as any Opposition party worthy of Government should, put forward an alternative Queen’s Speech that offered real positive change. At the heart of it was a progressive set of values that would help to realise the potential of our young people. In it, the SNP again called for the post-study work visa to be reinstated. This came on the back of an international students survey conducted by Hobsons that underlined the importance of such a visa as an incentive for international students when deciding whether to come to Scotland to study.

The SNP has long called for the visa to be reinstated. Indeed, I held my first Westminster Hall debate on the very issue. We are supported by Scotland’s universities, colleges, businesses and all parties, including the Conservatives, in the Scottish Parliament. The visa gave those international students the opportunity to live and work in Scotland after they had graduated from one of our excellent universities. The closure of the post-study route to remain has effectively removed that opportunity.

This is what has led to the disgraceful planned deportation of the Brain family from Dingwall. The Chancellor’s wholly ignorant and cold indifference to the plight of a seven-year-old Gaelic-speaking boy who has known no other home than the Scottish highlands was one of the worst answers I have heard in this place since I was elected. The Government must do the right thing and U-turn on their current position. They have certainly had plenty of practice of late.

This decision and the removal of the visa itself not only damages our international reputation, but is an economically illiterate policy, because the vast majority of these students are not able to contribute to the country that has provided them with an excellent higher education. For example, research undertaken by the Scottish Government’s post-study working group suggested that a number of new entrants to Scottish universities from India fell by 63% between 2010-11 and 2013-14.
It could be argued that colleges have been hit harder following the demise of the visa, as the number of international students studying in Scotland’s colleges has fallen from 2,039 in 2010-11 to 561—a shocking decline of 72%. The removal of the visa sends a clear message to our important international market that the UK FE and HE sectors are closed for business. The visa has supporters in this place beyond these Benches. The all-party group on migration produced a report, whose Conservative chairman noted:

“Higher education is one of our country’s leading export success stories, but the government’s current approach to post-study work is jeopardising Britain’s position in the global race for talent.”

With the negative tone pursued by the UK Government over the EU referendum, combined with the removal of the post-study work visa, it has become increasingly clear that this Government are out of step with what is best for our universities. The Higher Education and Research Bill, one of the few announced in the Queen’s Speech last week, contains some worrying reforms that the Government plan to bring forward. It would appear that the Government are once again working against the wishes of students when it comes to designing an education system for the 21st century.

The NUS has expressed deep concern about the unhealthy fixation of this Government with university marketisation, which, combined with the threat of lifting the £9,000 cap on tuition fees, has led the NUS to announce its intention to oppose the most damaging aspects of the Bill. In addition, it completely opposes any link between perceived teaching quality and fees.

Another issue that is not going to go away is the Chancellor’s crazy policy of abolishing bursaries for those studying to become the next generation of nurses, midwives and allied health workers. The arguments to see the reinstatement of the bursary support are well trodden and despite this issue being devolved, I have made them at length in this House. Thanks to the report published today by London Economics, we now have a better understanding of what the impact of the change will be. The students and HE institutions themselves will be significantly worse off and the cost savings to the Exchequer are, in the end, likely to be very minimal.

Students and graduates will be hit with a punitive 71% increase in the cost of going to university and will see their debt on graduation rising from just under £7,000 to just under £49,000. This will undoubtedly hit the numbers applying to study these courses, with London Economics forecasting a 6% to 7% fall in student numbers or more than 2,000 in the first year. Along with other factors, this will result in these institutions losing between £57 million and £77 million a year. Not only will the Government fail to address the shortfall in nurses coming into the NHS, they will actually make the problem more acute, and we will have to rely on migrant nurses coming from other countries whose nursing resources are already stretched as a result of emigration to the UK.

This Queen’s Speech represents a missed opportunity truly to transform the education sector. Teachers, pupils and university and college staff are working incredibly hard. It is disappointing that the Government have chosen not to match that level of hard work by introducing a programme of government to meet the challenges of a 21st-century education sector.

The SNP Scottish Government are going in the opposite direction. Instead of working against students and universities, we are working with them. Whereas the Tories promote front-door tuition fees down here and back-door tuition fees in Holyrood, the SNP Scottish Government have guaranteed free university education in Scotland. Our fundamental principle is that university access should be on the basis of the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

It appears that the EU referendum and quashing noisy Tory Brexit voices are the priority for the Prime Minister and his Government colleagues. This is at the expense of growing our economy, creating jobs and delivering a modern and inclusive education sector of excellence. The UK Government cannot and should not be defined by a single issue. If they have run out of steam and ideas, I would strongly suggest that they take a good look at the SNP’s alternative Queen’s Speech.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. A seven-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

5.49 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Many Members on both sides of the House will agree that good education provision is a sure way to reduce inequality and create economic prosperity. Indeed, my very presence here as a Member of Parliament was spurred on by the good vocational opportunities that I had in the further education sector in Greater Manchester. Let me begin by thanking the Minister for Schools, who is present, for engaging in a constructive meeting with me, along with other Oldham Members, to discuss Oldham education. I look forward to him visiting Oldham in the near future.

In the House, we often talk about the most vulnerable, and about enabling all children to have the best start in life. Just over a year ago, when I made my maiden speech, I talked about being a young mum at 16, and about the disadvantages, the opportunities and the aspirations of people from my constituency and my background. I believe that many people outside the House, if not inside it, will relate to some of what I will say today. I hope to do justice to the many constituents—especially young people—who may make journeys similar to mine, and to inspire them to reach for the stars, because they truly can do their best and fulfil their dreams.

I was the child so many Members have spoken about today, and I feel an obligation to talk about that. I grew up on a council estate, and my parents and I were recipients of welfare throughout my childhood. I was on free school meals. I was a NEET—not in education, employment or training—and I had no GCSEs at grade A to C; and, as I said, I had a baby at 16. School, for me, was not a place where I got to be educated, but a place where you got away from your parents for a couple of hours while they got some respite from you, and where you were able to see your mates. Rather tragically, it was also the place where I got a hot dinner. I often did not have a hot meal when I went home, and I often went to school without having had breakfast, so getting to lunchtime was quite tricky for me.
My mum could not read or write, so it was difficult for her to give me the ability to be school-ready. I did not see books, and did not see the value of books, until I went into education. However crucial it is to provide early years intervention and to give people opportunities and aspirations. The interventions from which I benefited provided role models. The Sure Start centres, for instance, helped me to be a better mum when I was 16. That broke a cycle, and the fact that it is possible to break the cycle is clearly demonstrated by the fact of my being in this place today.

The youth service gave me chocolate biscuits in the evenings, and somewhere safe to go. It gave me respite. The welfare support enabled me not to be like other lost families, and be without my son. My son is with me today, and I am so proud of him: he is a great young person. There was housing, further education and the local education authority, and there were the teachers who inspired me to dream and to do my best. I fear, though, that the Government’s austerity programme is pulling that ladder up. I think about all the things that I hold dear, and I look back to how they helped me to progress. It worries and upsets me that the young people in my constituency will not be given that opportunity.

I saved lives, and had an impact on lives, every day in my previous role as a home help, because I had been given the opportunity to go back into further education and obtain a vocational qualification in care. That was tremendously important to me. However, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), the further education sector was barely mentioned in the Queen’s Speech. That will be really detrimental to the ability of people like me to contribute to the economy and to progress with their education.

Colleges in my constituency are having to deal with the loss of nearly 40% of their income as a result of Government cuts. As I heard from the principals of both Tameside College and Ashton Sixth Form College just last week, those cuts are leaving many young people behind, unable to obtain level 2 qualifications, and struggling to serve the employers whose businesses so desperately need to grow. During my visit to Tameside College last week, I saw some of the excellent work that it was doing with the local construction industry to attract young apprentices from across Tameside, despite the Government’s assault on further education. The local construction training boards, working with Tameside College and the council, will get Tameside building again.

These colleges offer a lifeline to some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. For some, like me, that truly is a second or third chance. Surely the Minister is aware that without an adequate further education service, the talents of many young, and not too young, people will be shamefully wasted. This Government’s failure to protect further education funding has meant that the post-16 sector now has a debt of £1.5 billion, and 80 colleges are in discussions about mergers in order to survive—a full 40% of the total.

Both management and unions in our local colleges have warned me that student and staff morale is at an all-time low in my community, in this age of cuts and uncertainty. This has to change. The Government have to listen. Today, the Greater Manchester area-based review will make its final recommendations. That report is nearly six months behind schedule, and the process has turned college against college. I appeal to Ministers to do more. Futurity is crucial in bridging a gap for young people, particularly those like me who come from a disadvantaged background. Ministers have to do more to give those young people a second chance, so that many more Angela Rayners can come into this House in the future.

5.56 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the moving and powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). I am really grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I was pleased to hear in the Queen’s Speech that the Government intend to deliver opportunity for all at every stage of life. This is a worthy aim, and the Government are quite right to focus on the pursuit of educational excellence. It is to the education for all Bill that I would like to address my remarks.

The pursuit of educational excellence is undoubtedly the best way to enhance the life chances of individuals, and a well educated, skilled workforce is essential for a successful economy. So far, so good. Sadly, however, these words do not seem to translate into the right actions. Let us consider the whole academies fiasco. It is widely accepted by educationists the length and breadth of the country that children learn best when they have access to high-quality teaching provided by qualified teachers, irrespective of the structure. It matters not whether this teaching takes place in an academy, a university technical college or a local authority school.

What matters for the sustainability of the provision is that there is an overarching educational strategy that plans for the education of each and every child.

I have no objection in principle to the introduction of academies, but they should operate as an integrated part of a planned provision, because children are not customers and education is a right, not a market commodity. Nowhere is this better evidenced than in my own constituency of Burnley. In 2009, the Labour Government built five new secondary schools there. They replaced buildings that were no longer fit for purpose; many had become severely dilapidated. In my son’s school on a rainy day—there are quite a few of those in Burnley—it was a common sight to see a row of buckets down the corridor because of a leaking roof. It was clear that none of those schools was fit for purpose in 21st-century Britain.

I was lucky enough, around that time, to gain experience of schools in Japan and Germany, and I was struck by the stark contrast between the facilities on offer to our children and the high standards available to German and Japanese children. I was quite angry at the time, because I have always believed that British children deserve the best. Of course, as a teacher, I know that there is more to education than mere school buildings. In Burnley, there is a willingness in all sectors to raise educational standards. The teachers, the key stakeholders and, most of all, the pupils are really working hard on this. It was a real pleasure last week to visit Hameldon Community College in my constituency and to hear of the students’ ambition and their dedication to doing well in life. That was indeed a privilege.
HELL. There is plenty to go on not only in the Gracious lifelong learning, which has the tortured acronym of want to focus my contribution on higher education and 6.2 pm like an expensive and damaging free-for-all. Burnley? It does not really look like a plan, but more of the plan for excellence in education? Is that part of is building another school at the same time. Is that part absolutely clear, the school population is falling and the being built as I speak, at a cost of £24 million. To be accommodation and will soon move into its new premises, Government have allowed a new free school to open in a surplus of school places, it beggars belief that the pool of students who have been pursuing a specialist curriculum to work with me in the short term to secure the education notice of closure has been given. I urge the Government would pull the plug. Shockingly, only a few weeks’ their parents. They took up offers of places at the UTC and continued by the present Government, it was a bit tesco. Of course, none of that is the fault of the students or their parents. They took up offers of places at the UTC in good faith, never dreaming that the Government would pull the plug. Shockingly, only a few weeks’ notice of closure has been given. I urge the Government to work with me in the short term to secure the education of students who have been pursuing a specialist curriculum for three years. They need and deserve our support. The Government have at the very least a moral duty to honour the contract that they entered into with those students and their parents. I know that on the rare occasion that a local authority school closes, there is a phased closure to ensure that current students are protected. The Government owe these students that much. If that is not enough, knowing full well that there is a surplus of school places, it beggars belief that the Government have allowed a new free school to open in Burnley. The school opened in September 2014 in temporary accommodation and will soon move into its new premises, being built as I speak, at a cost of £24 million. To be absolutely clear, the school population is falling and the Department for Education plans to close a college and is building another school at the same time. Is that part of the plan for excellence in education? Is that part of the plan to further the life chances of children in Burnley? It does not really look like a plan, but more like an expensive and damaging free-for-all.

6.2 pm Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I want to focus my contribution on higher education and lifelong learning, which has the tortured acronym of HELL. There is plenty to go on not only in the Gracious Speech but in last week’s White Paper, which is titled “Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice”. I contend that it is the bit after the colon that is simply not matched by this Government’s actions.

Teaching excellence is ostensibly dealt with in the teaching excellence framework, which has already caused widespread concern, uniting Universities UK, the National Union of Students and my alma mater, the University of Cambridge. There are serious worries that linking teaching excellence to fee levels with a performance element will undermine teaching. It will force universities into further competition and represents a homogenisation of teaching standards. This Government said that they were into devolution, after all. Linking fees to inflation could see fees being hiked up to 10k—who knows?—and there is a worry that the TEF could be a Trojan horse for a further lifting of the fee cap to who knows where. The University of Cambridge has argued that linking the TEF and the fee cap will deter students from lower-income backgrounds. In short, therefore, only the wealthiest will be able to afford the top universities. The NUS is also opposed to the change.

Other eye-catching features include the plan to introduce new universities and so-called challenger institutions, seemingly though a relaxation of the criteria to usher in in what is, at best, deregulation and, at worst, privatisation through the back door. The threshold of 1,000 students to qualify as a university is to be lifted. New providers can get degree-awarding powers in three years and full university status after another three years. Due to the probationary period during which institutions can grant degrees, there is the prospect of students getting a degree from an institution that then fails its probation. What would happen to those students? There are question marks all over the place here. The removal of safeguards means that these untried, untested challenger institutions could expand very rapidly and then contract rapidly if they all start failing their three-year probation. As well as the standards issue, there seems to be a huge oversight on the whole issue of further education, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) so powerfully described. Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College in my constituency has recently given its 500th MBA. These institutions already have degree-awarding powers, so what will be the place for them? It is all very unclear.

Caution is being sounded across the sector. The Russell Group, which comprises our oldest institutions—the Oxbridges are all in there—has worries about this move undermining the international reputation of UK universities. Million+, at the other end, which represents the post-1992 sector and, thus, 50% of all full-time students in the UK, including those at the University of West London in my constituency, talks about the risk this approach poses to students. Universities UK says that these new institutions potentially devalue the label. It is important to remember that universities do not just operate to award degrees, but have a much wider civic role in the community, spreading public good and so on.

The White Paper also has a strapline on “improving social mobility”. Everyone has referred to the much talked of letter from the young, promising Member for Tatton in 2003, who promised that he would abolish fees if the Conservatives were elected. It has rightly
become an internet sensation, because of some of the things he was incredulous about at the time. He talked about fees, which at the time were £1,000 only—they rose subsequently and there was then a trebling to £9,000 under this Government’s watch. He also talked about how people were leaving with an average debt of £18,000 at the time, but it seems that the sky is the limit on both of those things under the proposals in this White Paper and this Queen’s Speech.

There are worries about these so-called reforms, in relation to the funding cuts, the tuition fee increase and the potential to destabilise the whole sector, which has knock-on effects for students. The Sutton Trust, which I mentioned earlier, has warned that, even if participation levels are going up, there is a yawning gap between those from the richest and the poorest wards, particularly in Russell Group institutions. Again, there are lots of question marks in respect of the Office for Fair Access, overarching powers and how they have the potential to erode institutional autonomy. The idea of covering action and participation in the mission statement for this new office for students is laudable, but let us not forget that if we are talking about lifelong learning, this Government have slashed education maintenance allowance, ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—adult skills and social mobility funding, and have abolished maintenance grants and the child trust fund, which was mentioned earlier. I am therefore not filled with confidence as to what this White Paper and Queen’s Speech will lead to next.

I could go on and on, as I was employed in the university sector before I got to this place. In one way or another I was in universities for 25 years before May 2015. People from my old union, the University and College Union, are on picket lines today because of the plummeting staff morale, the rocketing number of staff on zero-hours contracts, the creeping casualisation and a real-terms decline in pay. All these things have knock-on effects on students, and we all want the best student experience for all. I could talk about the Higher Education and Research Bill, a dog’s breakfast on which there has not been proper consultation with the unions or providers. As everyone is preoccupied with the EU referendum, let me also say that if we were to live in a post-Brexit world, the science budget for this country—even student mobility programmes such as Erasmus—would be seriously imperilled. I know that that is not strictly what we are talking about today, but I caution against voting leave for that reason.

Teaching excellence is not assured in these plans, social mobility is poised to go backwards and student choice is completely illusory in what we are being offered. Lifelong learning should also look at other pathways. The number of part-time students is down 38% and the number of mature students has decreased by 180,000 since 2010. Lifelong learning should not just be about offering a cut-price “Brideshead Revisited”, via pile ‘em off, the powerful self-esteem that can flow when an adult is basic skills tutor the powerful impact that the provision of that children. Their mother needs help.

We know that there is a real problem with basic literacy and numeracy classes among adults in this country. The latest survey published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2011 found that nearly 15% of 16 to 65-year-olds—around 5 million people—are functionally illiterate. That is a really damning indictment of one of the richest countries on earth. A total of 23.7% of participants in the survey—around 8 million people—lacked basic numeracy skills.

In 2013, an OECD study of 24 developed countries ranked England 11th in literacy and 17th in numeracy for people aged 16 to 65. Those aged between 16 and 24 fared even worse, being ranked 22nd and 21st respectively.

Last week, when I was walking down a road I saw a couple of children out playing. They were probably aged between three and four years old. All of a sudden, their mother appeared, tearing down the street and swearing at them to get back indoors. As I looked at them, it was clear to me that there was no future for those children. Their mother needs help.

I know from my own experience as a former adult basic skills tutor the powerful impact that the provision of free, friendly and accessible classes in the community setting can have on the lives of people who struggle to find the confidence to read and to write. I know, too, the powerful self-esteem that can flow when an adult is given the opportunity to learn—after all, we have all experienced that ourselves.

Seeing the mother and her children reminded me of the scene in “A Christmas Carol” where the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge two children emerging from under his robe. He describes them as “wretched, abject, frightful, hideous and miserable.” Scrooge asks Spirit, “Are they yours?” The Spirit replies: “They are man’s…This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy…beware ignorance the most.” That message is as true today as it was in Dickens’s time. We will all know the adage, “Teach the mother and father and you will teach the child.” If we are to break cycles of deprivation, we must provide opportunities to learn in accessible community settings free of charge. To pass through this world unable to read and write with confidence
is to experience a deprivation that few of us in this House can truly imagine. As one of the richest countries on earth, it is unacceptable that we allow this need to go unmet, yet the figures are telling. The total cut in the adult skills budget between 2010 and 2011 and 2015 and 2016 is around 37% in real terms, which has decimated local services, hence the need for voluntary provision, which I find unacceptable.

Then there is the matter of how we value those who teach basic literacy and numeracy. I know myself that tutors are very often on insecure and temporary contracts, and yet the work that they do is often as important as that of psychologists, nurses and language therapists. We need to provide a clear career structure and training for these basic skills tutors that properly rewards them and the work that they do.

Let me now turn to the matter of wider adult education provision, including those classes for which there is no requirement to take an exam or acquire a qualification. Back in the 1970s, we could walk past any number of schools in the evening and see the lights ablaze with classes full of people studying art, maths, Spanish, history, woodwork and yoga—the list was endless. We all recognise the value of having access to a swimming pool to maintain our physical health. Why do we not pay similar attention to public provision to foster creativity and maintain mental health? Why do we not value education for education’s sake and understand that some people want to learn without working to an exam? This is particularly important in an ageing society in which social isolation is a growing and significant public health issue. Education has an important role to play in tackling that. I believe we should foster a positive culture of lifelong learning so that we can all continue to learn, grow and share with others in our communities.

To ignore our creativity and our ability to learn is to deny our society its full potential and deny all of us our humanity.

6.15 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood). I agree with her sentiments and her quotes, which accurately reflect everything I think about the subject.

About five hours ago some questions were raised about taxes and how we use them. I remind Government Members who are not in their seats at present that “taxes are the price we pay for a civilised society”, and that includes education. Education is probably the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world, and it includes education. Education is probably the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.

I am thankful that education is a devolved and independent matter and that my constituents will benefit from having a Government with progressive attitudes and policies towards education, skills and training. A good education is an investment, not just in a child, but for our economy and for society as a whole. How could it not be? The Scottish Government strive to provide everyone, regardless of their background, with the very best chance of success in life. We do this by investing in high-quality childcare and highly trained staff. We support children during their vital early years and help them to reach their full potential.

The Scottish National party is in government, we will keep university tuition free, ensuring that education is based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

Helping young people make the transition to adulthood and the world of work is vital, whether a young person chooses university, college, vocational training or employment. It is important that they get the very best opportunity. The Scottish Government are committed to increasing the number of modern apprenticeships each year to 30,000 by 2020.

The appointment of the Deputy First Minister as Education Secretary demonstrates the Scottish Government’s commitment to education as a major priority. This exemplifies the dedication that we have in Scotland to build on the achievements already made, keeping education to the fore. However, the Scottish Government’s efforts in this regard are undermined by this Conservative Government. The apprenticeship levy introduced by the Conservatives is causing many organisations great concern. I was recently in contact with Forth Valley College in Falkirk, which expects to be liable to pay about £85,000, with no additional support from the Government. The principal has also expressed uncertainty about how the levy will be distributed to organisations in Scotland. This is an ill-thought-out measure, and as the chair of the all-party group on the hair industry, I am concerned about the impact on training and on college access across the UK.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware that Colleges Scotland—the organisation that looks after all the colleges in Scotland—recently calculated that £1.9 million will be taken out of the Scottish Government’s allocation for further education through the apprenticeship levy. Surely that £1.9 million would be better being retained to make sure that we train apprentices appropriately.

John Mc Nally: I could not agree more. We could use that money for a far better purpose.

With that in mind, I turn to the relevant part of the Queen’s Speech. I start by reiterating a point that has previously been made: this Queen’s Speech is a missed
opportunity for progressive action. Perhaps this Tory Government do not want to admit that they have no idea how to improve the people’s lives, or perhaps they simply do not care enough.

Over the last six years we have seen time and time again that the Tories are ideologically wedded to the divisive programme of austerity, and this Queen’s Speech delivers more of the same. This Tory Government are forcing a heavy financial burden on working families and students in England, as they continue to allow tuition fees of £9,000; indeed, as we have heard today, it sounds like fees are guaranteed to increase. That policy disheartens those who are not from wealthy backgrounds and discourages them from applying to university.

I respectfully suggest that the Secretary of State for Education should learn more from what we do well in Scotland, where more of the population is educated beyond school years. As has been mentioned, more of our population is tertiary-educated than in any other country, and a higher percentage of young people now leave school for positive destinations than at any other time on record.

Perhaps it is foolish of me to believe that the Government understand that a high-quality education available to all is the most important economic driver for a developed society in the 21st century. They fail to realise that, by restricting access to further education to those who can pay for it or who are willing to take on excessive debt, they are damaging the country for generations to come. There will be fewer graduates and fewer qualified professionals, leading to a loss in innovation and skills.

The Government are at the top of a slippery slope. The failure to invest in the education of all our communities is a failure for the future of the country. I make an appeal to the Secretary of State for Education that goes beyond and above party politics: she needs to reconsider her policy and to base education on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

It has been observed: 

“’Tis Education forms the common mind, Just as the Twig is bent, the Tree’s inclined.” 

It has also been observed: 

“No one should be ashamed to admit they are wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that they are wiser today than they were yesterday.”

6.23 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) and to conclude on behalf of the SNP.

There is a phrase in the Queen’s Speech that I doubt anyone in this place would disagree with: “educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life.”

I have taught in several excellent schools. One in particular that comes to mind is an inner-city comprehensive in Glasgow, where quality shone through. The quality was obvious in the way the school interacted with the wider community, the way former pupils came back to let their teachers know how they were getting on and the way the staff worked as a team to make sure they got the best possible outcomes for their students. It was also a happy place. However, would that school be deemed excellent by Government Members? I doubt it.

There are three main groups of people who make the difference to children’s educational chances: the children themselves, their parents and the teachers. At no point did I mention politicians, however, because we now have a situation where the level of political interference is reaching dangerous levels.

Many Members will have visited schools in their constituencies. Like the Queen, they will have been treated to the pristine and polished view. A more enlightening experience, perhaps, would be to go undercover and shadow a teacher for a couple of days. Even though a proficient teacher will make the job look easy, one would still develop a far more informed view of the realities of 21st-century education. I would suggest that Members try their hand at teaching a class of 30 teenagers, but unfortunately most hon. Members in this place would not make it past the morning interval. As legislators, we need to understand why there is both a recruitment and a retention crisis in teaching. We need to listen to the teachers to ensure that we retain these experts in education.

The dangers of the academisation programme may not be immediately obvious. Indeed, to the lay person the programme can seem attractive. No parent wants their child to get a second-class education at a so-called failing school, so transforming these schools magically into beacons of educational brilliance does indeed seem attractive. But we need to call it what it is: this “deregulation” is in fact privatisation by another name. Academies can be judged to be failing or coasting in the same way that local authority schools can be outstanding, so this relentless drive to convert schools to academies is clearly being done for a different reason, and I suggest that it is an ideological attack on state education.

There is plenty of talk about our great teachers—in fact, I have heard it mentioned several times today—but to the teaching profession these words appear hollow. Removing teachers’ nationally agreed terms and conditions and abandoning pay scales is ultimately about reducing education spending. These terms and conditions set out the number of hours teachers should work each week and how that time should be split between class contact, preparation time, and continuous professional development activities. Simple things like the requirement to give a teacher a lunch break are included in the conditions, but they also include agreed standards for, for example, sick pay or maternity leave. Firefighters and police officers are not expected to negotiate their pay with the local station, and neither should our teachers. For a beleaguered profession, this is the equivalent of kicking them when they are down.

The deregulation of pay scales has been reported as allowing schools to pay their staff more in order to recruit quality teachers. I am afraid I am sceptical. There is a real danger that by removing standardised pay scales, the opposite will in fact happen, and staff will be paid less. This will further demotivate teachers and lead to the increased use of unqualified teachers. As the largest part of any school budget is for staffing, when this is rolled out nationally the Government’s education budget can be eroded right across the country, meaning that education spending would reduce and funding problems currently experienced in schools would be ingrained.

The use of unqualified teachers causes me grave concern. We are talking about people who hold a child’s future in their hands. It would be unacceptable to go to
the doctor and find that the person sitting in front of you had never been to medical school, so why is this acceptable in teaching? I accept that there are shortages of teachers generally, and specifically in a number of key subject areas. The Government should therefore ask themselves, and ask the teachers, why teaching has become so unattractive, rather than compound the situation with further ham-fisted, ideologically driven interference.

On a number of occasions in this Chamber I have raised concerns about the £35,000 income threshold for non-EU workers. The Government need to look immediately at this ill-thought-out scheme and the impact it is having on the recruitment and retention of overseas teachers in key subject areas, particularly in STEM subjects. There is nothing in the Queen’s Speech to tackle shortages in those subjects or to lift the £35,000 threshold.

Excellence is not about groups of pupils leaving school with a narrow clutch of GCSEs in traditional subjects. In Scotland we have a new curriculum for excellence, which allows pupils to work through subject areas with much less constraint than in the past. The drive is not for boffin-like students to rhyme off equations and dates that can be Googled instantly; instead, it is for our young people to be empowered with skills such as analysis, communication and problem solving—in other words, the employability skills for which business is crying out.

I am happy to say that Scotland is a country of bairns not bombs. We are protecting pay scales, terms and conditions, and standards and qualifications for teachers. Unqualified teachers cannot work in our schools.

When the education system in England has been flushed down the toilet of deregulation, those who can afford it will go private, and unequal Britain will be embedded. The UK Government have to ask themselves what value they place—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I call Lucy Powell.

6.30 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): This is the climbdown Queen’s Speech or the “as much as we can muster together” Queen’s Speech. It is a Queen’s Speech so fearful of its own destiny—or should I say demise?—that it seeks hardly any powers at all. Nowhere is that more stark than in its flimsy offerings on education and skills.

The Prime Minister said only a few weeks ago that “academies for all...will be in the Queen’s Speech.”—[Official Report, 27 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1422.] Yet the word “academy” did not even appear in Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech.

The Government had one big idea for education: to force all schools, against their wishes, to become academies. That has been dropped as quickly as it was unveiled to shore up the Chancellor’s lacklustre Budget. There remains a schools Bill, but it is hardly worth the paper it is written on and raises more questions than it answers. If that is the sum total of the new thinking of the first Conservative majority Government in more than 20 years, their education policy is in a very dire state indeed.

In the process, their flip-flopping has wasted the valuable time and energy not just of the Department, which is failing to get the basics right, but of school leaders, parents and teachers around the country who are in open revolt at the Government’s approach.

What a crying shame that after so many years of real progress in education by successive Governments, particularly the last Labour one, this Government are now presiding over a school system in crisis. It is mired by chaos and confusion created by incessant ministerial meddling, and the basics of sufficiency in quality teachers, school places and budgets are woefully lacking. For the first time in a long time, education is right back up there as an issue of public concern.

As we have heard in the excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), and by many Conservative Members, there is relief at the Government’s decision to U-turn on forced academisation. However, the Government seem to have missed the point of the wide alliance that their plans have forged. It is not simply about the politically inept idea of compelling already good and outstanding schools to become academies against their wishes; it is about wider concerns about the desire for a fully academised system—without the underpinning evidence, capacity or robust oversight and accountability—leading to many more Perry Beeches or E-ACTs. Many of those concerns remain, but the Government have failed to address any of them or to produce any clear evidence. Vague assertions and loose statistics that have no correlation to cause and effect simply will not do.

The evidence remains patchy. Analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that only three of the biggest academy chains got a positive value-added rating and that just one of the 26 biggest primary sponsors achieved results above the national average. In areas where there is still underachievement at GCSE, most or all secondary schools are already academies. The highest-performing part of our school system is in primary, where more than 80% of schools are maintained and rated good or outstanding, and where most of the Education Secretary’s 1.4 million good new places have been created. There is simply no evidence that academisation in itself leads to school improvement. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) made many of those points, and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) made some excellent points about the fragmented and poor planning that the school system creates. That is why we now have a shell of a schools Bill and a Government with absolutely nothing else to say. I ask the Secretary of State again to get the independent analysis, take stock, ensure that best practice—not worst practice—is being spread and develop high-quality chains to take on more schools before seeking more powers to accelerate academisation.

I support the Secretary of State’s plans to require maths to be taught until the age of 18. Indeed, I think that that should be extended to English, too. But her ambition will fail completely if she does not take urgent action to tackle the chronic shortage of teachers, particularly in maths.

Margaret Greenwood: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government’s failure to get to grips with the retention of schoolteachers is hurting us towards crisis?
Lucy Powell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend’s excellent point. The shortage of teachers is the biggest issue facing education today, and the Government have only recently begun to acknowledge that there is a problem.

Cuts to further education will make the Government’s agenda more difficult. As the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee pointed out, STEM subjects are critical if we are to compete in the digital, automated new economy. Yet the Government are taking us backwards, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) said in her excellent speech. They must heed warnings from the OECD that the Secretary of State’s new maths curriculum is “a mile wide and an inch deep” and that it will fail to equip young people with the critical and conceptual thinking required to succeed in the new economy. My former schoolmate in Manchester, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), gave an inspiring speech on the future skills needed for the new economy.

One thread of the new legislative programme that the Government just about managed to muster was that of their so-called life chances agenda. Although I and everyone in the House share these aims, the record and reality of this Government fly in the face of that agenda. It is almost laughable. Yes, let us support social workers by lifting the quality and the status of the profession, and let us enable quicker adoption for those who want to give vulnerable children a great start in life. We also welcome the care leavers covenant. But let us not kid ourselves that the context has not got much, much harder. Huge cuts to children’s services, the decimation of Sure Start centres and family support services, reduced tax credits, increased housing and childcare costs and a growth in insecure work have put many more families in crisis or on the brink, as has the Government’s failure to tackle child poverty, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and others, scrapping for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), and others, scrapping for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). Ministers need to tell us what they are cutting: extracurricular activities, one-to-one tuition, teaching assistants, life-expanding school trips and visits and so on—all the things that should be at the heart of a life chances agenda. I recently visited a school in my constituency, a primary school in Moss Side, that had put on a Shakespeare play at the local theatre, but the headteacher will not be able to arrange that next year because of the budget cuts she faces.

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan) indicated dissent.

Lucy Powell: The right hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is the reality on the ground. I could give her a number of examples of that happening in every part of the country.

The Government could have ensured a robust and consistent testing and assessment framework. Instead, we have seen chaos and confusion—calamity after calamity on SATs with baseline testing being abandoned, and new and radically different GCSEs still not ready just weeks before they are due to begin. Today’s kids are guinea pigs for the Government’s chaotic experiments. In every other public sphere, Ministers are championing devolution, yet in education they are going in the opposite direction.

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend is being very generous with her time. Does she agree with a point put to me on Friday by a senior police officer on Merseyside that the Government are failing to provide an education that develops our children, particularly those who are not going to gain high academic qualifications, and that that is spilling over in the creation of lots of problems for our police and social services?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the narrowing of the curriculum that we have seen under this Government.

This week’s IPPR North report warns of the growing regional divide. As my hon. Friend the Members for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) and for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) highlighted, Ministers cannot build a northern powerhouse or a midlands engine of growth if they take away the levers that communities are using to tackle the deep-rooted causes of low attainment. However, the real headline of the report is just how well London has done. Why is that? It is—to name but a few reasons—because of the London challenge, significant resources and the development of a pool of world-class teachers. The Government seem to be ignoring all those lessons. Indeed, they are putting such achievements at risk by taking away further resources.

This is a programme from a Government who are unable to persuade even their own Members of the merits of their proposals, who are out of ideas for schools and education and who talk of improved life chances but whose actions make life much harder for those with the least. The Government’s education record has been one of structural change at the expense of standards. Chronic teacher shortages, a schools places crisis, falling budgets and assessment in complete and utter meltdown. Their own record is now coming home to roost, and on it they will be judged.

The Secretary of State talks of fair funding, which we support, but she does so in the context of real and significant school budget cuts. If we talk to any headteacher, they will tell us what they are cutting: extracurricular activities, one-to-one tuition, teaching assistants, life-expanding school trips and visits and so on—all the things that should be at the heart of a life chances agenda. I recently visited a school in my constituency, a primary school in Moss Side, that had put on a Shakespeare play at the local theatre, but the headteacher will not be able to arrange that next year because of the budget cuts she faces.

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan) indicated dissent.

Lucy Powell: The right hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is the reality on the ground. I could give her a number of examples of that happening in every part of the country.

The Government could have ensured a robust and consistent testing and assessment framework. Instead, we have seen chaos and confusion—calamity after calamity on SATs with baseline testing being abandoned, and new and radically different GCSEs still not ready just weeks before they are due to begin. Today’s kids are guinea pigs for the Government’s chaotic experiments. In every other public sphere, Ministers are championing devolution, yet in education they are going in the opposite direction.

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend is being very generous with her time. Does she agree with a point put to me on Friday by a senior police officer on Merseyside that the Government are failing to provide an education that develops our children, particularly those who are not going to gain high academic qualifications, and that that is spilling over in the creation of lots of problems for our police and social services?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the narrowing of the curriculum that we have seen under this Government.

This week’s IPPR North report warns of the growing regional divide. As my hon. Friend the Members for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) and for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) highlighted, Ministers cannot build a northern powerhouse or a midlands engine of growth if they take away the levers that communities are using to tackle the deep-rooted causes of low attainment. However, the real headline of the report is just how well London has done. Why is that? It is—to name but a few reasons—because of the London challenge, significant resources and the development of a pool of world-class teachers. The Government seem to be ignoring all those lessons. Indeed, they are putting such achievements at risk by taking away further resources.

This is a programme from a Government who are unable to persuade even their own Members of the merits of their proposals, who are out of ideas for schools and education and who talk of improved life chances but whose actions make life much harder for those with the least. The Government’s education record has been one of structural change at the expense of standards. Chronic teacher shortages, a schools places crisis, falling budgets and assessment in complete and utter meltdown. Their own record is now coming home to roost, and on it they will be judged.
The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): This has been an excellent debate. I estimate that 31 Members from all parts of the House have spoken, raising a variety of different subjects. One thing on which we can all agree is that everybody has an interest—a passionate interest—in education. It is an honour for me to close this debate, and I thank Members who have spoken for their insightful contributions.

It is clear from the speech by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) that when it comes to education, the differences between us and the Labour party are stark. While we take the side of parents, pupils and students, the Labour party backs stagnation and decline. The hon. Lady cannot even get her basic facts right: the attainment gap has narrowed at both key stage 2 and key stage 4 since 2011, meaning better prospects and a more prosperous life as an adult for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Since 2010, this Government have been relentless in our pursuit of educational excellence at all ages. I note that the hon. Lady did not even mention the Higher Education and Research Bill in her concluding remarks. We have worked to secure the economy, guarantee prosperity and deliver social justice. The Gracious Speech is a continuation of that approach. As many speakers have picked out, we are particularly focusing on opportunity for all.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): On Friday, I visited Oliver’s Battery Primary School in my constituency, which was the last school in my constituency to be neither good nor outstanding. Today, Hampshire County Council has told me that every single school in my constituency is now good or outstanding. That has been achieved through the hard work of the teachers, the parents, the governors and the young people, and that is what education reform is doing in my constituency.

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am delighted and pleased—perhaps he will pass on my congratulations to the school he mentioned on its recent Ofsted report. We want the opportunities that schoolchildren in his constituency have to be available to all children, right the way across the country. That is why the White Paper talks about “achieving excellence” areas.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State have any words for the school my children go to, where class sizes are currently increasing from 30 to 32? The notification I have had this week is of a new Ofsted team leading investigations and preparing cases for prosecution, but more needs to be done, which is why we have talked about regulating out-of-school settings. We will come back to Members with proposals on that after the consultation. I will return to his comments about the consultation on the education for all Bill later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms) set out his track record on referendum votes. That has not been too successful, but we can all agree that, whatever we think about the current referendum debate, this Government have delivered on giving the British people an in/out vote on our EU membership on 23 June. He was the first person to talk about support for the new national funding formula. I am grateful to him and other hon. Members who mentioned that.

In a very personal speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) spoke about her experiences, saying that what matters is not where you come from but where you are going to. That is absolutely right, and a view we would all subscribe to. She supports the national funding formula. The Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), talked about the Chancellor’s recognising the importance of funding science even in a time of austerity.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—I cannot see whether he is in his place—called the Queen’s Speech a Milk Tray of hard and soft centres, and a smorgasbord of delights. He certainly has a way with words. My hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), who talked about her support for the national funding formula, kindly invited me to make a visit on 5 July. I will have to look at my diary, but I very much enjoyed my last visit to Chippenham schools with her last year. She also talked about the links between schools and businesses, and we are of course backing the Careers and Enterprise Company, which offers exactly those sorts of opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) talked about her support for the National Citizen Service. I am sure that, like many others, she will welcome the Bill in the Queen’s Speech to put the NCS on a statutory footing. We are also going to make sure that it can be promoted in schools, to make sure young people get the opportunities she talked about. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) talked about the Wales Bill. I have to say that I have not been involved in its drafting or the debates about it, but I am sure that his remarks will have been heeded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) talked about the Higher Education and Research Bill, welcoming the establishment of new universities, which she hopes will particularly benefit her part of the country. She offered her support for the national funding formula. She also admitted that we have invented some new words in the past few weeks. For the benefit of the Minister for Schools, we have invented the verb “to academise”, along with the noun “academisation”. I look forward to those words being added to the next edition of the dictionary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) talked about early years provision. I encourage her and interested
people in her constituency to take part in the early years national funding formula consultation when it is published shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) talked about the better markets Bill and the problems in her own constituency. She may be interested to know that the Government today published a call for evidence seeking to establish whether there are any problems with the provision of advice, advocacy and dispute resolution in the regulated sectors, including water, to help us develop that better markets Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) also welcomed the national funding formula. She mentioned, as did other hon. Members, her concerns about young people’s mental health. She is absolutely right to identify that issue. The Department has done a lot of work on that. The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend, Peter Weir, to his place in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) asked where the evidence was, and I encourage him to read the discussions of the Education Committee about international evidence. Several SNP Members spoke about multi-academy trusts, and we debated that. The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) spoke about multi-academy trusts, and we debated that. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) spoke about part-time students, and will no doubt have welcomed the announcement last year that for the first time ever we will provide financial support to part-time students that is equivalent to the support we give full-time students. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) spoke about English devolution, and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) spoke about north-south funding. I am sure she will welcome the national funding formula, and take part in the next stage of the consultation.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) spoke about the changing world and robots. I wondered if she was suggesting that that might be the next leader of her party, but she was actually talking about new enterprise. The hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) spoke about the pothole fund, and I point her to the £250 million that has been announced. A number of hon. Members rightly mentioned the importance of the further education sector, but they overlooked the continuing investment in the pupil premium fund.

Mr Anderson rose—

Nicky Morgan: I will get to the hon. Gentleman’s speech in a moment. [Interruption.] I am glad that he wants to listen to my remarks.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) rightly said that we should learn from each other, and perhaps through him I can welcome the new Unionist Minister, Peter Weir, to his place in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) asked where the evidence was, and I encourage him to read the discussions of the Education Committee about international evidence. Several SNP Members spoke about the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in the Scottish Government. I spoke to John Swinney on Monday, and hope that we can work together, particularly on the 2017 international teaching summit that Scotland is hosting. I hope that all Administrations will take part in that.

Neil Gray: I assume that the Minister will be keen to retain as many skilled graduates as possible. Will she commit to working with the SNP, and the new Cabinet Secretary and Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, and approach the Home Secretary about the reintroduction of the post-study work visa?

Nicky Morgan: I heard the hon. Gentleman’s earlier remarks to the Minister. We have one of the most successful university sectors in the world, of which people from overseas rightly take advantage, and it is incumbent on us to ensure a robust visa and border policy. The number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who go to universities in Scotland is almost half—[Interruption.] Deprived young people in Scotland are almost half as likely to attend university as their peers in England.

The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) spoke about multi-academy trusts, and we debated that. He will have noticed the item in the White Paper on multi-academy trust accountability, which says that we will launch new accounting measures for MATs, and publish MAT performance tables in addition to the continued publication of performance at individual school level.

Stephen Timms: The Secretary of State spoke in the Education Committee about allowing parents to initiate the process of changing from one trust to another if things go wrong with the original trust. Will that provision be in the Bill?

Nicky Morgan: We are considering that, and we want to take soundings and consult on exactly how it would work. We would not want to destabilise trusts, but the views of parents are critical on that issue.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) spoke about part-time students, and will no doubt have welcomed the announcement last year that for the first time ever we will provide financial support to part-time students that is equivalent to the support we give full-time students. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) spoke about English devolution, and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) spoke about north-south funding. I am sure she will welcome the national funding formula, and take part in the next stage of the consultation.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) spoke about the changing world and robots. I wondered if she was suggesting that that might be the next leader of her party, but she was actually talking about new enterprise. The hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) spoke about the pothole fund, and I point her to the £250 million that has been announced. A number of hon. Members rightly mentioned the importance of the further education sector, but they overlooked the continuing investment in the pupil premium fund.

Mr Anderson Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nicky Morgan: No, I want to make this point. We are committed to the further education sector, and the education for all Bill will include measures to reform technical education and improve qualifications so that that is employer-led, and prepares students in further education for skilled and valued employment. The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) mentioned the university technical college, and she will meet the Minister tomorrow. She said that that was not proved financially viable due to poor pupil recruitment. I think I have dealt with all the points raised by hon. Members. The hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) also spoke about their commitment to education.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science opened the debate by outlining measures to secure the future success of our world-leading higher education system. The Higher Education and Research Bill will inject dynamism and innovation into the system, making it easier for new, high-quality providers to enter the market, giving students more choice and unprecedented transparency on data and information, so that they can make informed decisions about where and what to study. The Bill will raise teaching standards through the teaching excellence framework. In the face of doom-mongering by Labour Members, I remind the House about their record on predictions about higher education. They were wrong about the impact of fees on participation rates and wrong about the impact on disadvantaged pupils.
Let me turn to the children and social work Bill. We must expect the same for children in care as we do for our own children: the same aspirations, the same opportunities and the same hope. The Bill will continue the Government’s determination to transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children, giving them the stability to succeed. It includes measures to strengthen adoption and to ensure that those charged with making decisions in the interests of children always take into account a child’s need for stability. It will introduce new ways to drive innovation in local authorities, enable us to continue our drive to raise the status and standards of social workers, and include a set of corporate parenting principles and a requirement for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers, setting out what support they can expect and giving them the right to a personal adviser until the age of 25.

The education for all Bill continues our drive for excellence to exist everywhere in our education system, moving further towards a school-led system, with heads, teachers and parents in the driving seat. Schools are embracing the opportunities already available, with record numbers applying to convert to academy status in March and hundreds of underperforming schools set to be turned around by strong sponsors. The Bill shifts responsibility for school improvement away from local authorities towards great school leaders who will be able to spread their reach, ensuring more pupils benefit from their proven records of success.

Following careful consultation, which I hope will include the Education Committee, we will have robust criteria for identifying local authorities that are chronically underperforming or which no longer have the resources to maintain their remaining schools. The education for all Bill will allow us to convert all their remaining schools, including those that are good or outstanding.

The Bill will make sure excellence exists, too, for excluded pupils. Exclusion will no longer be a mechanism by which schools can deem them out of sight and out of mind. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, schools will be responsible for the continued education of excluded pupils; charged with finding them the right providers; able to give them the education they deserve; and incentivised to do their best for them by being accountable for their educational achievement.

It cannot be fair that a child in one part of the country can attract, in some cases, thousands of pounds more in funding to their school than a child with the same characteristics and costs who happens to live elsewhere. The education for all Bill will consign the antiquated school funding system to the history books, replacing it with a national funding formula that will enable schools their fair share of funding to give every child the education they deserve.

The Minister for Skills will shortly launch the Government’s skills plan, our strategy to revolutionise the skills system that has hitherto been a minefield of training and qualifications. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, we will introduce legislation to strengthen careers advice, requiring schools to give education and training providers the opportunity to reach young people on school premises.

It is telling that the Labour party would rather leave schools in the hands of underperforming and unviable local authorities based on opposition to school freedom. It is no wonder the leader of the NUT’s first act after stepping down was to join the Labour party. I cannot understand why the Labour party continues to draw a false distinction between structures and standards. Of course standards are paramount. The quality of teaching is the most important thing we can do to make sure education is life-transforming. But the Government believe that if we want high standards, teachers have to lead the structures. If we want educational excellence everywhere, we have to identify those parts of the country where the educational underperformance is entrenched and focus on it. We will look at all those things. As the Minister for Universities and Science said, the White Paper has one chapter on structures and seven chapters on teaching, leadership, funding, standards and qualifications.

Unlike the Labour party, the Government believe in opportunity and aspiration. More importantly, we will take the steps and seek the measures to support excellence in our schools, to support and enhance our world class universities, and to make sure we procure the best life chances for children in the care system. For Conservative Members, children, students and parents—

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab) claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put. Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 300.

Division No. 1] [6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Olive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burton, Mr John
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Crawley, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Siella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith

Nicky Morgan
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elf ord, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elliott, Tom
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Farrell, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fi ello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Paul
Foxglove, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hol lern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinahan, Danny
Kyle, Pete
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
MacTaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marr, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCaig, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGarry, Natalie
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Mea le, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Gra heme M.
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Omn, Melanie
Omrurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Ray, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, rh Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smee th, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Starmer, Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenhorne, rh James
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David

Tami, Mark
Thewlis, Alison
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Michelle
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Tunley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Watson, Mr Tom
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wis arth, Pete
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tell ers for the Ayes: Sue Hayman and Vicky Foxcroft
NOES
Burt, rh Alistair
Caims, rh Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Downen, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Question accordingly negatived.

7.14 pm The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3). Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 2 to 4 together. Ordered, That the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) Order 2016 (S.I., 2016, No. 332), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.

That the School Governance (Constitution and Federations) (England) (Amendment) Order 2016 (S.I., 2016, No. 204), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.

That the Feed-in Tariffs (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2015 (S.I., 2015, No. 2045), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee. —[Stephen Barclay.]
PETITION

Development on the former Two Trees High School site, Denton

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I rise to present the petition that has been collected by my constituent, Margaret Smethurst, following my Adjournment debate on 26 February concerning planning issues relating to the Haughton Green area of my constituency. The petition has 167 signatures. It is accompanied by an online Change.org petition that has 1,338 signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Haughton Green and Denton, Declares that the fields of the former Two Trees High School in Denton should be protected from unwanted development; and further that the site should be preserved for the benefit of the environment and future generations.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretaries of State for Education and Communities and Local Government to protect Haughton Green and Denton’s open spaces, and prohibit unwanted development on the former site of Two Trees High School.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Battle of Jutland Centenary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to invite the House to pay its respects to those who fought at the battle of Jutland on 31 May and 1 June 100 years ago. At 10.30 pm on 30 May 1916, Admiral Jellicoe led 16 Dreadnought battle ships out of Scapa Flow after the Admiralty had intercepted a message suggesting that the German fleet was mobilising. He was to meet a squadron of eight Dreadnoughts coming from Cromarty to form the grand fleet. Admiral Beatty’s battlecruiser fleet comprising 52 ships left Rosyth a little later. In total, 151 ships of the Royal Navy were to rendezvous 90 miles west of Jutland.

At 1 am on 31 May, Admiral Hipper’s battlecruisers left Wilhelmshaven. The German main battle fleet of 16 Dreadnought class ships led by Admiral Scheer left Jade at 2.30 am and were joined by six pre-Dreadnought ships from the Elbe river at 4 am, giving a total of 99 ships in the German high seas fleet. Neither side knew that the other’s entire force was at sea. On 31 May at 3.48 pm, five of Admiral Hipper’s ships opened fire on the battlecruisers of Admiral Beatty. Within 36 minutes, the British fleet had lost two battlecruisers, HMS Indefatigable and HMS Queen Mary, with the loss of 2,264 men and boys, and just 21 survivors.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that my grandfather served on HMS Valiant as a gunnery officer during the battle of Jutland? I shall be reading out his letters during a presentation in Devonport in Plymouth on Monday. The adrenalin that went through his body at the time meant that he did not need to eat anything for 36 hours after playing his part in the battle. He enjoyed only a glass of sloe gin and a ham sandwich during the course of it.

Mrs Drummond: The normal ration is rum, of course. I ask my hon. Friend to send those letters to the Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth; I am sure that it would be very grateful to him. HMS Valiant, on which his grandfather served, also had a distinguished career in world war two, when it served in the Mediterranean and the far east.

Within 12 hours, the Royal Navy had lost 14 ships and more than 6,000 men while the German navy lost 11 ships and 2,500 men. The total was 10% of the number of ships at battle. The conditions in which the battle was fought were foggy and damp with a freezing North sea that claimed the lives of many of those who managed to abandon their shattered ships. Those lives are remembered at the manning ports of Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham, where the memorials designed by Sir Robert Lorimer bear plaques carrying all their names.

The biggest ships fired shells weighing nearly a tonne over a distance of 12 miles. Conditions aboard ships on both sides would have been uncomfortable and cramped at the best of times.
Jutland has always been a difficult battle for lay people to understand, because of the chaos of a naval action in poor visibility and darkness. Despite a massive toll of injury and death, the true impact of the battle
was not understood at home, even immediately afterwards. There were some early interpretations of the outcome as a German victory, followed by an understanding that it was in fact a strategic defeat of Germany. Exactly a month later, the horrors of the Somme brought a fresh wave of shock to the population. Although we are here now to commemorate the centenary of the battle, it has spent most of the past 100 years lurking in the shadows of our national consciousness, yet the impact on my city of Portsmouth was profound. Portsmouth provided a major part of the crews of the biggest ships in the fleet. In Portsmouth’s manned ships we lost 3,000 lives in the battle of Jutland, more than we lost at the Somme. The impact of Jutland on families and communities in the city was huge.

The battle of Jutland jerked the Royal Navy out of Victorian complacency about its leadership. It had led the way with the building of Dreadnought and its successors at the insistence of Admiral Jacky Fisher, but over that period, and for long before it, the leadership of the Navy had fossilised ideas and played down the importance of initiative; it was constricted by the Victorian class structure.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Drummond: I am unable to, as I do not have much time. At Jutland, there were various examples of squadron commanders failing to act on their own initiative and a conservatism in the standing orders of the fleet, which were based on the outmoded premises of the Victorian era. There was an automatic assumption by almost everyone that the commander on the flagship must already be aware of what they saw. There was a reluctance to break wireless silence at night when important developments occurred. Generally, there was a disinclination to act and an eagerness to defer to authority—all those things are seen as the inevitable outcome of the structured rationalist certainties of the late Victorian fleet. By the prescriptive, centralising premises on which his elaborate battle orders were based, Jellicoe had acted correctly—but they were the premises of the Victorian era. Arthur Marder, writing in 1966, described the Royal Navy of the turn of the 20th century as follows:

“though numerically a very imposing force, it was in certain respects a drowsy, inefficient, moth-eaten organism”.

On the other side, the Germans had a technical and tactical understanding among their commanding officers that surpassed ours. The German navy arguably came into being as a distinct separate organisation only in 1888—indeed, most of its ships were named after Prussian soldiers. Alfred von Tirpitz became chief of staff to the German navy’s high command at the age of 48, after being a specialist in torpedoes and mines. He recognised that the torpedo could be as vital as the gun, and being a specialist in torpedoes and mines. He recognised that the torpedo could be as vital as the gun, and he advocated the modernisation of the fleet. He also understood the importance of initiative; it was constricted by the Victorian class structure.

The Germans practised a manoeuvre called “battle turnaround”, which was a simultaneous turnaround for all ships in the convoy, rather than the turn in succession. It made it easier to escape bombardment, and this was so successful at Jutland. Every encouragement was given to German subordinate officers to act on their own initiative whenever they could better further their commanding officer’s intentions, rather than have rigid compliance with orders. Admiral von Tirpitz was instrumental in the appointment of Admiral Scheer as head of the German high seas fleet who, likewise, was a torpedo specialist. Although it is not quite as true of the Royal Navy as it was of the Army in world war one that they were “lions led by donkeys”, there were clear deficiencies, and it is to the credit of the Royal Navy that they rapidly learned the lessons.

If we are to be critical of naval leadership, we should, at the same time, remember the burdens that fell on Admiral Jellicoe. He had, at all costs, to avoid a major defeat. In fact, he showed the Germans that the Royal Navy, even at the huge cost of life at Jutland, had the strength to fight battles on that scale repeatedly while they did not.

The lead that we built up in the Dreadnought race before the war was simply too great. The consequences of Jutland were that our naval supremacy on the surface remained unchallengeable. Germany largely kept its surface fleet in port and resorted to the unrestricted submarine warfare that eventually brought the United States into the war and doomed Germany. Jellicoe and Beatty led a Navy that stuck to its tasks and bravely undertook its duties despite horrendous hardships.

We find ourselves now in a new era of development, with two new aircraft carriers shortly to enter service; the introduction of the excellent Astute-class submarines, and a clear plan for renewing the nuclear deterrent. There is no doubt that, technically, our Navy is at the forefront of technology and doctrine.

However, it is not enough for us in this House to allow the Royal Navy to acquire the most up-to-date equipment if it is to rest idle in the docks in Portsmouth, Plymouth or Faslane. We must provide the resources to enable the Navy to recruit and retain a highly motivated team. We must provide them with the resources to work out the best way to utilise the equipment to enable them to develop tactics.

Today it is tempting to believe that, with the internet, satellite communications, and video-stream links, we can have centralised systems and that, just like Jellicoe, we can control those people in the field. However, just like at Jutland, there could be a misplaced assumption by those in the field that those in the centre already know what is going on.

In the battle of Jutland, there was one flag signal every 67 seconds. In the Falklands, HMS Hermes handled 170,000 signals in 10 weeks, or one every 39 seconds. Too much signalling can lead to information overload. It can also centralise decision making and stultify initiative.

In times of peace, the value of experience fades and is replaced by rational theory as a result of new technology discrediting previous experience. We might do well to remind ourselves of the quote from Sun Tzu, the Chinese general who wrote some 2,500 years ago:

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting”.

That encapsulates the object of our strategy of deterrence, and so we must demonstrate to all our potential enemies that not only do we have the most up-to-date equipment, but we also know how to use it.

The people who have served in our forces in the past, now, and who will serve in the future must always be at the centre of our thoughts. At this time of year, our forces have fought crucial battles in other wars besides world war one. On this day in May 1941, the fleet led by
Admiral Cunningham, supported by my father-in-law, on HMS Hereward, began the evacuation of Crete, one of the Navy’s grimmest tasks but one it carried out with devotion and sacrifice.

Thirty four years ago, all three services were fighting 8,000 miles away to liberate the Falklands. Today, 25 May, is the anniversary of the sinking of HMS Coventry. A total of 19 of her crew were lost and a further 39 were injured. Our hearts go out to the friends and relations of those who were killed in that battle.

Most of us in this House were alive during the Falklands war, and it is through our memory of that conflict, including that of the fate of HMS Coventry, that we have a greater understanding of the shock suffered by the nation after the battle of Jutland. Likewise, it is through the people we know who fought in that battle that we have some understanding of what it must have been like at Jutland as bombs and missiles hit magazines in those ships too.

While we have enjoyed decades of peace in Europe, around the world our service personnel have been in action in difficult circumstances, and suffered injury and death. We must listen to their experiences and keep on learning the lessons that they can teach us. I am proud of the thinking behind the armed forces covenant, but there is still more that we can do to ingrain it in how public services support veterans and those still serving.

There are always lessons to learn in victory or defeat, or in between. Jutland was a victory, although it did not resemble the second Trafalgar that public opinion had become conditioned to look for. Beatty said during the battle:

“There is something wrong with our bloody ships and something wrong with the system”.

Within a year, the standing orders of the fleet were updated to encourage initiative and the taking of responsibility by junior commanders.

Among the crews at Jutland in junior positions there were no fewer than eight future First Sea Lords, and there is no question that the Navy went into the second world war better led as a result of the lessons learned in 1916. Admiral Sandy Woodward wrote in 1996:

“The Navy had to rediscover from bitter experience of 1914-16 much about warfare which it should never have forgotten”.

The differences of opinion about Jellicoe and Beatty were settled before they both died. The country honoured both men with burials in St Paul’s cathedral and busts in Trafalgar Square near Lord Nelson, thus recognising their huge contribution to the security of this country.

It has always been the nature of the Royal Navy that it recruits from all over the country, inland as well as from the historic ports, and every village and town will have made its contribution to the work of the Navy at some time. But it is an honour as the Member of Parliament for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) on securing this important debate about the centenary of the battle of Jutland, which we commemorate next week. I commend her for her interesting and informative speech about the battle, the people and the lessons and consequences for the Royal Navy.

I am grateful for the interventions that we have had, and to the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) for being on the Bench to support this important debate.

The commemoration of the battle of Jutland is just one of the national events in the four-year first world war centenary programme announced by the Prime Minister in 2012. We have already held national events to mark the centenary of Britain’s entry into the war in August 2014, the Gallipoli campaign in April 2015, and later this year in July, we will mark the start of the battle of the Somme.

Neil Gray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Evennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Evennett: In a moment. I shall make a little progress first.

Tonight and next week our focus moves from the battlefields to the sea. Jutland was one of the largest naval actions in history and the most decisive sea battle of the first world war. It was fought by the British Royal Navy’s grand fleet under Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and the imperial German navy’s high seas fleet under Vice-Admiral Reinhard Scheer. It took place from 31 May to 1 June 1916 in the North sea. More than 8,500 lives were lost, with many bodies never being recovered in what was the only major naval confrontation of the first world war.

The commemorations of this naval clash, which brought together 250 warships and over 100,000 men, provides an opportunity to remember the contributions of all those involved in the conflict and the battle’s important role in the allied victory in the first world war. We will also reflect on the reconciliation with Germany and the peaceful relationship we have today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Evennett: I will give way in a moment, but time is very short.

As well as Jutland itself, we will be commemorating the wider war at sea and the huge role of the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, the fishing fleets, the shipbuilders and the contribution of all those who served or contributed. Their work and service we remember with pride and gratitude.

Next week on 31 May, my Department, together with partners including the Royal Navy, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, will deliver national commemorative events in Orkney. The British grand fleet was based in the sheltered anchorage of Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands during the first world war and the local community played an important role in supporting the war efforts. It is only right, therefore, that 100 years later, we hold commemorations in a place that has profound resonance with the Navy and other maritime organisations. I would like to acknowledge...
the help and support that the Orkney Islands Council, local organisations and the community have given over the past year during the planning of these events. Their work has been much appreciated and we thank them.

Neil Gray: I thank the Minister for giving way and I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), my colleague on the women and work all-party parliamentary group, on bringing this important debate to the House, and I thank the Minister and the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for acknowledging the central role that my native Orkney had in the battle of Jutland. Is the Minister aware of the fantastic display of poppies formerly at the Tower of London, now at the iconic St Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall—the weeping window—and what a fitting tribute that is to the battle of Jutland 100 years ago?

Mr Evennett: I certainly endorse that point, and I was coming to it in a moment, but the hon. Gentleman has beaten me to it.

The national events will take place at St Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall—the UK’s most northerly cathedral, which was founded in the 12th century—and at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s royal naval cemetery at Lyness, on the isle of Hoy, which was founded in 1915, when Scapa Flow was the base of the grand fleet. The cemetery contains 445 Commonwealth burials of the first world war, 109 of which are unidentified. In the spirit of reconciliation, there will also be a wreath-laying event at sea at Jutland Bank, with the Royal Navy and the federal German navy taking part.

For those in Kirkwall not attending the cathedral service, there will be an opportunity for the general public to gather on the streets to watch the events live on a big screen. The event will be broadcast live on the BBC.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Evennett: Unfortunately, I really do not have much time.

I am really pleased that around 800 guests will attend the events in Orkney. I look forward to being present myself next Tuesday, as one of the 300 descendants attending. My grandfather, Clyde Turner, served on HMS Malaya during the battle, and I have a strong personal association with the commemoration. He often spoke about his experiences as a stoker and subsequently as a chief petty officer. He was a career naval man and a real influence on me in my early years. I shall, of course, be thinking of him and remembering the time spent with him. In his memory, my son Tom and my grandson George were given the name Clyde as one of their Christian names. I am pleased, therefore, to be the Minister responsible for the first world war centenary at this time, and I look forward to meeting other descendants at the commemoration next week.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): As the granddaughter of a chief petty officer who served at the same time, I commend the Minister’s words. Will he join me in commending Glasgow University professor of naval architecture, Sir John Harvard Biles, on his contribution to the design of the Dreadnought class of warship, which was so vital in the battle of Jutland?

Mr Evennett: I would be delighted to endorse that comment, which is so important.

Memories are important, and it is also important that schoolchildren and students learn about the battle of Jutland and about those who served their country. Commemorative events will take place across the UK, including on 28 May at Queensferry cemetery in West Lothian. There will also be events led by the Royal Navy on 31 May at Chatham, Plymouth and the Portsmouth naval memorial, which I understand my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South will attend. Events will also be held at Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites at Esbjerg new cemetery in Denmark, Fredrikstad military cemetery in Norway and Kviberg cemetery in Sweden.

Our key themes across the first world war centenary programme are remembrance, youth and education, and I am delighted that there are a number of resources for children, young people and adults alike so that they can learn about the battle on websites such as those of the Imperial War Museum and the BBC.

A number of key Jutland exhibitions are also taking place. Last week, the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth opened the exhibition my hon. Friend told us about—“36 Hours: Jutland 1916, The Battle That Won The War”. In London, the National Maritime Museum opened its new gallery, “Jutland 1916: WW1’s Greatest Sea Battle”. I would encourage as many people as possible and particularly families—perhaps during half-term next week—to visit those exhibitions to learn more about the battle.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the Minister for giving way—he has been very generous. Too, congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) on her marvellous contribution. Will the Minister join me in congratulating the people of my constituency, and particularly of the town of Helensburgh, near Faslane, who turned out in such fantastic numbers last week, along with members of our armed forces, our cadets and our veterans associations, to remember the battle of Jutland in such a fitting manner?

Mr Evennett: I would certainly be delighted to endorse that comment, and I congratulate those involved.

Communities across the UK that also wish to mark the battle should be aware that the Royal British Legion has made available resources to help communities run local events, including factsheets and other useful information.

In Belfast, the last floating ship that survived the battle of Jutland—HMS Caroline—will be open to the public for the first time. It is managed by the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Thanks to £12.2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, HMS Caroline will become a significant visitor attraction, where people will discover the role she played in the war and the role of the Irish sailor.

Suella Fernandes: On my hon. Friend’s point about the Royal British Legion, will he join me in congratulating one of my constituents, 70-year-old veteran John Hardman, who is running his third triathlon and swimming 1,916 km at Fareham leisure centre to commemorate the battle of Jutland?
Mr Evenett: We wish him good luck and congratulate him on taking on that test.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to the 6,094 British and 2,551 German sailors who lost their lives at the battle of Jutland. The battle and the first world war provided key learning that influences the Royal Navy and the armed forces of today. On 31 May, we remember as one nation the battle of Jutland and honour those on all sides who lost their lives during the battle or were affected by the war at sea. We must ensure that they will never be forgotten. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South for helping to raise awareness about the impact that the battle of Jutland had and to recognise, most definitely, the important role of the Royal Navy in the first world war.

Question put and agreed to.

7.45 pm

House adjourned.
The Solicitor General: The hon. Lady is right to refer to those regional variations, which are concerning. I am glad to see a strong commitment to a greater national approach to this issue. That is why the setting up of RASSO units in every area is vital. The CPS has recruited a further 102 specialist prosecutors, with a further phase of recruitment due to take place, which will help to drive conviction rates up.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, there were more than 28,000 incidents with a domestic motivation in 2014-15, and there were 2,734 sexual offences, including 737 cases of rape. Not only are conviction rates too low across the UK, but the number of incidents is still too high, particularly considering that many victims of domestic violence do not come forward. What steps are the Government taking to reduce the number of offences? Have they considered an education programme for boys and girls in school?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful, as always, to the hon. Gentleman. I am happy to say that, in England and Wales, the overall number of cases being brought—not just of rape but of associated violence and sexual abuse in a domestic setting—continues to increase, which means justice for thousands more victims year on year.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): What steps has the hon. and learned Gentleman taken to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service discusses with the police the type of evidence that needs to be on the file sent to it to secure a conviction? Has he reviewed with the Home Office police forces that are accused of putting too many rape cases in the “no crime” category without investigation?

The Solicitor General: To answer the hon. Lady’s latter point first, that is obviously an operational matter for the police, but the general principles and policy issues arising from it are important. That is why the Attorney General and I take great interest in the important work of the RASSO units—the specialist prosecutors—that work with the police at an early stage to identify the sort of evidence that is needed to secure convictions. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that point.

Serious Fraud

2. Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): What steps the Serious Fraud Office is taking to help prevent serious fraud and other economic crimes.

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Over the past 18 months the Serious Fraud Office has secured, for example, its first contested conviction for rate rigging, its first conviction of a corporation for offences involving bribery of foreign officials and its first deferred prosecution agreement.

Ian C. Lucas: But in 2015, as a result of the 3,000 cases reported to the dedicated fraud line, the SFO opened only three cases. What is the reality of why the SFO does so much less than the Government’s rhetoric suggests?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate, I am sure, that there is more than one body in the system that prosecutes fraud. The Serious Fraud
Office deals only with the most complex and difficult cases, so it is not surprising that of all the cases reported, not all of which will be prosecuted by anyone, it deals with only a small proportion. It is set up to deal with the most difficult and complex cases, and that is what it does.

14. [905132] Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is it not important that not only the Serious Fraud Office but all other Government agencies have access to communications data in order to ensure convictions?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Communications data are important in the prosecution of all types of offending. For example, the vast majority of prosecutions in terrorism cases involve such data, but they are also used in relation to fraud. That is why the Investigatory Powers Bill currently before the House is so important.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Attorney General conscious of the fact that there is a deep problem in the Serious Fraud Office, in that it is underfunded and under-resourced and cannot attract the greatest talent for complex cases? Is he aware that it is believed that £400 million of British taxpayers’ money is still affected by the disaster with the Icelandic banks and should be retrieved? Will he look at the close relationship that the SFO has with the big accountancy firms, which do not have the necessary expertise in-house, and will he look particularly at Grant Thornton in that respect?

The Attorney General: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will recognise that I am not going to comment on specific cases. He will understand that it is the responsibility of the director of the Serious Fraud Office to decide whether to open investigations and prosecutions. In fact, the core funding for the Serious Fraud Office has increased, not decreased. It also has access to so-called blockbuster funding to enable it to take on very large and substantial cases when the need arises. Were it to retain that core capability throughout a given period, it would sometimes not be using it to its fullest extent when such cases were not on its books, which is an appropriate way to proceed. We will always make sure that the Serious Fraud Office has the funding it needs to prosecute the cases it ought to prosecute.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I listened carefully to that response from the Attorney General, because this week’s report from Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate into the Government’s arrangements for the SFO found that the blockbuster funding model does not represent value for money and is incompatible with long-term strategy for building prosecutorial capability and capacity in-house for future investigations and prosecutions. Will he look at alternative funding models to ensure that the SFO is on a sustainable footing and not, in effect, subject to a Treasury veto?

The Attorney General: The hon. Lady will recognise that the report from the chief inspector, which I asked him to produce in order to look at the way in which the Serious Fraud Office is governed, was a very balanced report that also put forward some very positive points about the way in which the Serious Fraud Office has improved under the direction of the current director. She is right, however, that questions were asked about the funding model. There is a balance to be struck, as I indicated to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). We have to make sure that the Serious Fraud Office has the money it needs, and we will. The director will never refuse to proceed in a case for lack of funding, so there is no Treasury veto as she suggests. However, we have to balance the need for that money with the need not to have unused capacity that is being paid for by the taxpayer. The blockbuster funding model has so far been considered to strike that balance correctly, but I will of course look carefully at what the chief inspector says, and we will consider whether further change is appropriate.

Pro Bono Legal Services

4. Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905096]

6. Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote the provision of pro bono legal services. [905098]

7. Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905099]

8. Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [R] [905100]

11. Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to promote (a) public legal education and (b) the provision of pro bono legal services. [905129]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): As Government pro bono champions, the Attorney General and I continue to support, through our co-ordinating committees, a number of projects that reinforce how important pro bono work and public legal information are, not just domestically but internationally.

Bob Blackman: Clearly the actions of certain lawyers bring the profession into disrepute, but thousands of people across the country achieve justice through pro bono work. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that lawyers who give their time free of charge are helping justice in this country?

The Solicitor General: In the last financial year, £601 million-worth of work was provided pro bono by lawyers in private practice—that is, barristers, solicitors and legal executives. They recognise that the time they give makes a real difference to people who would otherwise be denied access to justice.

Maggie Throup: Small community-based charities that provide services such as community transport, luncheon clubs and after-school activities play an important role in our society, but they often operate under immense financial pressure. What is my hon. and learned Friend doing to encourage more law firms to provide pro bono
legal services to those small charities, to help them cut their running costs and focus their resources on making a difference in our communities?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is right to pay tribute to the existing pro bono commitment by the legal professions, working alongside the voluntary sector, to providing trustee support and other advice to a range of local charities in both her constituency and mine, and in many other communities the length and breadth of the country.

**Mims Davies:** Does the Solicitor General believe that public legal understanding has caught up with the legal changes in relation to sexting and revenge pornography?

**The Solicitor General:** Public legal education has an invaluable role to play. I have seen at first hand in schools how the Citizenship Foundation, with the support of lawyers, runs sessions on issues such as social media and the law. The particular issue that my hon. Friend raises is extremely sensitive and important to young people in particular, and I believe that running the appropriate courses can teach them about the consequences of such criminal acts.

**Michael Tomlinson:** The legal profession may have its detractors, but one of its finest traditions is that lawyers are encouraged to undertake pro bono work. What more can be done to take pro bono work into our schools, both in Dorset and across the country?

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is right to pay tribute to the existing pro bono commitment by the legal professions, working alongside the voluntary sector, to providing trustee support and other advice to a range of local charities in both her constituency and mine, and in many other communities the length and breadth of the country.

**Mims Davies:** Does the Solicitor General believe that public legal understanding has caught up with the legal changes in relation to sexting and revenge pornography?

**The Solicitor General:** Public legal education has an invaluable role to play. I have seen at first hand in schools how the Citizenship Foundation, with the support of lawyers, runs sessions on issues such as social media and the law. The particular issue that my hon. Friend raises is extremely sensitive and important to young people in particular, and I believe that running the appropriate courses can teach them about the consequences of such criminal acts.

**Michael Tomlinson:** The legal profession may have its detractors, but one of its finest traditions is that lawyers are encouraged to undertake pro bono work. What more can be done to take pro bono work into our schools, both in Dorset and across the country?

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is right to pay tribute to the existing pro bono commitment by the legal professions, working alongside the voluntary sector, to providing trustee support and other advice to a range of local charities in both her constituency and mine, and in many other communities the length and breadth of the country.

**Mims Davies:** Does the Solicitor General believe that public legal understanding has caught up with the legal changes in relation to sexting and revenge pornography?

**The Solicitor General:** Public legal education has an invaluable role to play. I have seen at first hand in schools how the Citizenship Foundation, with the support of lawyers, runs sessions on issues such as social media and the law. The particular issue that my hon. Friend raises is extremely sensitive and important to young people in particular, and I believe that running the appropriate courses can teach them about the consequences of such criminal acts.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sure that the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) will put that tribute on his website in a matter of minutes.

**Dr James Davies:** I thank the Solicitor General for his reply on this topic. How can the Government further help the efforts of charities such as LawWorks, a pro bono legal advice service supported by the Law Society that targets the most needy and has offices across the UK?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend is right to mention LawWorks, which has been an active member of the pro bono co-ordinating committee for several years. Since October 2014, the Ministry of Justice has provided funding for the litigant in person support strategy, which is designed to help third sector organisations deliver increased support to litigants in person. I am sure that he will put that on his website.

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I have done a fair bit of pro bono legal work in my time as well. It is often a substitute for inadequate access to legal aid, which was greatly cut under the last Government. Will this Government consider using interest on client account for legal aid? Each solicitor in private practice has to have a client account in which the client’s money is kept separately and earns interest. In some jurisdictions, such interest is used to fund legal aid. The Government should consider that for England.

**The Solicitor General:** I appreciated the constructive part of the hon. Gentleman’s question, and my colleagues in the Ministry of Justice should look at the idea. I am cautious about compulsion, however, because one of the great things about pro bono is that it is voluntary. It is all very well for him to criticise the Government for cuts to legal aid, but he will remember, because he was a Member of Parliament at the time, the so-called Access to Justice Act 1999, when a Labour Government destroyed civil legal aid, so I will not take lectures from the Labour party.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I have always been a supporter of pro bono work—both while I was a practising barrister, before I entered this House, and since—but does the Solicitor General agree that because pro bono work is voluntary, as he said in his last answer, that is precisely why it could never be used as a policy solution to sort out the Government’s cuts to legal aid?

**The Solicitor General:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, neither the Attorney General nor I—nor, indeed, the Government—advocates pro bono as a substitute. It is an adjunct to legal aid, and it always should be.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Nobody will deny the worth of pro bono, and everybody will welcome it, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) said, it is no substitute for access to justice. So that we know which areas get that justice, will the Solicitor General agree to publish a list of how many hours of pro bono are available in each geographical area? That would help us to know whether there is access to justice.

**The Solicitor General:** With respect to everybody who works in the pro bono area, I do not want to detract from the important work of pro bono by pretending that it is somehow a legal aid service. It is not; it is voluntary. It is a vital part of what it is to be a lawyer. Not only does it provide a benefit for those whom it serves, but it is an important part of the career development of lawyers. The Conservative party is committed to funding our legal services, and we are spending just short of £2 billion a year on legal aid. It sits very ill for the Labour party to lecture us about the amount we spend on legal aid when it merrily cut legal aid while in office.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I declare an interest in that my wife is a part-time tribunal judge and legal aid lawyer.

We all praise the work of lawyers who give up their time to offer advice and assistance, just as we praise law centres and citizens advice bureaux, but does the Minister agree that those individuals and organisations cannot possibly fill the gap left by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012? In April 2010, more than 470,000 people received assistance on social welfare matters. Just 12 months after LASPO, the number was down to 53,000—a drop of 90%. Will the Minister please urge the Justice Secretary to bring forward the promised review of LASPO?
Oral Answers

Disability Hate Crimes

5. Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What assessment he has made of reasons for variations between police force areas in conviction rates for disability hate crimes.

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): A number of factors are likely to have an impact on the variation in conviction rates for disability hate crimes. I am actively considering them, and I believe that the best practice to provide consistency of approach is the network of hate crime co-ordinators that the Crown Prosecution Service has established, which includes a focus on the important issue of disability hate crime.

Debbie Abrahams: I thank the Solicitor General for his response, but there were an estimated 62,000 disability hate crimes in 2013, only 574 of which resulted in prosecution. As he said, there was huge regional variation in the prosecution rate. Is he as concerned as I am about that, and will he be a bit more specific about how he will address it to ensure that convictions for disability hate crime do not depend on where people live?

The Solicitor General: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his response, but there were an estimated 62,000 disability hate crimes in 2013, only 574 of which resulted in prosecution. As he said, there was huge regional variation in the prosecution rate. Is he as concerned as I am about that, and will he be a bit more specific about how he will address it to ensure that convictions for disability hate crime do not depend on where people live?

Debbie Abrahams: I thank the Solicitor General for his response, but there were an estimated 62,000 disability hate crimes in 2013, only 574 of which resulted in prosecution. As he said, there was huge regional variation in the prosecution rate. Is he as concerned as I am about that, and will he be a bit more specific about how he will address it to ensure that convictions for disability hate crime do not depend on where people live?

The Solicitor General: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his response, but there were an estimated 62,000 disability hate crimes in 2013, only 574 of which resulted in prosecution. As he said, there was huge regional variation in the prosecution rate. Is he as concerned as I am about that, and will he be a bit more specific about how he will address it to ensure that convictions for disability hate crime do not depend on where people live?

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): These are terrible crimes. One of the problems is inconsistency between police areas. Does the Solicitor General agree that an important role for the College of Policing is to make sure standards are consistent throughout the country?

The Solicitor General: The right hon. Gentleman is correct in his assumption. There was an invaluable round table at the national College of Policing in September, which I attended and spoke at, involving regional leads from all parts of the country. It was designed precisely to deal with hate crime, and disability hate crime in particular. By sharing best practice, such as the third-party reporting mechanisms I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, we can improve and raise the rates in relation not just to hate crime but to all crimes committed against people with disabilities.

Margaret Ferrier: Human rights are not conferred by the new Scotland Act because they are already devolved—they are not listed in schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998. Does the Attorney General accept that changing Scotland’s framework of human rights will require a legislative consent motion from the Scottish Parliament?

The Attorney General: I am always amazed at the ingenuity of Scottish National party Members in asking the same question in a slightly different way every time we meet for parliamentary questions. As the hon. Lady knows, because she has previously heard the answer, the Human Rights Act 1998 is not a devolved matter but a reserved matter, and the whole United Kingdom Parliament will consider it when we bring forward proposals for change.

Mr Speaker: Ingenuity is a valuable parliamentary commodity.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I am genuinely mystified at our apparent ingenuity. Clearly, human rights are not listed in schedule 5. Schedule 5 is the exhaustive list of reservations, and human rights are not on it. What is the legal basis for the Attorney General’s assertion? Human rights are devolved to Scotland.

The Attorney General: Mr Speaker, I am not sure how many times I can get away with giving the same answer. The position is as I have set out: the Human Rights Act is a matter for the UK Parliament. I entirely understand SNP Members’ frustration at having to sit in a UK Parliament, but I am afraid that that was the decision of the Scottish people and they are going to have to live with it.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Disabled People: Employment

1. Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on progress towards the Government’s employment target for disabled people.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): There are 365,000 more disabled people in work than two years ago. Our ambition to halve the disability employment gap is a key priority of this Government.
Diana Johnson: Ministers promise that people currently in the work-related activity group will not see their payments reduce, but all new claimants from April 2017 will see such a reduction, including many people who have learning disabilities and need the same support as people currently in the group. How will further cuts in the incomes of disabled people help to get them into work?

Justin Tomlinson: First, to be clear, those who would be in the support group will see no changes at all. On the specific area of those with learning disabilities, my Department, jointly with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, has set up a taskforce, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). We are looking at the best ways of accessing the apprenticeships scheme to help those with learning disabilities to have a greater chance of taking up an opportunity to work.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that there have been detailed conversations about the value of the Access to Work programme and that the Government continue to be committed to it? The scheme was raised with me at the weekend by two disabled working people in my constituency who are concerned that the Government are not committed to it and that they may be let down.

Justin Tomlinson: The Access to Work programme is one of the incredibly important levers we are using to meet our commitment to halve the disability employment gap. I am delighted that funding has been increased to provide an additional 25,000 places a year, which builds on our near record number of just short of 37,000 people who benefit from the scheme.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What rationale was there for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions scrapping the White Paper on the health and work programme and putting the issue back to a Green Paper for an indeterminate time? Surely putting it into the long grass will, from a health or disability perspective, harm the chances of people returning to work.

Justin Tomlinson: My discussions with stakeholders give a very different view. A Green Paper gives an opportunity for stakeholders with genuine, first-hand real life experience to help shape our future policies and make sure that we do the very best for vulnerable people in society.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): The jobcentre disability employment service has a ratio of one adviser providing support per 600 disabled people. That key cause of concern was highlighted by a Work and Pensions Committee inquiry in December 2014. Does the Minister believe that that inadequate ratio is part of the reason the Government are set to fail to reach their employment targets for people with disabilities?

Justin Tomlinson: First, 365,000 more disabled people have come into work in the past two years, which we are proud to celebrate, but there will be further work towards our bold ambition to halve the disability employment gap. We recognise that support in jobcentres is important. All job coaches have extensive training and are multi-skilled, but we acknowledge the feedback from the Select Committee report and will be increasing the numbers.
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): While this Government have cut workers' rights, attacked trade unions' ability to organize and legislated to block women's access to justice, the EU has protected maternity rights, strengthened paternity rights and upheld our fundamental rights. Does the Minister agree that EU membership will protect rights for women returning to employment?

Caroline Dinenage: I do not agree that this Government have undermined women's rights, but I agree that the EU has done an enormous amount to protect them.

Sentencing Policy: Child Neglect/Abuse

3. Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of reasons for gender differences in prison sentencing for people found guilty of child neglect and abuse.

[905114]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Child neglect and abuse are absolutely abhorrent crimes, and those who are guilty must be brought to justice. Sentencing decisions are a matter for the independent judiciary and not Government. Those decisions take into consideration a number of factors, including the seriousness of the offence, aggravating and mitigating factors, and a guilty plea. Our sentencing framework is gender-neutral.

Philip Davies: Despite what the Minister says, according to the Ministry of Justice's figures for the last available period 33% of men convicted of cruelty and neglect of children were sent to prison, but only 15% of women were. That does not sound gender-neutral to me. Notwithstanding the fact that those figures are clearly far too low, given that, as she made clear, these crimes are abhorrent, will she explain why there is such a huge discrepancy between the two figures? Given the nature of these crimes, she surely cannot trot out her normal guidelines and principles of sentencing apply to every case. I say gently to my hon. Friend that data can be used to prove anything. In 2014 the average custodial sentence for child cruelty or neglect was the same for men and women, but in 2015—the Ministry of Justice figures—on average women received longer sentences than men for child cruelty or neglect.

Caroline Dinenage: Every case is different, and, as I have said, the sentencing framework is gender-neutral, and the same criminal offences, maximum penalties, guidelines and principles of sentencing apply to every case. I say gently to my hon. Friend that data can be used to prove anything. In 2014 the average custodial sentence for child cruelty or neglect was the same for men and women, but in 2015—according to figures from the Ministry of Justice—on average women received longer sentences than men for child cruelty or neglect.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Minister seen recent disturbing evidence of women who have been convicted of non-violent crime, often fraud, who are given horrendously long sentences when they should be serving their punishment by working in the community?

Caroline Dinenage: As I have said, the judiciary is rightly independent of the Government, but the Justice Secretary is keen on considering alternatives to custody, particularly when an individual might have child caring responsibilities. That is why we are putting a lot of effort into things such as electronic tagging.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that universal access to family planning and maternity services is paramount for the health and equality of women and girls? How will she ensure that migrant women access maternity services in the UK when they have no means of paying for those vital services?

Mr Speaker: This is in relation to those in prison, having been found guilty of child neglect and abuse—it is fair to say that it is a testing question.

Caroline Dinenage: I am not aware that birth control is a massive issue within women's prisons—I certainly hope it is not, but I will take a look at that.

STEM Careers

4. Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage girls and women to take up STEM careers.

[905115]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): My Department has set an ambition for a 20% increase in girls' entry to A-levels and STEM subjects by 2020. We fund programmes in schools and colleges to encourage young people to take qualifications in science, technology, engineering and maths, and to improve achievement in those subjects. Those working in science and technology careers are paid on average 19% more than those in other professions, so motivating girls to study those subjects is important if we are to eliminate the gender pay gap.

Maria Caulfield: Nursing is now a graduate-entry profession, and STEM subjects form part of the course for student nurses. Once they qualify, student nurses take on the role of many junior doctors in prescribing medication and ordering investigations, so does the Minister agree that nursing is a STEM career to which young women, and indeed young men, should aspire?

Nicky Morgan: I know about my hon. Friend's own nursing background, and I agree that nursing is a fantastic career for young women, and indeed young men. We are committed to strengthening careers provision for young people across England, and projects funded through the Careers and Enterprise Company’s investment fund will do just that. She may be aware of a project led by Skills East Sussex that seeks to improve the work-readiness of young people, the take-up of apprenticeships locally, and the gender balance in key sectors.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Owing to ongoing cultural stereotypes and a lack of visible role models, many women do not realise the fantastic career opportunities that engineering and STEM subjects offer until they have left formal education. What is the Minister doing to ensure that routes are available for retraining older women, particularly through adult education and lifelong learning?

Nicky Morgan: I agree it is important that we tackle perceived gender stereotyping or bias in certain careers. We have funded programmes in schools, and I have mentioned things such as the STEM Ambassador network. After that come apprenticeships—the Minister for Skills bangs that drum at every opportunity—and the opportunity for someone to earn while they are learning.
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): More young women entering Scottish universities are choosing to study science, technology, engineering and maths, and they now make up 48% of all those gaining degrees. Will the Minister look towards Scotland as an example of how to encourage more women into STEM subjects?

Nicky Morgan: As I said in last night’s debate on the Gracious Speech, I spoke to the Cabinet Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland earlier this week. There are always ways in which we can learn from each other. I should mention Loughborough University, which I represent as a constituency MP, as it has the highest number of women engineering undergraduates in the country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I recently visited the Thales site in Crawley and saw some wonderful high-quality engineering jobs; unfortunately, not enough of them are held by women. Will the Government heed the recent findings of the CBI that over 90% are not receiving the careers advice they need, and support face-to-face careers advice from age 11, which would assist more women to enter engineering careers?

Nicky Morgan: I have been very clear since taking up the role of Secretary of State for Education that we need to look at careers guidance. That is why, in December 2014, we announced our backing for the Careers & Enterprise Company, which was set up to bridge exactly that gap between schools and colleges and the world of work. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that starting early is very important. I hope that he, along with all Members across the House, has spoken to his local enterprise co-ordinator, through the local enterprise partnership, to support the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company.

Older Women in the Workplace

5. Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905116]

7. Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905118]

12. Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support older women in the workplace. [905124]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Older women have a whole range of skills and experiences that are extremely valuable to employers and potential employers. We are publishing a new employer-led strategy later this year, which sets out how we can help people to have fuller working lives. We will continue to challenge outdated perceptions about older workers and actively promote the business benefits of employing them.

Dr Davies: Does the Minister agree that the key issue for older women in employment is flexibility, as they very often face caring duties? Indeed, of all carers more than half are aged over 50 and they are disproportionately female.

Caroline Dinenage: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we have invested £1.7 million to look at the best ways to support carers to stay in employment, including exploring how businesses can give employees with caring responsibility more help through flexible working and setting up carers surgeries. We have extended the right to request flexible working, with more than 20 million workers now eligible.

Alex Chalk: Age discrimination remains a problem. I am delighted to hear the Government are taking the matter seriously, but what concrete steps can be taken to ensure that older women, who are increasingly important as the pension age increases, get the opportunities they deserve?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is vital that women are supported in returning to work following a break in their career. I recently attended the launch of the Barclays and Women’s Business Council “Comeback Toolkit”, which is a fantastic example of innovative working practices and inspirational case studies, such as their “Bolder Apprentice”, Lucille Galloway. She spoke passionately about how returning to a role in the workplace has transformed not only her life but the lives of those around her.

Lucy Allan: Does the Minister agree that 50 years ago women experienced far greater degrees of discrimination in the workplace, and that the impact of that discrimination is still affecting their prospects today? Does the Minister also agree that changes to the state pension age compound the difficulties and challenges women face?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is right to point out that we have made great strides in gender equality, and I am incredibly proud of that. The average woman who reached state pension age in 2015 will get a higher state pension income over her lifetime than any woman who has reached state pension age at any point before her. We have legislated for an independent review every Parliament to ensure that any future changes are fair, affordable and sustainable, and that no one is unduly penalised.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Given that women are having children later in life, what thought has the Minister given to extending statutory paternity leave to six weeks to enable women to get back to employment more quickly?

Caroline Dinenage: We do want men to take the shared parental leave already available. The signs are that men are beginning to do that, but we need a cultural change to encourage men to take their share of shared parental leave.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I want to mention just one workplace. While it is perfectly right that someone in his late 70s should be a regular presenter on BBC television—he is younger than I am—can the Minister imagine a female of that age in the same position? Is that not a form of age discrimination by a public body?

Caroline Dinenage: I am obviously in favour of older male television presenters, particularly of news programmes, but absolutely we need many more female counterparts.
9. [905120] Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is vital that the civil service shows leadership in this regard. In 2011, women finally achieved parity at the top of the civil service, but since the Prime Minister gave himself the power to choose the top jobs, he has painstakingly reassembled the glass ceiling, and now only 18% of permanent secretaries are women. Will Ministers commit to publishing the gender breakdown of all applicants and those shortlisted for the top jobs in the civil service?

Caroline Dinenage: This is a really important issue. Four of the permanent secretaries appointed in the last year are women, but we want more and that work will continue.

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

6. Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): What plans does the Government have to mark International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2016. [905117]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): The UK is proud of its record on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, which is why the Prime Minister and I hosted a reception at No. 10 to mark IDAHOT. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has announced that approximately £900,000 from the Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy will go to projects working with LGBT communities around the world. Several Departments, including mine, also flew the rainbow flag in a show of support.

Ben Howlett: And a lovely reception it was too! This year, IDAHOT drew everyone's attention to the importance of institutions being able to further LGBT rights. To mark the day, I joined Members from across this House and the other place to highlight the benefits of our membership of the EU to further those rights. Does the Minister agree that the EU has done an awful lot to protect the rights of minority communities across the UK and EU?

Nicky Morgan: I agree that it was an extremely enjoyable reception and that the EU plays a key role in improving the lives of LGBT people in Britain, the EU and internationally. We work closely with the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and member states to improve the lives of LGBT people across Europe. Through our membership of an EU national focal points network, we can share our approach to LGBT equality law across Europe.

11. [905122] Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): According to recent figures published by Transgender Europe, there have been 117 murders of trans and gender-diverse people in Europe since 2008. Will the Minister commit to working with our European partners to end transphobia across our continent?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Lady raises a really important point. It is why our membership of international networks, including the EU, is so important. I am proud to say that the UK can lead the way in tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. We are also investing money, of course, in our own schools to make sure that the next generation shows tolerance towards everybody.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Notwithstanding the benefits, or otherwise, of the EU, would my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of marking this international day is better forms of screening for diseases that affect LGBT people, one of which, of course, is the human papilloma virus?

Nicky Morgan: Putting our differences aside on the EU, I am delighted to say that the public health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), today laid a written ministerial statement in the House stating that from June this year Public Health England will start a pilot to see whether it is possible to offer the HPV vaccination to men who have sex with men and are attending sexual health service clinics. The pilot will eventually reach up to 40,000 men at high risk of attracting HPV. I hope that the House will welcome this move.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The global focus of this year’s international day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia was mental health and wellbeing. Does the Minister share my concerns about the impact that local government cuts are having on LGBT mental health organisations in the UK, and will she take steps to protect LGBT mental health services?

Nicky Morgan: I agree with the hon. Lady. Lady that mental health services are incredibly important for all people. This issue has been raised with me by members of the trans community and more broadly. I cannot agree with her that this has been caused by changes to local government finance. There is a much broader issue of making sure that services are available to people as and when they most need them.

Women in Business

8. Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support women in business. [905119]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): We are absolutely committed to supporting women in business. I am delighted that Britain has been named the best place in Europe for female entrepreneurs. We have invested £2.2 million in our women and broadband programme, enabling them to take advantage of technology to start or grow their business. We have also run 19 nationwide “meet a mentor” sessions to provide help, support and encouragement for female entrepreneurs.
Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful for that answer. Wimborne Women in Business are fearless in promoting their own businesses locally, but broadband speeds in parts of Dorset remain frustratingly slow. What more can the Minister do to engage in this subject and ensure that women in business in Mid Dorset and North Poole have access to adequate broadband speeds?

Caroline Dinenage: We are working very hard to ensure that 95% of UK homes and businesses get access to superfast broadband. Coverage in Dorset will continue to improve during 2017 through a Government and local enterprise partnership-funded ultra-fast programme, which I hope Wimborne Women in Business will appreciate. Through the Dorset Go Digital women and broadband programme, we have supported almost 100 women in the past six months alone to take advantage of this and develop the digital skills they need to start or grow their business.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that if there were more women at senior levels in business, we might have fewer advertising campaigns such as that by Calvin Klein, featuring overtly sexualised images of young women, including what are known as “upskirt” shots? Will she join me in urging Calvin Klein and similar organisations not only to be more responsible in their advertising, but to donate some of the profits they have made to charities that are solving rather worsening the problems women face in society?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to point out this sort of irresponsible advertising, and I recently met the advertising industry to discuss the issue. She is also right to say that we need more women on boards. Currently, 26% of the people sitting on FTSE 100 boards are women—more than ever before. This is an issue on which we will continue to work—on boards, but in the executive pipeline as well.

Revenge Porn Helpline

10. Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Government’s revenge porn helpline.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): Let me be clear that revenge porn is an abhorrent crime. The pilot of the revenge porn helpline has received approximately 4,000 calls, relating to 785 cases since its launch in February 2015, sadly indicating a clear need for the important practical and emotional support it provides. The helpline has been successful in removing over 1,000 illegal images online.

Mrs Miller: That demand for the revenge porn helpline reflects the fact that there were more than 1,000 police reports of online revenge porn last year, yet two thirds of those cases saw no action taken because of problems with the evidence or victims withdrawing. When will the helpline and this new law be matched with police training and the option of anonymity for victims?

Nicky Morgan: The Chairman of the Women and Equalities Committee raises an important issue. We criminalised revenge porn in early 2015. Last year, there were 82 prosecutions and 74 cautions. Thousands of police officers are trained in digital crime, and revenge porn is used as a specific case study in the College of Policing mainstreaming cybercrime training programme. We must ensure that victims report the crime. I will certainly raise this matter with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary when I next see her.

Topical Questions

T1. [905102] Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): I hope that hon. Members will join me in welcoming the introduction of topical questions to Women and Equalities oral questions. Along with the introduction of the Women and Equalities Committee in the last Session and the cross-government Front-Bench presence here today, we are sending a powerful message to the public about the importance that this Government and this House place on equality. I am delighted that at the recent G7 Education Ministers meeting in Japan, I was able to persuade all Ministers to recognise the need to address the discrimination that children might suffer, including because of their sexual orientation or gender. That was captured in the formal summit communiqué.

Anne McLaughlin: I am delighted to be asking the first Women and Equalities topical question.

One group of victims of domestic violence who are not entitled to access protection consists of women whose immigration status is dependent on their partners, the perpetrators of that violence. I have raised the issue in two Westminster Hall debates in recent weeks, and two Ministers have agreed to make representations to the Home Secretary about it. Will the Minister—probably the most relevant Minister in this context—add her voice to calls for equality for all women in those circumstances?

Nicky Morgan: Let me begin by welcoming the appointment of Angela Constance as the Cabinet Minister with equalities responsibility in the Scottish Government. I very much enjoyed working with her when she had the education brief in the last Government. I will certainly look at the issue that the hon. Lady has raised. As I have said, I shall be meeting the Home Secretary soon, and I will add it to our agenda.

T2. [905103] Maggie Throup (Errewash) (Con): During a recent visit to Crossrail, I was delighted to learn of the major contribution that women have made, at every level, to Europe’s largest infrastructure project. Given that both HS2 and Crossrail 2 are on the horizon, will the Minister tell us what action has been taken to retain those women and their skills, which are so important to the future of our infrastructure projects?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): As a result of the Government’s unprecedented investment in transport infrastructure, opportunities for women in construction will continue to grow, and we must build on Crossrail’s excellent example. The industry already has some great role models, including Ailie MacAdam, who led the team that delivered the channel tunnel rail link, managed the
construction of St Pancras International, and was a delivery director for Crossrail. I hope that many young women will follow in her footsteps.

T3. [905104] Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): The Scottish National party is committed to reviewing and reforming gender recognition law in Scotland so that it is in line with best practice for people who are transgender. Will the Minister join me in applauding that approach, and will she press for such legislative change here, through her own Department?

Nicky Morgan: As I have made very clear, discrimination on any grounds is abhorrent, and the Government want it to end. There is more discussion now about issues facing the trans community, and I pay tribute to the work of the Women and Equalities Committee, which has published an important report on transgender issues. The report made a number of recommendations to Departments throughout Whitehall; we are studying those recommendations, and will respond to them fully in due course.

T4. [905105] Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Will the Minister join me in congratulating The R&A on barring Muirfield golf club from hosting the Open championship in the light of its decision not to admit women as members? Does she think that the club should put that right, and admit them?

Nicky Morgan: In short, yes, I do.

T6. [905107] Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What conversations has the Minister had with her counterparts in the Home Office about the equalities implications of the Prevent strategy? In a written submission to the Home Affairs Committee, terror watchdog David Anderson QC said that the strategy would benefit from an independent review, expressing the concern that “aspects of the programme are ineffective or being applied in an insensitive or discriminatory manner.”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): I think it will be clear to the hon. Lady from the Home Office representation at this session that such conversations are taking place, but I note the point that she has made.

T5. [905106] Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): By the age of six, young girls have begun to decide which roles are for them and which are for boys, often to the detriment of careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In many cases, that is because certain toys are marketed for girls, and most science toys are marketed for boys. What plans have the Government to show that young girls do not have to limit their career aspirations?

Nicky Morgan: I know that my hon. Friend is passionate about this issue. As I have said, no career should be off limits because of factors such as gender, race or sexual orientation. Careers education in primary schools, including broadening horizons and bringing children’s learning to life. I mentioned the Careers & Enterprise Company earlier; I hope that Members in all parts of the House will support their local enterprise co-ordinators.

T7. [905108] Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Given the importance of the health and work programme, which supports disabled people who are unable to work or gain access to work, will the Minister ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to publish his Green Paper as a matter of urgency, so that disabled people do not have to wait any longer to access support?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): The Green Paper gives a fantastic opportunity for stakeholders, with their first-hand experience and knowledge, to help shape the policy, and, where there is local best practice, to look for ways in which we can scale that up.

T10. [905111] Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): What steps is the Minister taking to increase the number of female headteachers?

Nicky Morgan: The White Paper on education that I published in March reinforces our commitment to develop a diverse supply of school leaders. More than 450 women are benefiting from our equality and diversity fund, and earlier this year I announced a women in education network to support women’s career progression. I have called on exceptional school leaders to come forward and pledge to coach women into leadership, and 300 have already signed up to do so.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Minister support the introduction of “X” passports?

Nicky Morgan: This matter was raised in the Women and Equalities Committee’s report. Evidence was taken on it and it is something that we are considering, along with all the other issues in that report.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Secretary of State very kindly referred to the Select Committee earlier. We have produced two reports so far in our short existence: one on the gender pay gap and one on transgender people. One of those reports is now five months old, and we have yet to receive a response to either of them. When can we expect those responses?

Nicky Morgan: I always say that if you want something done, ask a busy woman, and they certainly make up the majority on the Women and Equalities Committee. I am delighted to see that it has been so busy. My right hon. Friend mentions two reports: one on transgender issues and one on the gender pay gap. They make recommendations for cross-government co-operation. I want to ensure that we get the best possible responses, but I expect to publish them shortly.

Mr Speaker: I hope that “shortly” means well before the summer recess. That seems to be a very tardy response indeed. This is really not very satisfactory.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): In February, Women for Refugee Women made freedom of information requests on the number of pregnant women being detained under immigration rules. What has happened since has been described by politics.co.uk as “an instruction manual in obfuscation and delay”.

Oral Answers Oral Answers 26 MAY 2016 Oral Answers 680
Can the Minister explain why the Government are so reluctant to reveal this information, and tell us when they will finally release the data?

Karen Bradley: The detention of pregnant women under Immigration Act powers occurs only in limited situations, either when there is a clear prospect of early removal or in exceptional circumstances. Very few pregnant women are detained. Central recording of the number of detained women who have disclosed their pregnancy started in August 2015. Options for the collection of wider data on pregnant women are being considered as part of the implementation of the Immigration Act 2016, which has just gone through this House.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure the Minister will be aware that, against a background of tens of thousands of gun murders every year, 11 states in the United States have decided that the question of who uses which bathroom is the key issue affecting public safety. Will she assure me and the House that our Government will not go down that path and that they will focus on real public safety priorities rather than the ones being imagined as a result of prejudice in the United States?

Karen Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and I am more than happy to have a conversation with him about his concerns. This is not something that has been raised with me previously.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) to put his urgent question, I would emphasise that although it of course covers an extremely important matter—and is, by definition, urgent—exchanges on it should be completed by 11 o’clock. We have the business question to follow, and a ministerial statement by way of an update on the steel industry and a very heavily subscribed main debate thereafter. The time limits will therefore need to be strictly enforced.
Brain Family: Deportation

10.34 am

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) Urgent Question: Mòran taing agus madhainn mhath, Mr Speaker. To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the impending deportation of the Brain family from Dingwall.

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): By convention, Ministers do not usually comment on individual immigration cases on the Floor of the House. However, I am happy to waive that convention today to properly address the question raised by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford).

Kathryn Brain came to the UK in 2011 on a tier 4 visa, which expired in May last year, with her husband and son listed as her dependants. On 25 May last year, Kathryn Brain applied for leave to remain under tier 4 of the points-based system, again with Mr Brain and her son listed as dependants. In June, this was granted to December last year. In December, an application was made for leave to remain under article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to a family life—which in March was refused with an out-of-country right of appeal.

In this time it has of course been open to the family to make a tier 2 skilled work application under the points-based system. On 12 April, I exceptionally extended the 28-day grace period after their leave expired, during which a valid tier 2 application could be made, to 11 May. Upon hearing that Mr Brain had submitted a job application with an appropriate employer, I subsequently extended the grace period further on 28 April to the end of this month. We have not yet received an application from the Brain family for leave to remain under the points-based system, but we will consider any application that they make. I am meeting the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber again this afternoon, but he can be assured that the family do not face an imminent risk of immediate deportation.

More broadly, it is important to recognise the UK’s excellent post-study offer. There is no limit on the number of international graduates who can remain in the UK to take up graduate-level work, provided that they secure a graduate job paying an appropriate salary. Since 2010, visa applications from international students to study at Scottish universities are up 9%. I look forward to meeting the hon. Gentleman again later today to discuss the matter further.

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, although I must say that the question was to the Home Secretary. After all, it was the Home Secretary who briefed the Chancellor when he responded to my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) at Prime Minister’s questions yesterday.

The family came to this country under the fresh talent initiative that was put in place by the previous Labour Administration in Edinburgh, with the support of the Home Office, for students studying at Scottish universities, who would then qualify for the post-study work visa. That was the commitment that this Government made to those coming to Scotland in 2011. In this case, the Government have taken retrospective action to deny the rights that this family would have been granted under that legislation. It is a breach of trust and of faith from this Government.

I want to help the Minister. The number of people who came under the fresh talent initiative has now dwindled to virtually zero. We are asking the Government to recognise the commitment that the family have made to the highlands and to Scotland. I look specifically to seven-year-old Lachlan, who is in Gaelic medium education in the highlands. He reads and writes in Gaelic, not English. He speaks English, but it is a different thing to be able to be educated in a different language. The thought of deporting that young boy back to Australia, where he will be two years behind his peer group, is shameful. That is where the human rights aspect comes in.

I can tell the Minister today that Kathryn Brain has now been offered a job at the new GlenWyvis distillery in Dingwall. It is a start-up business that will offer a job and prosperity not only to Kathryn, but to others. We need to recognise that the family should be given the right to stay today. Give them the time to qualify for the tier 2 visa. Show some compassion and humanity. All of us should be judged on our actions. For goodness’ sake, Minister, do the right thing today.

James Brokenshire: I have met the hon. Gentleman to discuss this case previously. He says that he should show compassion and humanity, but he will know that I have already exercised discretion not once but twice in this case on the basis of representations he has made on the family’s behalf. I obviously listened carefully to what he said, and I look forward to meeting him later to hear more about the details that he has relayed to the House this morning and to reflect further on his representations.

I want to correct slightly some of the facts that the hon. Gentleman has presented. He said that the family came here under the fresh talent scheme, which closed in 2008 and was replaced by the post-study work scheme under tier 1. The latter scheme was closed by the coalition Government and that announcement was made on 21 March 2011. From the information that I have, the Brain family arrived in the UK on 14 June 2011. There are clear issues to consider about post-study work opportunities and moving from the tier 4 study route into tier 2. I was pleased to note in the latest figures that I have seen that around 6,000 people did that in the last year for which information is available.

It is important that the Scottish Government continue to play their part in creating an enterprise economy, using their powers to create jobs and opportunities for the hon. Gentleman’s constituents and to provide a route for people who study at our universities to get graduate-level employment. The previous arrangements simply did not work. They allowed abuse to take place and resulted in people moving into low-skilled employment, not reflecting the education that they obtained. However, I wish to reflect further on the comments that the hon. Gentleman has made to me today, and I look forward to meeting him later.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): There is nobody more passionate about having a robust immigration policy than me, but I just wonder whether the Minister would agree that this may be a case where the Government are
being too harsh on people from outside the European Union, as a direct consequence of having free movement of people from within the European Union.

James Brokenshire: I say to my hon. Friend that when dealing with issues of migration it is important that we take steps both outside Europe, where the majority of net migration continues to come from, and inside Europe. Therefore, our approach is to look at this in both ways, but, as I have indicated, I will certainly reflect on the further representations that are made to me.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): First, I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the Brain family, who came here in good faith and have been let down by this Government. Their case is yet another that highlights the chaos of the immigration system under this Government. The Brains’ situation will be familiar to many Members in this House, who will have seen their own constituents faced with deportation owing to changes in the immigration rules. Let us be clear about what is involved here. This family came to the UK on a Government scheme specifically designed to attract people to relocate here. They entered legally, they have integrated into their community and they have fully embraced its way of life. That they should now be faced with deportation because of Government changes shows the problems caused by the constant chopping and changing of the immigration rules by the Home Office. These changes are retrospectively made, in a desperate attempt to meet targets on net migration that the Government have consistently missed and show no sign of meeting any time soon—it just adds insult to injury.

The highlands of Scotland have for centuries faced the problem of depopulation. The population of Scotland has barely grown in the past 100 years. As the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) correctly said yesterday; the Brains’ case is not an issue of immigration, but of emigration. Our immigration system must allow people from within the European Union, as a direct consequence of having free movement of people from within the European Union.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): This case highlights the fact that Scotland’s migration needs are really very different from those of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: Our immigration policy is formed on the basis of the whole of the UK and of the needs of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: I say to the hon. Lady that when dealing with issues of migration it is important that we take steps both outside Europe, where the majority of net migration continues to come from, and inside Europe. Therefore, our approach is to look at this in both ways, but, as I have indicated, I will certainly reflect on the further representations that are made to me.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): First, I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the Brain family, who came here in good faith and have been let down by this Government. Their case is yet another that highlights the chaos of the immigration system under this Government. The Brains’ situation will be familiar to many Members in this House, who will have seen their own constituents faced with deportation owing to changes in the immigration rules. Let us be clear about what is involved here. This family came to the UK on a Government scheme specifically designed to attract people to relocate here. They entered legally, they have integrated into their community and they have fully embraced its way of life. That they should now be faced with deportation because of Government changes shows the problems caused by the constant chopping and changing of the immigration rules by the Home Office. These changes are retrospectively made, in a desperate attempt to meet targets on net migration that the Government have consistently missed and show no sign of meeting any time soon—it just adds insult to injury.

The highlands of Scotland have for centuries faced the problem of depopulation. The population of Scotland has barely grown in the past 100 years. As the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) correctly said yesterday; the Brains’ case is not an issue of immigration, but of emigration. Our immigration system must allow people from within the European Union, as a direct consequence of having free movement of people from within the European Union.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): This case highlights the fact that Scotland’s migration needs are really very different from those of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: Our immigration policy is formed on the basis of the whole of the UK and of the needs of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: I say to the hon. Lady that when dealing with issues of migration it is important that we take steps both outside Europe, where the majority of net migration continues to come from, and inside Europe. Therefore, our approach is to look at this in both ways, but, as I have indicated, I will certainly reflect on the further representations that are made to me.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): First, I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the Brain family, who came here in good faith and have been let down by this Government. Their case is yet another that highlights the chaos of the immigration system under this Government. The Brains’ situation will be familiar to many Members in this House, who will have seen their own constituents faced with deportation owing to changes in the immigration rules. Let us be clear about what is involved here. This family came to the UK on a Government scheme specifically designed to attract people to relocate here. They entered legally, they have integrated into their community and they have fully embraced its way of life. That they should now be faced with deportation because of Government changes shows the problems caused by the constant chopping and changing of the immigration rules by the Home Office. These changes are retrospectively made, in a desperate attempt to meet targets on net migration that the Government have consistently missed and show no sign of meeting any time soon—it just adds insult to injury.

The highlands of Scotland have for centuries faced the problem of depopulation. The population of Scotland has barely grown in the past 100 years. As the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) correctly said yesterday; the Brains’ case is not an issue of immigration, but of emigration. Our immigration system must allow people from within the European Union, as a direct consequence of having free movement of people from within the European Union.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): This case highlights the fact that Scotland’s migration needs are really very different from those of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?

James Brokenshire: Our immigration policy is formed on the basis of the whole of the UK and of the needs of the south of England. I can assure the Minister that the Scottish National party Government in Edinburgh have created an enterprise economy. What we need now is for the UK Government to do their bit by bringing in a sensible migration policy that will enable Scotland to attract and keep the talent that we need, particularly in areas such as the highlands. When will this Government recognise that Scotland’s migration needs are different? In particular, will the Minister tell me when his Government will reintroduce the post-study work visa, bearing in mind that all parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Ruth Davidson party, support that?
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Brain family enjoys support throughout the highlands and islands. I have heard of many similar cases over my years as a Member of Parliament. The Minister is absolutely right to say that we must have a system that works for the whole of the United Kingdom, but the truth of the matter is that the current system does not work for communities such as those in the highlands and islands, the rural north-west of England, Cornwall or mid-Wales. Will he look again at the way in which the rules operate and understand that the immigration needs of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow are very different from those of the highlands and islands, which again are different from those in other regions of England and Wales?

James Brokenshire: The point that the right hon. Gentleman makes is one that a number of hon. Members have made this morning, and I have already said that there is recognition of that within the immigration rules. Some have asked whether there should be separate salary thresholds for different parts of the United Kingdom. Again, I say that they should be careful what they wish for, because on the medium-level salaries, that might lead to an increase in the salary thresholds for Scotland as contrasted with where the national salary limits actually sit at present. I have been very clear on the fact that we have listened carefully on this specific case, and I will continue to do so.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Home Affairs Committee, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and other Members of this House have warned the Government that the post-study work rules just do not work, and that they result in the kind of mess that we have this morning. The Minister talks about abuse, but the only evidence that has been given by a previous immigration Minister is of one person who was found at a checkout at Tesco who was working instead of being a student. I say to him that if there is abuse, deal with it, and do not let it affect genuine people who want to come to this country. The Minister says that he has exercised his discretion twice. I am glad that he has exercised discretion, because he has not used it in the past on a large number of cases—especially mine. He should exercise it once more and allow this family to stay.

James Brokenshire: The right hon. Gentleman highlights the abuse that we saw under the previous student arrangements. I point to the fact that 920 sponsors under the previous student arrangements have had their sponsorship withdrawn as part of the reforms, which have ensured that we have the quality that we want. We want to attract skilled and talented people to come and study at our universities. The Russell Group universities have seen a 7% increase in the number of international students coming to study at their institutions. I think I have underlined to the House this morning that I have considered this case carefully and that I have exercised discretion. I will certainly continue to listen to the representations made by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, and I will always consider representations made by all hon. Members across this House, but it is important that discretion is exercised exceptionally; otherwise we start to undermine the rules themselves.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I have recently had a substantial increase in the number of people telling me that immigration lawyers will not take their case. That appears to be a result of changes in procedure, meaning that there is little chance of success even when right is on the side of the appellant. Why will not the Government take the opportunity afforded by the Brain family case to re-assess their immigration rules and procedures and introduce that note of compassion, as well as helping those who benefit our economy to stay in the UK?

James Brokenshire: We always keep our immigration rules under review, and, as I have indicated again this morning, we are always prepared to look at cases that may be brought to us and examine them to make sure that they are assessed properly, but it is important that we have clarity within those rules. If we seek to exercise discretion all the time, obviously that starts to undermine the very rules that we are seeking to uphold.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): A week before the Scottish referendum the Prime Minister said that if Scotland wants to stay in the UK, all forms of devolution are there and all are possible, yet when at least 95% of Scotland’s MPs, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament want to keep just one family in the highlands of Scotland, it seems that nothing at all is possible. Young Lachlan Brain is in a Gaelic school in Dingwall—one can hardly get a more Scottish name than Lachlan—yet the Westminster Government want to throw him out. May I ask the Minister one question: has he identified a school in Australia where Lachlan can continue his Gaelic education?

James Brokenshire: We continue to discuss with the Scottish Government the possibility of examining reform in relation to international higher education students. We welcome the continuation of those discussions. The UK has an excellent record in relation to the post-study offer available to graduates of Scottish universities. As I have indicated again this morning to other right hon. and hon. Members, I will continue to listen to the representations that are made in respect of this case and consider them carefully.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Instead of spending time and resources on the deportation of this family, is it not time that the Home Office got its actions right and ensured that dangerous criminals such as Noureden Mallaky-Soodmand, who attacked people in Stockton, are deported after their first offence, rather than waiting for them to offend again?

James Brokenshire: This Government take very seriously the removal of foreign national offenders and those who pose a threat to this country. The hon. Gentleman will see from figures released today that the numbers of foreign national offenders who have been removed are at a five-year high. We continue to work across Government to achieve more, and I will reflect on the specific case that the hon. Gentleman has referred to me.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Shiekh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on his urgent question and commend the work of my right hon.
Friends the Members for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and for Moray (Angus Robertson), and our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament and the First Minister for the attention that they are giving to this case. By his very admission at the Dispatch Box today, the Minister has made it clear that the family find themselves in their present position as a direct result of changes in the rules. It is another example of this Government’s continuing lack of attention to and understanding of the positive effect that immigration has on this country. They are allowing rhetoric on immigration to fuel the EU referendum debate. It is time for this Minister to stand up, do the right thing and prove that “Project Fear” in relation to immigration will not be allowed to win the day in the EU referendum.

James Brokenshire: The Government certainly do recognise the contribution that skilled and talented people from outside this country can make to our economy, and I have been very explicit about the way in which our immigration rules are designed to facilitate that. We announced the closure of the post-study work route in March 2011, which was before the family arrived. However, I will certainly continue to reflect on further representations and to consider those—and, indeed, any further application that the family may wish to make—very carefully.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Does this case not confirm that UK immigration policy simply does not work for Scotland? Scotland needs families like the Brains—we need dynamic young families such as them to come to live and work in Scotland. We have different demographic challenges, and we simply do not share this Conservative Government’s obsession with immigration figures. Will the Minister at least start a conversation with us about a sub-national immigration policy throughout the United Kingdom so that we can fashion an immigration system fit for Scotland?

James Brokenshire: We have an immigration policy that we continue to reform to ensure that it acts in the best interests of this country. I do not accept the characterisation that the hon. Gentleman gives. We will remain open to discussions with the Scottish Government about a range of issues. We have very clear about avoiding the abuse that we saw in the past.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Should the Minister not bear in mind two things? First, since he has come to the Dispatch Box no Conservative supporter of his have supported in any way the decision the Home Office has made. Secondly, would it not be appropriate to understand the strength of feeling that Opposition Members have expressed throughout these exchanges? It is always important to reflect on the representations, and that is precisely what I will be doing in the meeting I will hold later today with the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The Government have gone back on their word—that is what has caused this problem. We hear a lot from the Government about their thoughts on one nation. Which nation does the Minister think is benefiting from this obtuse and retrospective immigration arrangement?

James Brokenshire: Again, I remind the hon. Lady of when the decision was announced to close the post-study work route—in March 2011—and of when the family arrived. They obviously have had many years to know what the situation is. I obviously wish them success, and I will continue to reflect on representations.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Is it not the case that the head-shaking from those on the Government Front Bench and the fact that two of the people who were sitting there have not been able to stay for a full half-hour demonstrate the Government’s attitude? On immigration policy for the UK as a whole, is it not time to revise the £35,000 threshold? Clearly, there are wage differences regionally, so that threshold needs to be reviewed.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Meal do naidheachd—I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on the passionate way in which he has represented his entire constituency. This family are desperate to contribute to the highlands, and the highlands are desperate to keep them. What gives anyone the moral right to impose a decision on the highlands that nobody in the highlands wants?

James Brokenshire: Ultimately, the family need to find employment at the appropriate level. That is why I have made the points that I have about the Scottish Government and the work they do to see that there is a strong economy that is creating the jobs that actually create the environment people need to stay and work in Scotland. That is the important part of this.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As an MP for a rural constituency—one that is experiencing depopulation—I am dismayed that the Government are preparing to throw out of Scotland a family who have moved into the highlands and who are contributing positively to their community. Why are the Government determined to make our depopulation problem worse by sticking to this unfair and unjust action? The rules are clearly out of date and outdated.

James Brokenshire: As I have indicated, there is no immediate prospect of the family being removed from the UK, and obviously we remain open to any further application that they may wish to make. I stress the point about the ability of the Scottish Government to create the jobs and the environment needed for people to stay.
Point of Order

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, we had the first ever topical questions session in Women and Equalities orals this morning. I warmly welcome that, and I want to put on record my thanks to the Leader of the House and to the Minister for Women and Equalities for supporting their introduction. Unfortunately, we had a few teething problems with the new arrangements that meant that I was unable to raise the topical—indeed, imminent—issue of the importance of the impending European Union referendum for women. Given the alarming suggestion by the Employment Minister that we could scrap half of what she called “the burdens of...employment legislation”—like maternity leave and part-time workers’ rights—by leaving the European Union, may I ask you, Mr Speaker, whether she has indicated to you her intention to come to the House to make a statement about her intentions?

Mr Speaker: I have received no such indication at all, but I hope that the hon. Lady is satisfied that she has put her point on the record, which I think was her principal—indeed, perhaps her only—concern. If there are no further points of order—I sincerely hope there are not, because there should not be, and therefore there cannot be, and therefore there will not be—we come to the business question.

Business of the House

11.1 am

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will the Deputy Leader of the House please give us the future business of the House?

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The business for the week commencing 6 June will be as follows:

MONDAY 6 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Investigatory Powers Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 7 JUNE—Conclusion of the remaining stages of the Investigatory Powers Bill (day 2).

WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE—Opposition day (1st allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 9 JUNE—General debate on carers. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 10 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 13 June will include:

MONDAY 13 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Policing and Crime Bill (day 2).

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 13 June will be:

MONDAY 13 JUNE—Debate on an e-petition relating to foreign aid spending.

Melanie Onn: I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in wishing many happy returns of the day to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and to my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). Happy birthday!

Today is the last of six days of debate on the Gracious Speech, and I think we have all reached the same conclusion: this Government are completely hamstrung by Europe.

“The government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of the sad man on a train, Michael Portillo. It is the British public who are paying the price for the Government’s paralysis. Will the Deputy Leader tell us why the Government dropped plans for a Bill to include the names of the bride’s mother on marriage certificates? The current system is a patriarchal throwback; society has moved on. We support the move in principle, so what is stopping them? May we have a statement on how the Government plan to meet their manifesto commitment to halve the disability employment gap, given that there was no mention of that in last week’s speech?

The Government could not even bring forward a ban on wild animals in circuses. The Prime Minister said he would do that in the previous Parliament, but did not. The Conservatives promised it in their 2015 manifesto, but so far, nothing. Only two travelling circuses in Britain still use this cruel practice; it really cannot be that difficult to introduce a ban. I wonder whether it has anything to do with the fact that the company that trains the animals for the circuses is based in Witney?
May we have a statement on NHS recruitment in the light of the study from the National Union of Students and Unison published yesterday showing that scrapping bursaries for student nurses will deter 2,000 people from training for careers in the NHS? The health service already has a recruitment problem, and nursing remains on the occupational shortfall list, so why do the Government insist on making it worse?

There has been much debate about debates this week, specifically the TV debates for the EU referendum. What should the format be? Who should the speakers be? For the sake of the viewers, I think we should pick the most entertaining advocate for each side. For Brexit, I suggest the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and remain could be represented by the former Conservative Mayor of London.

For those who complain that it would not be a fair and balanced debate, let us imagine how it would play out. On the unlikely prospect of Turkey’s ascension to the EU, pro-EU Boris might again say:

“...to build a bridge between the Islamic and the Christian worlds”,

and:

“What are we saying if we perpetually keep Turkey out of the European Union just because it’s Muslim?”

Brexit Boris, on the other hand, could recite his poem in which he insultingly found a rhyme with Ankara and suggested that the Turkish Prime Minister had an inappropriate relationship with a goat. [Interruption.] I’ll get there.

On America, pro-EU Boris could point to his joint US-British citizenship and once again stress the importance of our special relationship, while Brexit Boris could suggest that we should not pay attention to President Obama because he is “part-Kenyan”. Brexit Boris might bemoan the European regulations that ban bunches of more than two bananas—a claim that pro-EU Boris might call “demented”.

For their closing statements, Brexit Boris could read from his column in The Daily Telegraph in which he announced he would be backing the leave campaign, while pro-EU Boris could read from the same column in the same edition, which he wrote in case he decided to back the in campaign.

The serious point is that the next Prime Minister will not be chosen by the public; it is Conservative party members who will have the final say on our country’s leader. All I will say to them is that they should look across the Atlantic, where their sister party is trying to put into office a two-faced populist who is completely without principle, who incites violence against journalists and who is willing to say anything, no matter how offensive or plainly false, as long as it takes him a step closer to power. They should ask themselves whether they really want to do the same here.

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) for her questions about the business. I also extend my birthday wishes to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and the Leader of the Opposition, and to my hon. Friend the Members for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish).

I congratulate the 20 Members who won today’s ballot, particularly the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson). I feel somewhat sorry for their staff, because they are probably already fielding hundreds of emails and phone calls. Nevertheless, we look forward to their proposed legislation, which we will debate in due course.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby talked about Europe. She and I are united on the matter: we both believe that Britain will be better off staying in a reformed EU. However, she overestimates the issue with regard to the Conservative party. We are absolutely united and are a one nation Government. The Scottish National party voted against the British people having their say, and the Labour party used to vote against it, but at least we agree that this important issue will be settled for a generation on 23 June. I look forward to the result.

Today we will conclude the debate on the Gracious Speech, which the House and the nation have welcomed as the next step in delivering security for working people, increasing life chances for the most disadvantaged and strengthening our national security. We have important Bills to finish—we will conclude our deliberations on the Investigatory Powers Bill next week—before we start our programme of 21 new Bills in our one nation Queen’s Speech, which will enable us to make further progress.

In the past six years, 31 million people have received a tax cut. Millions of young people are starting apprenticeships and getting into skilled work. The national living wage is benefiting 3 million workers, and more people are being given the chance to own their home. The Queen’s Speech builds on those measures and uses the opportunity of a strengthening economy to go further.

We will have a chance to debate measures including giving every household a legal right to a fast broadband connection, if they request it; reforming and speeding up the planning process to help build more homes; introducing a lifetime individual savings account to help young people save for their future; speeding up adoptions and giving children in care more support; helping young people save for their future; speeding up adoptions and giving children in care more support; making prisons places of education; and preventing radicalisation and tackling extremism. [Interruption.] Somebody said that we discussed that last week. Of course, we are still debating the Gracious Speech and we will discuss 21 Bills during this Session.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is in the USA this week as part of a cross-party parliamentary delegation, further cementing the special relationship between our two countries, although I do not know whether he has met either presidential contender. I was also with an all-party parliamentary group this week on a visit to the Chelsea flower show, which is another marvellous institution. I visited a garden called “A Suffolk Retreat”, designed by Frederic Whyte in partnership with the Pro Corda Trust, which provides world-class ensemble training to exceptional musicians. I particularly want to mention it because it is based in my constituency. I really hope that we can bring the garden back to Suffolk.

While I was at the Chelsea flower show, I noticed the melinis flower and the melliodendron, which is lightly fragrant with pale pink fleshy flowers—very apt for the House. The Member for Great Grimsby. I do not know whether the shadow Leader of the House is also into gardening, but I suggest that he might like to christen a new variety of rhododendron the “Rhonnoddendron”.

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby referred to several important pieces of legislation, and I suggest that she should be patient. We won the election last year and there are still four years of this Government to go. I am sure that, in due course, the Government will fulfil their commitment to some of the measures that she mentions.

It really matters to me that we try to achieve some cross-party consensus on the fact that we need more nurses. The Labour party led an important debate on the matter the other week. I thought that the approach was interesting, because we have a shared view on the outcome but have proposed different solutions for achieving it. The bursary route has limited the number of people who can become nurses. We are proposing a way in which more people can become nurses, and that will be good for our NHS. I am conscious of the fact that many people want to speak, so I will finish on that, and I look forward to further business questions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As the House will know, my normal practice is to seek to accommodate everyone who is interested in coming in on the business question. That is, of course, much more challenging today, given that there is a statement to follow and no fewer than 49 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in the main debate. Therefore, there is a premium on single, short supplementary questions without preamble, the seminar on which will be led by Rebecca Pow.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am deeply honoured, Mr Speaker. Thank you. May we have a debate on microplastics? Evidence suggests that microplastics found in cosmetics and personal care products that we all use, such as shower gel, shampoo and even toothpaste, are getting into the watercourse and damaging marine life, and they are potentially a hazard to human health.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises a really important matter, and I know that the Government are looking at it carefully. The vitality of our oceans and our rivers is important for nature and for our country. Businesses are trying to eradicate these things from their products, and the Government are working on that with them and encouraging them to do so. Some people might say that this is a good example of something on which we can work with our European neighbours to ensure that action goes across many more markets so that we can eradicate these potential dangers. I am sure that the Government are leading on that matter.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I wish I could thank the Office of the Leader of the House for sending me a note to tell me that the Leader of the House would not be here this morning; if they had done so, my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) would certainly have done business questions. That is another obvious failure by the Leader of the House.

We need an urgent debate on the Representation of the People Acts. The Prime Minister effectively admitted at the weekend that the Conservative party had broken electoral law. To be fair, according to him it was just a “misdeclaration”—an honest mistake—as though our electoral laws were some sort of optional extra. Our electoral laws are in place to secure the integrity of our democracy, and any transgression must be viewed as a very serious matter. That is why this week I have reported the Conservative party to the Metropolitan police to ensure that this is properly investigated. Now is the time for the Government to start to take these issues seriously. We need a debate on the Floor of the House so that we can properly consider the matter.

Even though he is not here, I am sure that the Leader of the House will be thrilled to learn that the Scottish Parliament will today formally back EU membership. Only a couple of Tories will vote against it; all other MSPs will support the motion. May we have a debate about the impact on our devolved legislatures and the consequences of a leave vote, particularly given that the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday conceded to the Scottish Affairs Committee that no contingency plans are in place if Scotland is dragged out of the European Union against our national collective will? We need to know what the consequences will be for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if we are dragged out, particularly if we do not vote to be taken out of the European Union.

Lastly, I do not know when the Leader of the House intends to bring forward his legislation to reform the House of Lords in response to the Strathclyde report, but we must have an opportunity to table an amendment so that this House can vote on the abolition of the House of Lords, with Labour reformers and Conservative Members who are very unhappy with the other place joining us to rid this nation of that circus of donors and cronies once and for all.

Dr Coffey: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman was not listening because the Leader of the House announced today’s arrangements last week. I am very sorry that we will not hear from his hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh). When I was at the Chelsea flower show, I spotted the tansy flower, also known as the golden button, which I thought would be very appropriate for SNP Members with their yellow rosettes.

The hon. gentleman talked about election expenses and similar issues. Frankly, I know that SNP Members are very happy to get their choppers out and about around the country, but they should really think about whether they want to continue that particular debate. It is not a matter for the Government, and in relation to what the hon. Gentleman mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made no particular assertion.

I recognise SNP Members’ opposition to the House of Lords. I respect them for the view they hold and I appreciate that it is included in their amendment on which we will vote later today, but I am sure there will continue to be other opportunities in the future. Indeed, SNP Members, none of whom had a private Member’s Bill during the last Session, now have three of the top seven slots for private Members’ Bills, so—who knows?—they may have a chance to bring forward legislation of their own.
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): At the heart of the European Union referendum is the question of democracy and the democratic deficit. May I draw attention to the European Scrutiny Committee report that has come out this morning on the lack of a democratic system in the Council of Ministers? Voters are clamouring for facts in the referendum. Some 55% of our laws come from the European Union, the bulk of which are made by officials and nodded through by Ministers, while there is no information about how the 50% of decisions made behind closed doors are reached, according to this unanimous report by the European Scrutiny Committee. How are such decisions arrived at and at what price? Will the Deputy Leader of the House give us a debate on this matter?

Dr Coffey: There was a debate on this matter in February, shortly after the Prime Minister announced the EU referendum, and a national debate is going on right now. It is important that people participate in that debate and use this opportunity to vote. Frankly, UK Ministers work very hard to further the interests of the UK within the European Union, and long may that continue. Nevertheless, on the kind of information being given out, may I recommend the House of Commons Library website—www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/eu-referendum/? The Library is putting out briefings that any member of the public can read and perhaps use to inform themselves in making their decision on 23 June.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for the business statement. The House will have noted that she announced that on 9 June there will be a general debate on carers, sponsored by the Backbench Business Committee. That is a legacy of the last Session. We cannot meet as a Committee until the party managers on both sides of the House appoint or reappoint their members of the Committee. May I ask them to expedite that process so that we can meet as early as possible after the Whitsun break?

Dr Coffey: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his re-election. I am sure he will have another good year of showing leadership in providing many interesting debates. I echo his words, and I look forward to the Backbench Business Committee being back in business so that many of the requests made to me today can be queued up and, in time, debated.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): In Potters Bar, there are proposals for more than 750 new houses to be built on the edge of town, but in a neighbouring local authority, Will the Deputy Leader of the House find time for us to debate the importance of the duty to co-operate in local planning processes so that planning decisions properly take into account the needs of residents in places such as Potters Bar?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is important to deliver housing. There is already a duty of co-operation between councils, but I am sure he will be able to refer to that further when we discuss the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill in due course.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): May we have a statement on why the Government will not adopt my nifty, ready-made private Member’s Bill on adding mothers’ names to marriage certificates? The Queen’s Speech was a bit light, so there is plenty for room for it. The Deputy Leader of the House has just said that there are 21 new Bills; please make it 22.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady has been campaigning on this issue for some time, and is not alone in doing so. She will have heard the Prime Minister acknowledge its importance in the past. There are several years of this Parliament still to go, so she should continue to be patient.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May we have a statement by the Business Secretary on the yesterday’s demise of Courtaulds, the last hosiery manufacturer in the country? It has thrown 320 people—mainly women—out of work, so may we have a statement on what the Government can do to help such a company?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to bring that up. I am sure that it has been a devastating blow to the local economy in Belper, and I hope that administrators will be able to help keep at least some of the jobs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills will be here shortly to give another statement; I will make sure that he is aware of her request.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Two of my constituents, Mr Matthews and Mrs Southward, have been in touch with me about the care of their family members during recent stays in hospital. Breakdowns in communication between staff seem to have contributed to very poor standards of patient care, leaving the patients and their families very distressed. May we have a debate on how we can ensure that we have the best standards of care in our hospitals?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is right to speak on behalf of patients—ultimately we have to be patients’ champions in our constituencies. There are no Health questions for some time, so this would be a subject for the Backbench Business Committee to consider for a topical debate. I put on the record my thanks to the Care Quality Commission, which has been leading the way with inspections. It has been trying to highlight such issues and to make hospital boards come together to ensure that the patient always comes first.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Many people benefit from lower airfares and lower mobile roaming charges as a result of our being in the EU. Research published this week has shown that the average cost of holidays could increase if we leave. May we have a debate on the impact on tourism—domestic, inbound and outbound—should we leave the EU?

Dr Coffey: The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who has responsibility for tourism, will be here to answer questions in the first week back after the recess. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) is absolutely right to highlight the potential increase in costs connected to leaving the EU. Of course, I wish to
encourage domestic tourism as well. I am sure that a lot of people will be coming to Aldeburgh and Southwold, including the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), who is coming on Saturday to campaign with me for Britain to stay in the European Union. My hon. Friend has raised an important issue, which I hope the country will take notice of.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the Land Registry? Many people are opposed to its privatisation, so may I have an assurance from the Deputy Leader of the House that that will not be sneaked into the planning and infrastructure Bill and the Land Registry therefore sneaked out of the ownership of the British public?

Dr Coffey: It is not a case of the Government sneaking things in, as the hon. Lady suggests. We have a very transparent process. We have set out our agenda for the next year, and she will have the time to debate that issue as and when it arises.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Deputy Leader of the House tell us whether there are any plans for the House to sit on Saturday 25 June, in case the country votes to leave the EU and there is a change in Government, or we have to mobilise for war, as the Government have suggested, or introduce a Bill about airfares, or plague has broken out? Are we going to sit on Saturday 25 June?

Dr Coffey: I am not aware of any plans for that. The country has a really important decision to make on 23 June. This Government and Parliament will listen to the decision of the people and act in due course. My hon. Friend and I are on different sides of the argument, but I am sure that he will come back on 27 June and work alongside Government Members to progress the important measures in the Queen’s Speech, which will help this country in the future.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): May we have a statement on the responsibilities of local councils to protect green open spaces in their ownership—such as that on the ex-Brumby hospital site in Scunthorpe—when they develop their own landholdings?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and it is important that guidelines in the national planning policy framework are enforced. Ministers from the Department for Communities and Local Government will be answering questions on the first day back after the recess, and he may wish to raise the issue with them.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): The closure of Rugeley B power station was confirmed last week and will mean that leisure facilities will also close. Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in calling for other local facilities and groups to come forward to support those who are affected and need to be rehomed, and may we have debate about local community and leisure facilities?

Dr Coffey: I know my hon. Friend has worked hard on that matter for her constituents, and the decision will obviously be disappointing for those affected. She is right to try to engage the community to provide facilities for the activities that were ongoing. Has she considered the asset of community value process, to try to protect some of those important facilities?

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This is Children’s Hospice week. Charlie House, a fabulous charity in my constituency that supports families with children who have life-limiting conditions, is fundraising to create a purpose-built facility in Aberdeen, bringing support closer to those who need it. Will the Deputy Leader of the House make time for a debate on charities such as Charlie House that provide vital support for children with complex disabilities and their families?

Dr Coffey: I am delighted to hear of progress in fundraising for Charlie House, and raising the issue in this House is an important way to advertise it—many hon. Members across the Chamber will be doing similar things. The hon. Lady raises an important matter, and I hope that she will be able to secure an Adjournment debate on that subject, which I am sure would be well attended.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): This weekend Plymouth, and the rest of the country, will commemorate the battle of Jutland, and last night my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) secured a debate on that important event. Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to all those who participated in Jutland, including my grandfather, and the contribution that they made to European and world peace?

Dr Coffey: I echo what my hon. Friend has said. When he listened to the debate he will have heard our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, (Mr Evennett) saying that he will attend the ceremony and that his own grandfather was also involved in that battle. We must pay tribute to those who fought to keep peace, and being part of the European Union is a way to try to ensure that we have trade and prosperity, rather than destructive war.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Given that we are now just a few weeks away from commemorations to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, what plans do the Government have to hold a debate in this Chamber, so that Members from across the House and every corner of the country can reflect on that most traumatic but momentous time in our country’s history?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that important centenary. I am not aware that the Government have planned to set aside time to debate that issue—indeed, when the reforms went through, such matters were put in the hands of the Backbench Business Committee, but I am sure that many people would co-sponsor such a debate, which will probably be one of Parliament’s finest this Session.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Yesterday, the other place appointed a Select Committee to consider long-term NHS sustainability. Given pressures on our national health service, can we consider whether such a Committee might be established in the elected House?
Dr Coffey: That is the first time that I have heard a request for a new Select Committee. It would perhaps be more appropriate for the Health Committee to investigate that issue further, so I will pass the matter on to its Chair, our hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston).

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I apologise for labouring this point with the Deputy Leader of the House, but following the difficulties that some MPs seem to have landed themselves in over election expenses, will the Government invite the Electoral Commission to produce updated regulations covering local and national election expenses? That would help to clear up some of the uncertainties about accounting for election expenses, so will she make Government time available to debate that issue?

Dr Coffey: The Electoral Commission is, rightly, independent of the Government. The right hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I am sure the Electoral Commission will not be shy in coming forward with potential for discussion, but it is important that the Government do not interfere in any investigation.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May we have an urgent debate to assess whether legislation is needed to stop management companies taking advantage of freeholders? I represent retired constituents from Woodland Mews in Heathfield, who, despite being freeholders, are being taken advantage of by a property company over their communal areas. The list is so long, Mr Speaker, that it would cause you distress if I read it out.

Dr Coffey: I understand entirely what my hon. Friend is referring to. It is an interesting part of the law. The people better placed to answer his specific queries will be at the Dispatch Box on Monday 6 June.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Constituents of mine who work for, or who have experienced trying to get in touch with, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs will not at all have been surprised this week by a National Audit Office report highlighting how job losses have led to the loss of up to £97 million last year and the tripling of call times. May we have time for a debate on HMRC hotlines?

Dr Coffey: I recognise what the hon. Lady says. It is frustrating to have to wait a considerable time. HMRC civil servants are dedicated and focused on ensuring people pay the correct tax in the first place, which is important in preventing frustration later. I note her point, however, and will make sure the Treasury is aware of it.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Yesterday, over 100 guide dog owners visited Westminster Hall to highlight discrimination. Their access all areas campaign raised awareness of discrimination against the partially sighted because of their dogs. May we have a debate on disability equality training to ensure that that important issue is addressed?

Dr Coffey: It was wonderful to see so many assistance dogs in Westminster Hall yesterday and to see how beautiful animals can help people to lead fulfilling lives. My hon. Friend is right to point out the terrible frustrations when people, who do not seem to have been adequately trained, frustrate the fulfilment of lives. I will ensure that this issue is referred to the Department for Work and Pensions. I also want to thank Simon and Jo, who came up from my constituency to see me. I intend to take up further local action myself.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): May we have a debate on cyberbullying, and in particular its impact on young people? There are instances of cyberbullying perpetrated by those outside the UK who are using jurisdictional issues to evade the law.

Dr Coffey: I am sure we both agree that cyberbullying is completely unacceptable. It may be worth the hon. Lady pursuing this matter with the Minister responsible. If loopholes in the law are preventing positive action, we can try to close them if at all possible. I will refer her question to the relevant Minister.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Does my hon. Friend consider, as we see yet another misplaced, misjudged and costly consultation from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and its thankfully departing chairman, that now is the right time to discuss, in a cross-party debate in a grown-up way, the lessons of the past six years at least, particularly as it is noted by many non-establishment colleagues that the Speaker’s Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has no representatives from the 2010 and 2015 intakes? That is a shocking oversight, Mr Speaker. You and colleagues from across the House will be relieved to hear that I am very happy to volunteer to help to remedy that.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend has had a long interest in IPSA—as do we all. A consultation is under way and it is important that Members respond to it. We know the reasons why IPSA was set up, but that does not mean we cannot put across our views on how we need a regime that best helps us to help the people we represent and does not curtail our efforts in that aim.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): As the Deputy Leader of the House will be aware, I have been asking since November for a meeting with the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). I have an open cast coalmine in my constituency that desperately needs proper restoration. Owing to the financial shenanigans of the company that owns it, a large body of water will be left unrestored. I have now received a letter from the Minister saying that her diary is too busy and too full for her to meet me. May we have a debate on how much time Ministers are spending campaigning for Brexit, rather than doing their parliamentary work?

Dr Coffey: I think the hon. Lady raised this issue in last summer’s pre-recess Adjournment debate. I replied then and thought I had been helpful, but I will encourage
the Minister responsible to see what she can do. I will not make promises prior to 23 June but I will do my best.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Ceramics, bricks, tiles and pipes are important industries providing valuable jobs across the UK, including in my constituency, where clay from local quarries is used in brick manufacturing. May we have a debate in Government time on the strategic importance of bricks and ceramics, especially on how best to support these industries so that they are well placed to meet ongoing and future demand for bricks and house building?

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend raises a serious point about an industry that is hugely important to ensuring that UK plc keeps motoring and that people have homes to live in. I would encourage her to apply to the Backbench Business Committee, when it meets shortly, because I am sure that many people would be interested in such a debate.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It was announced on Tuesday that Polestar, a printing works in my constituency, would close with a loss of 650 jobs. That followed the loss of 600 jobs at Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and 700 jobs at HSBC. This has all come in a short period. As well as immediate help for the Polestar workers, could we have a debate on what the Government can do to assist areas where a multiplicity of significant redundancies are announced across different sectors in a short period?

**Dr Coffey:** I recognise that job losses such as those at Polestar will be a blow to the local economy, but the Government are committed to the northern powerhouse and to Sheffield. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has been working closely with the local council and the local enterprise partnership to produce an enhanced devolution deal. That landmark deal includes £328 million in growth deal resources for the next five years. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can work with the council and the LEP, as BIS has done, to ensure that we create new jobs for the future.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): In view of the ludicrous claims that the price of holidays will increase if we exit the EU, will the Government find time for a debate on how to boost tourism to English seaside resorts in order to replace the lost holidays abroad? Also, if my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) wishes to make representations to the Prime Minister, he might like to know that he will be in Cleethorpes on 25 June to mark the national celebration of Armed Forces Day.

**Dr Coffey:** That is just another reason to visit Cleethorpes—en route I am sure people will drop into Great Grimsby, the constituency of the shadow Deputy Leader of the House. We want to encourage people to relax and enjoy themselves, but if people are to enjoy domestic, as well as foreign, tourism, we need a strong economy and increasing wages, so it bears repeating that if the British people choose to leave the EU—it will be their choice, if they make it—they should be aware of the possible consequences for the economy and jobs. I hope they choose to remain.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I draw the attention of the Deputy Leader of the House to early-day motion 47 on blacklisting compensation payments. That this House welcomes the recent public apology and admission of wrongdoing made by eight major construction firms in the High Court, and the settlement reached between the construction workers, Unite the Union, GMB and UCATT trade unions, the Blacklist Support Group and their legal teams with those construction firms that will mean that 771 blacklisted workers will share an estimated £50 million in compensation; praises the work of the Blacklist Support Group, the justice campaign and support network for those caught up in the UK construction industry blacklisting scandal; notes that trade unionists, safety campaigners, journalists, academics and environmental activists were all blacklisted by big business; further notes that blacklisting was exposed in 2009 after a raid on the offices of the Consulting Association that operated the blacklist on behalf of the major companies, and that trade union members were denied work over many years due to their trade union activity on previous building sites, raising concerns over asbestos, poor working conditions and unpaid wages; notes the investigation on this subject carried out by the Scottish Affairs Committee in the last Parliament; notes with concern media reports that senior police officers attended meetings of the blacklisting organisation; and calls on the Government to conduct a full public inquiry into the scandal of blacklisting.

Eight multinational companies have settled cases with hundreds of blacklisted workers in the construction industry. Will the Government make a statement or hold a debate in Government time on this scandal and allow hon. Members to demand a full public inquiry into blacklisting?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Gentleman will know that blacklisting is illegal and that appropriate things can be pursued where it is shown to have happened. I suggest that he try to secure a debate in order to raise these matters in more detail, and I am sure that a Minister will respond in due course.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): The Prime Minister once said that immigration had “placed real pressures on communities up and down the country. Not just pressures on schools, housing and healthcare—though those have been serious—but social pressures too.” Can we have a debate on how the Government’s approach to reducing immigration to the tens of thousands is going? In such a debate, we would realise that the only way to control immigration, which he wanted to do, is to leave the EU. The clue is in the title: free movement of people.

**Dr Coffey:** The Prime Minister and the Government are still committed to reducing net migration to tens of thousands. We have strengthened measures through the Immigration Act 2014. The United Kingdom has created more jobs than the rest of the European Union put together in six years, so I do not think people should be surprised if some of those jobs have attracted people in the EU to come and work here. Nevertheless, the pledge still stands, and I am sure my hon. Friend will work alongside us to make it happen.

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): The Times published the headline: “Imam beaten to death in sex grooming town” on 20 February. The editor could not be bothered
to respond to concerns and IPSO—the Independent Press Standards Organisation—refused to take up the complaint. It was clearly Islamophobic, disrespectful to the victim and derogatory to the town I represent. May we have a statement on when we will have a press regulator with some teeth?

**Dr Coffey:** I understand why the hon. Gentleman is distressed by that headline. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will be here on the first Thursday after our return, so the hon. Gentleman might want to pose that question directly to him.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May we have debate about the Avon and Somerset police? We are now on our sixth chief or acting chief constable, and we have a police and crime commissioner who is completely out of control. The current chief constable is under investigation for historical sex allegations. He has been investigated once already, and can be read about in *Private Eye*. May we have a debate, because we need to know whether we have the Keystone Cops or the Avon and Somerset police force—and nothing in between?

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of people having confidence in the local police. I expect that the police and crime commissioner has just been re-elected with a new manifesto, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to hold this person to account in fulfilling the strategies that were outlined.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): Will the Deputy Leader of the House join me in congratulating FC Halifax Town on their outstanding victory in the FA Trophy at Wembley on Sunday? Will she allow a debate to discuss how best to encourage people to participate in sports at all levels?

**Dr Coffey:** I certainly want to congratulate FC Halifax Town; it must be fantastic to lift a trophy at Wembley. The hon. Lady is hopefully aware of the sport strategy launched by the Government, which is specifically focused on how to increase participation in all sports. Ministers will be in their places on the Front Bench on the first Thursday after our return, so she can raise her question again.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): May we have a statement from the Government confirming that their “works of fiction” Department, which has been busy producing pro-EU propaganda over the last few months, is going to be closed down? What measures are being put in place to ensure that the purdah rules are properly enforced in the last four weeks of the referendum campaign?

**Dr Coffey:** The Government have fulfilled what was set out in the European Union Referendum Act 2015, which was to provide information and analysis. The Government are doing this online through documents, but also through the booklet that was sent to households across the country. Purdah starts tomorrow. The Cabinet Secretary is, I think, writing to permanent secretaries to ensure that appropriate steps are taken. I am sure that the civil service will act appropriately.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In Pakistan, another Ahmadi Muslim was murdered in a target killing in Karachi on Monday night. To date, 30 Ahmadis have been murdered there on grounds of faith—but not a single attacker has been brought to justice. In Indonesia on Sunday, an Ahmadi mosque was attacked and destroyed in central Java. Will the Deputy Leader of the House agree to a statement on what the Government are doing to tackle intolerance and extremism against Ahmadis and to call on countries to make adequate provision for that?

**Dr Coffey:** I am not aware of the details of that particular situation. The best I can do is to ensure that the appropriate Minister replies directly to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I wonder whether the Deputy Leader of the House noticed that the UK representative in Lonely Planet’s top six places for travellers to visit in Europe this summer is not London or the Lake district, but Warwickshire, with its main attractions being Warwick castle, Stratford-on-Avon and the recently announced “world rugby hall of fame” being created in the birthplace of the game. This will be important to my constituency, so may we have a debate to consider how investment in tourism can stimulate local economies?

**Dr Coffey:** Culture Ministers will be here answering questions on 9 June. Let me say, though, that going to Warwickshire is always wonderful, especially to celebrate the oval ball, while there will be celebrations of the round ball shortly with the European championship.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): May we debate why the Government want 50 fewer elected Members of Parliament but keep on creating more unelected Tory peers? The hon. Lady’s party received 36.8% of the votes at the general election, but 43.7% of the House of Lords already consists of party political Tory peers. Will her party stop creating peers, and drop its plans to gerrymander the House of Commons?

**Dr Coffey:** The purpose of the Act that was passed during the last Parliament was to ensure that constituencies were of equal size, and I thought that very fair. I find it extraordinary that there are 40 MPs in Wales, representing considerably smaller constituencies than the average in England and Scotland. Someone who says that he believes in fairness should accept that is what the electorate deserve.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): I welcomed this week’s news that the west of England, including Bath, had received £2.2 million of Government funds to increase access to walking and cycling. Does my hon. Friend agree not only that that will benefit health, but that the subject of walking and cycling should be raised during debates on the infrastructure Bill?

**Dr Coffey:** That is an interesting suggestion. We already have walking and cycling strategies, and transport questions may provide opportunities to debate their effectiveness further. I am sure that cycling around Bath is a very pleasurable experience, as well as being particularly good for the thighs because there are so many hills.
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): This week the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has been grilling the Government on whether or not they are meeting their obligations under the convention on the rights of the child. May we have a debate, in Government time, on whether the Government are meeting those obligations, with particular reference to the two-child policy and the rape clause?

Dr Coffey: I know that the hon. Lady has been pursuing a specific issue in relation to this matter. I think that the Government can be confident that they are supporting children. New measures in the Queen’s Speech will do even more to help children in care, and I hope that that is something on which the hon. Lady and I can agree.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): The performance of Southern Rail is increasingly shocking. There were 156 cancellations on Monday and 208 on Sunday, which affected not just my constituents but passengers across Surrey, Sussex and London. May we have an urgent statement from the rail Minister to establish how we can deal with that shocking situation?

Dr Coffey: No commuters like to be late for work because of errors over which they have no control, and I understand why my hon. Friend’s constituents are particularly frustrated. No transport questions are due for a while, so I will bring the matter to the attention of the rail Minister.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Two years ago the two Newport Members of Parliament, the local trade union and the workforce said with one voice that privatising the then profitable shared services in the town would be a terrible mistake. Last week the National Audit Office announced that privatising those services and handing them over to the failing French company Steria has cost the country £504 million. When can we debate the cost to the nation of Ministers’ following their own canard— their own political, doctrinaire belief—that everything public is bad and everything private is good?

Dr Coffey: The Government do not share that view, which is why we are ensuring that the NHS is in public hands and will continue to be so. I am not aware of the specific case to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, but he knows that Ministers appear at the Dispatch Box daily to answer questions.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Today marks the start of the world-renowned Hay literary festival in my constituency. Over the years, many Members have attended the festival to sell their books, whether they are books about crime or fiction, or their autobiographies, or perhaps even a combination of all three. Will my hon. Friend allow time for a debate supporting the literary industry in this country?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that that would be a very popular debate. No doubt my hon. Friend will gather support for it through the Backbench Business Committee. The Hay literary festival is an important international festival, at which we welcome people from around the world. I know that the Daily Mail sketch writer lives nearby and is pushing his book, so I expect my hon. Friend will see him there as well.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the House will join me in welcoming the launch of Kilombero rice from Malawi by Just Trading Scotland. It will now be stocked in branches of the Co-op across Scotland.

Our opportunities to discuss issues of food security and fair trade are limited, given that there are only two sessions of questions to the Secretary of State for International Development between now and the end of September. Will the Deputy Leader of the House look into the rotation of questions as a matter of urgency, to ensure that Members have a chance to give all Departments a fair crack of the whip?

Dr Coffey: The rota is fairly well established, and it is important that every Government Department is brought to the House to answer questions, so this is just one of those timing things. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to find time through Westminster Hall or other debates to hold the Government to account on that matter.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last week the Government won a High Court case against big tobacco, which has paved the way for the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products, and this week AXA insurance has announced its withdrawal of £1.2 billion of investment in the tobacco industry. May we have a debate in Government time on the new tobacco control strategy, so that Members across the House can have an input into it before the Government publish it?

Dr Coffey: I know that this issue always generates a lot of interest, and I am sure that the appropriate Health Minister would be willing to respond to a debate on it. My hon. Friend has made his case so eloquently that I am sure that neither you, Mr Speaker, nor the Backbench Business Committee would deny him the time to hold such a debate.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Time is becoming very constrained and it is almost certain that some people will not get in, but brevity will help.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May we have a statement or debate on the rationale and details of the UK-Sudan strategic dialogue and the Khartoum process—the EU horn of Africa migration route initiative—both of which pretend that Sudan is simply a transit route for refugees, when it is in fact a significant source country of refugees fleeing the predations of a regime that has been indicted by the International Criminal Court but is now being indulged by those two processes?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will have heard the hon. Gentleman’s comments, but as of now there are no plans for such a statement or debate.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): The River Hamble games are fast approaching, as is the summer of sport. May we have a debate highlighting the activities of the many brilliant volunteers who keep our community supports clubs alive and keep our after-school activities
happening? We need to discuss how we can help them maintain a work-life balance in the light of their contribution to the development of future athletes.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend makes an important case. I think she should join up with the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) to secure a debate on the benefits of sport.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Within the last hour, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—ignoring the concerns expressed by the Public Accounts Committee, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and this House—has announced that it is pressing ahead with its plans to close the BIS policy office in Sheffield. Will Ministers come to the House to explain why they have signed off on a decision that adds to the Department’s operational costs, flies in the face of the Government’s policy of moving civil servants out of London and fatally undermines claims about the northern powerhouse?

Dr Coffey: I understand that the Department has issued a written ministerial statement today—[Interruption.] Or it is due to issue one. The decision was reached after consultation with staff and trade unions. It has been a difficult decision, but the Department has chosen to base all policy roles in London by 2018. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is sitting on the Front Bench, and I am sure that he will have heard the hon. Gentleman’s concerns.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Residents in Brigstock are fighting an unwelcome and unwanted speculative planning application from the developer Gladman. Many villages in my constituency have been targeted by such applications in recent years, but East Northamptonshire Council has stood up for the residents and thrown out the planning application from the developer Gladman. Many villages in my constituency have been targeted by such speculative developments over the years. I am sure that the Department will take note of today’s debate on how to ensure that developers get the message?

Dr Coffey: The Government have put forward the national planning policy framework, and a local plan has to take account of appropriate future development. Also, Department for Communities and Local Government has to take account of appropriate future development. National planning policy framework, and a local plan issued a written ministerial statement today—

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): We might consider today my amendment to the Loyal Address on the threat that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership poses to our NHS, but the Government show no sign of genuinely listening. Having seen at first hand the damage done to the NHS by big businesses such as Virgin Care, I want a clear, unambiguous statement that the Government will reject any treaty that gives such companies a private court system that puts their interests over ours. Will the Deputy Leader of the House provide time for a Minister to give that assurance?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is right that we are concluding the debate on the Queen’s Speech today. The Government are confident that the TTIP treaty poses no threat to the NHS. I recognise that her view may differ from mine, but there is no need to be concerned. The European Commission is also well aware of the matter in its negotiations.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It costs more than £3,000 to train to be a HGV driver, leading to a shortage of 45,000 drivers in the industry. For every training package that the Government paid for, there would be a payback of six to 12 months of welfare savings. Will the Deputy Leader of the House rattle together the heads of the Secretary of State for Transport, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor to seek common sense?

Dr Coffey: This issue affects my constituency as well, so I have been lobbying fellow Ministers. It is important to say that plans are due to be announced. It is clear that advanced career loans also apply to such courses, so I encourage people in my constituency to take advantage of them now.
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is approaching 12 years since Gary McCann was killed in a road traffic accident in India. Since then, his brother, my constituent Paul McCann, has been seeking information, and eventually justice, following this tragic incident. Despite his best efforts, however, he has been given no updates about any criminal proceedings in the Indian legal system, and the Indian high commission has been frankly woeful in supplying information to Mr McCann. May we please have a debate on how people such as my constituent can get the information and support to which they should be entitled? Twelve years is far too long to have to wait for answers.

Dr Coffey: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman and the family are concerned about the matter, and I will share it with Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I welcome the UK Government’s commitment to making access to broadband subject to a universal service obligation. Is the Deputy Leader of the House aware of the Scottish Government’s objective of delivering 100% access by 2021? May we have a statement on whether the UK Government will commit to matching that ambition and to ensuring equality of funding across the UK?

Dr Coffey: We are ahead of them, Mr Speaker—we already have universal access to 2 megabits per second for people who want broadband. Our universal service obligation is due to be in place by 2020, not 2021, and I hope that it will include all of Scotland.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): NHS Protect is supposed to investigate fraud in the NHS, but it has been inspecting one senior manager for more than two years without reaching a conclusion. May we have a debate on whether the UK Government will commit to matching that ambition and to ensuring equality of funding across the UK?

Dr Coffey: Understandably, I am not aware of the individual details of that case. It would probably not be appropriate to comment on it on the Floor of the House, but I will ask a Health Minister to follow up with the hon. Lady.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Balfron High School in my constituency was built using the private finance initiative scheme, which was invented by the Conservatives and pursued by the Labour party. It has a capital value of £16 million, but the Stirling taxpayer will pay £71.1 million for it. It has now been discovered to have structural defects and has been partially closed, meaning that the children have to be driven to schools in Stirling—a total distance of almost 40 miles. May we have a debate on the great PFI swindle?

Dr Coffey: PFI has been debated in the House before, and in the last Session the Government undertook to renegotiate some of the contracts. I am conscious of the disruption that is being caused to children’s education, but the suppliers should bear the risk of that and provide appropriate remedies.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the progress of the Greater Manchester further education area review? Theresa Grant, the chief executive of Trafford Council and chair of the steering group, has warned that it would lead to a fragmentation of colleges in Greater Manchester.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point. Given that Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers are not going to be here to answer questions for some time, I shall ask the further education Minister to look further into the matter.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the Deputy Leader of the House allow time for the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to bring forward a debate on the work and health programme? The White Paper has been scrapped and there is now a Green Paper. Such a debate will allow the whole House to consider help and support for disabled people to get into work.

Dr Coffey: I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman brought such a debate forward through the Backbench Business Committee, it would be very popular. It is important that the Government continue to press on with our reforms, which are helping more people into work. It is a record we are proud of, but we want to make sure that even more disabled people are working.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): May we have a statement on the recommendations of the review on antimicrobial resistance as soon as possible?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is a very high priority for the NHS. Work is being done to try to ensure that we have more appropriate prescriptions, in recognition of the fact that AMR is declining. We need to ensure that the matter is looked at carefully, and I will raise it with Health Ministers, given that this will not be dealt with in the House for the next fortnight.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Oil is trading at above $50 a barrel, which is welcome, but yesterday we had the sad announcement of 475 job losses at Shell, mostly in Aberdeen and from its offices in my constituency. The tax cuts and the establishment of the Oil and Gas Authority are welcome, but this announcement makes it clear that more needs to be done. May we have a statement from the relevant Secretary of State about what more can be done to support this great industry?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman should be aware of the extensive support that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change have given to the industry. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to apply for a debate, when we can discuss those policies in much more detail.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Given reports of recent racist attacks against asylum seekers who live behind red doors on Teesside, may we have a debate about how the Home Office manages the COMPASS—commercial and operating managers procuring asylum support—contracts, and its monitoring of the services provided through G4S and its subcontractors?
Dr Coffey: We know that issue has already been debated in the House, but the Home Office Ministers will be back here to answer questions shortly, on 13 June, when I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be able to raise it again in more detail.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I attended the UK pipe band championships on Saturday, which were held very successfully in Paisley for the first time. The team behind the bid to secure the title of UK city of culture 2021 indicated that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had delayed publishing the dates involved in the competition. Will the Deputy Leader of the House give the Culture Secretary a nudge to publish a written statement setting out the said dates, as Paisley is very much ready and eager to get on and win?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that Paisley would be a very fine city of culture in the UK—there will of course be other candidates. I will nudge the Secretary of State, but if he still has not done that by 9 June, he will be here then to answer questions.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I was grateful for the birthday wishes from the shadow Deputy Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House.

Tomorrow, I will be attending “Time to Talk”, an event in Pontypool in my constituency that is designed to look at combating feelings of loneliness, particularly among retired veterans and older people. May we have a debate in the House on the very important issue of people who feel isolation from our society?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that issue, especially on his birthday. Tackling isolation is important, as I am sure all parties will agree. DCLG Ministers will be before the House soon, when perhaps he will be able to ask a more detailed question on local strategies.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): In the light of the severe criticisms directed against the Government in today’s European Scrutiny Committee report, may we have an early debate in Government time so that Members can hold the Government to account for their abject and wilful failure to co-operate with proper parliamentary scrutiny of important European legislation?

Dr Coffey: I think our Parliament has very robust procedures on scrutinising European matters. The biggest question will of course be decided by the British people on 23 June, after which I hope we will continue to have a European Scrutiny Committee so that we can debate matters further.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May we have an urgent debate on how towns such as Huddersfield uniquely combine a strong manufacturing base with a thriving university? If we do not stay in the European Union, such towns will be devastated.

Dr Coffey: Even I would not go that far. I do know that the people of Huddersfield will be devastated as and when the hon. Gentleman announces his resignation—I am sure that that is many years away. Before then, he will continue to champion their interests, and I am sure that the whole House supports him in doing so.
Steel Industry

12.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on Britain's steel industry.

Yesterday, Tata's board met in Mumbai and reviewed progress on the sale of its UK steelmaking assets. Ahead of that meeting, I travelled to India for discussions with Tata's leadership. I arrived back in London just a few hours ago. I use this opportunity to stress the importance of Tata continuing a responsible and effective sales process, which I commend it for doing so far. I raised various challenges and issues that had been flagged up by potential buyers, and I reiterated the Government's willingness to support bidders who can deliver a sustainable and successful future for British steelmaking.

Understandably, Tata wants the sales process to be as swift and as straightforward as possible. However, it assured me that it remains absolutely committed to being a responsible seller. There are a number of credible bids on the table, all of which we discussed. Tata is now studying the proposals closely before making a decision on which to take through to the next stage of the sales process. We will be continuing our dialogue with the bidders and with Tata while that happens.

This remains, quite rightly, an independent commercial process. It is not the Government's job to pick a winner or to back a specific bid. What we can do is listen to Tata, listen to the bidder and work with everyone involved to remove potential barriers to a sale. For example, we are today launching a consultation on options to deliver clarity and security for British Steel pension scheme members. This follows representations from the trustees of the scheme itself and from Tata.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and his team for all their hard work in making this consultation happen. The House will appreciate that commercial confidentiality stops me offering a running commentary on the sales process itself. Indeed, all the bidders have signed a non-disclosure agreement. However, I will continue to update the House on progress whenever it is appropriate to do so, and to work around the clock to support British steelmaking and British steel workers.

That support has already seen tens of millions of pounds of compensation paid to energy-intensive industries, which will exempt them from new renewable policy costs. It has seen us become the first Government to score and focusing on what really matters, we are together forging a secure and sustainable future for British steelmaking. I commend this statement to the House.

12.9 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement and for advance sight of it. I am surprised that he failed to mention any of the details of the consultation paper on pensions that his Government published today.

I agree with the Secretary of State's assessment of the importance of our steel industry to the UK economy. No one who saw the steelworkers march through London yesterday can fail to be moved by the sight of a dedicated and skilled workforce fighting for their industry. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's trip to Mumbai, along with the First Minister of Wales, to meet the Tata board yesterday—his direct engagement with the board is better late than never. I also welcome his confirmation that Tata is acting as a responsible seller. That is vital for the future of the industry here and I, too, commend Tata for it.

The British Steel pension scheme, especially the liabilities it now brings with it, is clearly an issue that requires resolution. Any resolution must protect the pensions of the scheme's 130,000 beneficiaries, but it must also ensure that it avoids setting a potentially dangerous precedent for the millions of other occupational pensioners who currently enjoy retail prices index indexation rights. I recognise that there are no easy options. I welcome the consultation which has been published today by the Department for Work and Pensions, although the timeframe for responses is very short and the document has been published on the last day before a recess.

The suggested move from the RPI to the consumer prices index for the British Steel pension scheme risks setting a very worrying precedent for other occupational schemes. As the House will know, this change is currently illegal. Why has the Secretary of State said nothing about the details of the consultation he has published today? Can he now say a little more? Is there agreement across Government on the principle of the change to sections 67 and 68 of the Pensions Act 1995, which would reduce indexation from RPI to CPI for this scheme?

What assurance can the Secretary of State give me that this proposed change will not be extended to other occupational schemes? Can this change be sensibly and safely ring-fenced? If not, the position is very difficult. What guarantees can the Secretary of State give the House on the future management of the British Steel pension scheme if such concessions limiting future benefits to pensioners are conceded now, especially on the administrative costs and the charges of the scheme going forward? Are there any other options that were considered by the Secretary of State but not included in the consultation, such as safeguarding the scheme on the public books, as was done with the postal scheme and the mineworkers?
Finally, has the Secretary of State considered the effect on the incentive to save for the wider workforce if accrued pension rights can be arbitrarily reduced in this way, as the consultation paper suggests?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and questions. She mentioned the demonstration yesterday. She is right that it reminds us that ultimately this is all about people. I was pleased to note that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise attended that demonstration, alongside the Leader of the Opposition—two unlikely bedfellows but united in this cause to find a long-term sustainable future for our steel industry.

The hon. Lady, understandably, focused her questions on the pension scheme. I will answer as many of her questions as I can and provide more detail. I note that she is a former Pensions Minister herself and I take very seriously what she says. She has a great deal of experience in this area. While the consultation continues, I would be more than pleased to sit down with her and her colleagues and discuss matters in more detail, as I know will my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of time. It is a four-week consultation, as I think she knows, but time is of the essence. The steel industry is in a very difficult state. As I mentioned in my statement, Tata is looking to secure a sale as soon as possible. It has been responsible with the timeframe so far, but I hope the hon. Lady understands and agrees that timing is very important. With the timeframe that has been set for the consultation, I hope we have plenty of time to consider all the stakeholders that have responded.

On the consultation itself, one of the first important points to make is that it is the scheme’s trustees who have asked us to look at current legislation, because they believe that changes would lead to better outcomes for their members. So this is a product of the scheme trustees approaching us directly. Under the scheme’s current rules, they have the ability to make all the changes that they have proposed, but they are prevented, rightly, by legislation—the Pensions Act 1995. They have asked us whether we would consider removing that portion of the Act in the case of their scheme, and their scheme only.

It is clear from the consultation document—it was clear already—that the scheme is in deficit, so it is very unlikely that any situation can come about where, unless some of those changes are made, the scheme can be prevented from entering the Pension Protection Fund. That is not to say that there is any issue with the PPF; it is one of the strongest backbones of our pensions system. It is envied around the world and it provides an excellent safety net for so many people, but the scheme trustees have put forward this proposal and it is only right that we consider it.

I will not go into detail about how the proposal, if it were taken forward, would affect certain groups of members, but it is very important to emphasise that if the proposal were implemented it would not be the Government making any changes; those would be something that the scheme wanted to do because it believed that it would mean that in almost every case its members would be either better off or no worse off. That is the belief of the scheme trustees and it will be tested by the Pensions Regulator.

It is worth highlighting the fact that the Government have not made any decision. We are considering the pension trustees’ proposal. It is right to consider this and to consult widely, and for the Government to determine later whether it is the right thing to do.

**Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con):** I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement about the possibility of Tata Steel being bought and carrying on as a business. That is very similar to Courtaulds, which closed down in my constituency yesterday. There are people looking to buy the business, keep it running and keep 320 people employed. May I have an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss that?

**Sajid Javid:** I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. This is an incredibly sensitive issue, which must be handled with extreme care. That is why I am disappointed that there was not more detail in the statement today. It raises more questions than it answers. We wish to see the Government act where they can, and as quickly as they can, to support and save the UK steel industry. As I have said on so many occasions in this House, we on the SNP Benches are keen to support steel communities represented across this House.

As the shadow Secretary of State said, we are concerned that the proposal could set a dangerous precedent that undermines workplace pensions and incentives to save in order to secure dignity in retirement. Roy Rickhuss, general secretary of Community, said this morning that the union was not “taking anything off the table”, but that it was important “that any change in the law to save steelworkers’ pensions would not have an adverse impact on other pension schemes.” Mark Turner of Unite made similar comments this morning. That is why the SNP believes that it would be highly inappropriate for the UK Government to push the proposal through without further careful consideration.

In that vein, what discussions has the Minister had with the unions and others in the industry? How will the scheme work? How will pensioners currently in the scheme be affected? Will there be a disadvantage for future scheme members? Will he commit to set aside more time in this House so that all the issues can be teased out and discussed in a timeous fashion to support the industry and to ensure there are no wider unintended consequences?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He quoted Roy Rickhuss, the leader of the Community union. Roy is right—we need to tread carefully. This is a very important issue and it is right, as the hon. Gentleman said, that we do not set any precedents that the House may later come to regret. At the same time, it is also right that we listen to the trustees, and indeed the unions and Tata itself, on this proposal and consider it very carefully. I am sure the House will have more time to look at it in more detail, and there is a lot more information in the consultation that has just been published. I understand that the hon. Gentleman may not have had enough time to look at that just yet, but the consultation period will give us the time we need to look at the issue very carefully.
Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome the Work and Pensions Secretary’s rhetoric in today’s written statement, when he says: “Britain’s steel industry is an important part of our economy and this Government is working to help the industry secure a long-term viable future.”

However, may I push the Business Secretary on the risk that steps that are taken could set a dangerous precedent, whereby companies abdicate their responsibilities to the members of their pension schemes? So is this deal purely for steel, or are the Government extending it to other strategically important sectors of the economy or to companies that are identified as crucial to the UK? Is the Government’s preferred option the precedent of the Royal Mail scheme in 2012 in distinguishing between past and future service contributions to members’ pensions in the steel industry?

Sajid Javid: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s comments. First, there is no deal, and there is no preferred option; this is a very open consultation. As he will see, there are a number of options the Government are looking at, but no decision has been made. As I mentioned earlier, we are very wary of setting a precedent. I can assure him that this is very much about this scheme, and this scheme only, in these very unique circumstances.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): As Ministers know, those of us who recently visited the Tata site in Corby with the Business Minister had a very good discussion about what the future holds for it. We heard about the time and investment that are needed to see the plan through. As part of his discussions not only with potential buyers but in Mumbai, has the Secretary of State had any indication that the investment we so desperately need in Corby will be forthcoming?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Of course, he is rightly concerned about Corby and about the operations Tata Steel UK has in his constituency. There is a lot in this process that is commercially sensitive, and it would not be appropriate for me to discuss it in public. However, seven bidders have already come forward. A number have put forward much more detailed, serious bids, and Tata is seriously considering them. Many of them include a future for all the operations that Tata Steel UK currently has.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for what he is doing to try to save this valuable industry, but I would just add—I say this as a pension fund member myself, albeit a small one—that I am slightly concerned by these proposals, so I hope we will proceed with great caution and with thought for all those who are likely to be seriously affected by them.

Sajid Javid: Many members of the pension scheme may well be concerned, and that is why it is absolutely right that they have full information from the Government in the consultation. I understand that the chairman of the trustees has today welcomed the Government’s move, but, at the same time, he has said that the trustees themselves will write to all the members. I welcome my hon. Friend’s recognition that this is all about not only getting the best outcome for the members but sustaining the long-term future of our great steel industry.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome the Work and Pensions Secretary’s rhetoric in today’s written statement, when he says: “Britain’s steel industry is an important part of our economy and this Government is working to help the industry secure a long-term viable future.”

However, may I push the Business Secretary on the risk that steps that are taken could set a dangerous precedent, whereby companies abdicate their responsibilities to the members of their pension schemes? So is this deal purely for steel, or are the Government extending it to other strategically important sectors of the economy or to companies that are identified as crucial to the UK? Is the Government’s preferred option the precedent of the Royal Mail scheme in 2012 in distinguishing between past and future service contributions to members’ pensions in the steel industry?

Sajid Javid: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s comments. First, there is no deal, and there is no preferred option; this is a very open consultation. As he will see, there are a number of options the Government are looking at, but no decision has been made. As I mentioned earlier, we are very wary of setting a precedent. I can assure him that this is very much about this scheme, and this scheme only, in these very unique circumstances.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): As Ministers know, those of us who recently visited the Tata site in Corby with the Business Minister had a very good discussion about what the future holds for it. We heard about the time and investment that are needed to see the plan through. As part of his discussions not only with potential buyers but in Mumbai, has the Secretary of State had any indication that the investment we so desperately need in Corby will be forthcoming?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Of course, he is rightly concerned about Corby and about the operations Tata Steel UK has in his constituency. There is a lot in this process that is commercially sensitive, and it would not be appropriate for me to discuss it in public. However, seven bidders have already come forward. A number have put forward much more detailed, serious bids, and Tata is seriously considering them. Many of them include a future for all the operations that Tata Steel UK currently has.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Although the House is naturally concentrating on steel jobs and steel pensions, the Secretary of State must be aware that there are thousands of other schemes containing millions and millions of members, that are equally difficultly placed at the current time, and I am sure he will find it difficult to gate this to just one scheme. Therefore, may I make a plea that, when we return from our short break, we have an opportunity to discuss the longer-term repercussions of the announcement he has made today so that there can be a feeling in the House as to what the next moves might be to defend what has been one of the great successes of the welfare state—occupational pensions?

Sajid Javid: I always listen carefully to what the Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee has to say, particularly on this type of issue, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss this further. He makes a very important point: this should not be seen as a general look at pensions rules. We are lucky, as a country, to have a very robust pension system; when things do go wrong, there is a lifeboat that works. However, as I said earlier, this is very much about this scheme, although I would be happy to discuss this further with him.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The Secretary of State’s consultation represents an important potential point-of-principle change. Will he tell the House whether the change to indexation alone will put the fund into surplus? If the fund is still in deficit after this change, is there not a possibility that a future PPF referral will mean a double whammy for the workforce?

Sajid Javid: The pension trustees believe that their proposal will move the scheme into surplus and make it stable. However, it is worth emphasising that the Pensions Regulator will be very much involved. If this actually did go ahead, the Pensions Regulator would rightly have to be satisfied with it, and there would also have to be a number of other safeguards.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): There has been speculation in the media that Tata Steel may in fact decide to retain the business. Will the Secretary of State explain what role Tata Steel would play in dealing with the pension scheme if that were to happen?

Sajid Javid: There is all sorts of speculation on this issue in the press, but what I can tell the hon. Gentleman, who has been very committed to this process—we have discussed it in person a number of times—is that Tata remains committed and very focused on the sales process. As I mentioned earlier, there are seven potential bidders. The next step is to narrow the field—that is important—so that we can all focus, along with Tata, on the most credible bids. The Government stand ready to work with those bidders.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): There is concern on both sides of the House about what would happen if the pension scheme was changed for Tata Steel. However, would not the sale be more attractive if we went to the root of the problem—the dumping of Chinese steel? Why can we not follow the example of the President of the United States, who has just put tariffs of 588% on Chinese steel?
Sajid Javid: Tariffs do have a role to play where there is evidence of unfair trade. The good news is that, where that evidence has come up, we have worked with our colleagues in the EU—and my hon. Friend’s colleagues in the EU—and been able to take action. In almost every case where a tariff has been introduced, it has resulted in a fall in Chinese imports of almost 90%. That shows us that the process is effective.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My father-in-law is a British Steel pensioner. What does the Secretary of State believe will happen regarding the recent deals with Liberty and Greybull if the British Steel pension has to be absorbed into the Pension Protection Fund? Will he also remind the House how much money the Treasury has already made as a result of the state taking over the miners pension fund and receiving half the surpluses every year?

Sajid Javid: If this pension fund ended up in the PPF, the outcome would be different depending on the particular circumstances of this group of members. Where those members are existing pensioners—they are receiving their pension already—they would typically continue to get 100% of their pension, but the indexation would change to the statutory minima, which is typically CPI.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I know from my discussions with Ministers about the future of the Scunthorpe works that the Government have been grappling with the issue of business rate support for the industry. Is the Minister able to advise and update us on any progress that has been made on additional relief?

Sajid Javid: Business rates are an important component of costs for many industries. The Government have already taken action. In the last Budget, we announced that business rates would be indexed to CPI rather than RPI; by 2020, that will save business £370 million. Regarding steel, there are specific proposals. While we do keep these things under review, we are also very much focused on many other ways in which we can help the industry.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State or the scheme trustees had any preliminary discussions with the Pensions Regulator about this potentially very risky and precedent-setting proposal?

Sajid Javid: Business for Work and other Ministers. That underlines the fact that if any of the proposals in this consultation went ahead, it would require the full support of the Pensions Regulator in the UK. My hon. Friend will know that, for example, we have talked about helping with financing on commercial terms, with potentially hundreds of millions of pounds of financing, including a potential equity investment, on commercial terms, of up to 25%.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): In Scotland, the Tata plant in my constituency, Dalzell works, has already been sold on, but current and former steelworkers in Motherwell and Wishaw will rightly be concerned about their pensions, now frozen in the Tata scheme. Will the Secretary of State provide assurances as quickly as possible to my constituents that their future pensions are secure?

Sajid Javid: It is important that the hon. Lady knows that no pensions are frozen. The scheme is working as it should. The reason this consultation has come about is that, as I have said, the scheme trustees believe that this may lead to a better outcome for all members, including her constituents.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement. What assurances can he give the House that in his able work to aid the steel crisis, the crucial principles that members should always have the final say, and that employer pension promises, once made, should always be delivered, are protected?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that. Of course, we must do everything we can to maintain integrity in our overall pension system. In this particular case, it is important to examine carefully the trustee’s belief that exploring some of the alternatives laid out in the consultation would be a better outcome for their members than the alternative.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that the last Tory Government to deal with a major occupational fund was the Major Government way back in 1994, when they privatised all the pits and then did a deal with the detested Union of Democratic Mineworkers in order to get the thing on the pension fund settled? The result was chaos, and the net result was even worse after that, because it meant that the Government were able to get their hands on billions of pounds from the miners pension fund, and then at the end, when me and my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) were calling for a little bit of state aid to save the last remaining pits, that lousy, rotten Government would not find a penny.

Sajid Javid: I am not sure that has anything to do with today’s statement.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I know that the Secretary of State and the Business Minister will do all they can to secure as many jobs as possible and to make sure that the pension scheme pays out to as many as possible, but will he assure us that whatever deal is done, it will be sustainable and we will not be back here in two years’ time facing the same challenges in the steel industry?

Sajid Javid: I can assure my hon. Friend that no deal has been done. This consultation is about exploring options that have been brought to us by the trustees, and its right that we look at that. As a further assurance,
I can tell him that the regulator would have to be involved, as well as a number of other safeguards, if we went ahead.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I appreciate that the timescale in this consultation has to be short, but will the Government commit to publishing a full impact assessment on what this means for people? My constituents have suffered so much in the past six months, and if they get another kicking like this, it will be absolutely disgraceful. The Government have acted shamefully on the British steel industry—please, please look at what the impact of this will be.

Sajid Javid: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. Rightly, many people, including her constituents, will want to know what impact this could have. I think they would equally want to compare it with the alternative as well, and judge for themselves whether they would better off with the proposal from the trustees. There is a lot more information in the consultation document, but I am sure that over the next few weeks more will be available.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend. As these important discussions about the pensions continue, will he assure me that all the rest of the work to support the steel industry continues? With that in mind, may I congratulate him on his announcement on rolling out the guidance on procurement practice to the whole public sector, and ask what he is doing to ensure that UK steel companies are aware of bidding opportunities and are best placed to win contracts?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I can absolutely assure her that we continue with the rest of the work, which began a long time ago, including on energy costs, emissions regulations and unfair trading, but of course on procurement as well. One of the streams on procurement, as she suggested, is ensuring our procurement pipeline. Over the next five years we have the biggest infrastructure pipeline of any Government, and that is well known to all steel suppliers and producers.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I acknowledge that the Secretary of State and the Business Minister have both visited Stocksbridge, and they will now fully understand that the plant makes some of the very best steel in the world. On that basis, it is really important that we have a responsible buyer for the business. Will the Secretary of State give further details of the timetable, which would be an indicator that Tata is committed to finding a responsible buyer, and tell us how the pensions consultation timetable fits into the overall timetable for the sale of the Tata UK holdings?

Sajid Javid: I enjoyed my visit last week to Stocksbridge in the hon. Lady’s constituency, where I could see for myself just what a strong and valuable business it is. I agree with her comments about the business. In terms of the timetable, I mentioned earlier that Tata itself wants a swift process, but it has not set out a specific timetable. That is good, because there is some flexibility in that. The pensions consultation is a four-week consultation. If the Government were to take any of the proposals forward—again, I stress that it is an “if”—it will be based on the evidence that is returned in the consultation. Then we would want to make sure that it is done as quickly as possible in order to help the sales process.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I understand that there are a number of credible bidders in the sale process. Are there options for those bidders to work in partnership to help to seek solutions for the pension scheme and for the UK steel industry more widely?

Sajid Javid: Seven bidders have expressed interest so far, and that field will now be narrowed down—I cannot tell my hon. Friend exactly to how many, because I do not know at this stage. Where there are bidders that may want to work together, I am confident that Tata will take that seriously.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): What ongoing discussions has the Secretary of State had with his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence about protecting the steelmakers and processes involved in the Successor programmes, such as Sheffield Forgemasters in Sheffield? These are important not just for the UK economy but for the ability of this country to provide an independent nuclear deterrent.

Sajid Javid: There have been regular meetings with our colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and with the companies, including Sheffield Forgemasters, that specialise in some of the steel that is required for our defence purposes. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that, for example, the new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers will use some 95,000 tonnes of British steel.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): While words of support from Labour Members are always welcome, has the Secretary of State made an assessment of the impact that the climate change levy introduced by Gordon Brown has had on the steel industry? What steps are the Government taking to support other energy-intensive industries such as the china clay industry that is so important to my constituency?

Sajid Javid: That is an important point: energy costs are important for all energy-intensives, including steel, ceramics and many other industries. We have already introduced compensation for the green policy costs to industry, and that already saves the steel industry, including Tata Steel, £80 million, and we are now moving further towards an exemption, which could save another £400 million by the end of this Parliament.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): As well as yesterday’s march, Nissan held an event in Parliament celebrating the excellence of the supply chain, which includes the Zodiac line in Llanwern, and highlighting the skill and dedication of the workforce. In these difficult times, will the Secretary of State be specific about what Ministers are doing to ensure that customer confidence is being maintained?

Sajid Javid: Unfortunately I missed that exhibition because I was not here, but my right hon. Friend the small business Minister attended it and I agree with the
hon. Lady about the Zodiac line’s importance to our excellent automotive industry. We have been in touch with Nissan and, indeed, all our other major auto producers, as well as many other companies that rely on British steel, particularly from Tata’s operations. We have been making sure that they have confidence in the sales process so that they can be secure that the supply will be there for the long term.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the small business Minister for all the work they continue to do on this matter. I want to raise the question I raised last year about problems with the quality of imported steel, particularly in the construction industry. What work is the Department continuing to do on that?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. British steel is known for its quality worldwide, not just at home. There have been cases where companies have come to regret some of the steel they have imported. It is important that the Government continue to play a role, alongside the industry, to highlight that.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): The Secretary of State speaks of urgency when it comes to the pension consultation, but does he agree that if he had acted with urgency years ago, when we raised the underlying problems, we would not be in the desperate situation we are in now?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady is right to mention urgency, and that is why this Government are acting as quickly as they can. To be fair, she should speak to her party leadership and ask why, in the last Parliament, the then Leader of the Opposition, shadow Chancellor and shadow Business Secretary did not use the word “steel” once in the House of Commons.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s efforts to save as many steel jobs as possible, and he obviously also has to look at the pension funds. Would any prospective change to pensions legislation include a ballot of scheme members so that they could give their approval?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Under the current scheme rules, the trustees have the right to make the changes they have proposed, but what is preventing them from doing so is legislation. When the trustees discuss the issue and communicate with their members, it is important that they provide full information.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The Secretary of State mentioned the support of the First Minister and the trade unions. Likewise, Plaid Cymru is resolute in its support of the steel industry; in fact, we proposed some practical and detailed measures that would have supported them it many weeks ago. However, does he accept that our support is contingent on the pensions of current steelworkers and steel pensioners not being affected?

Sajid Javid: If the consultation proposals do not go ahead—it is important to note that the Government have not made a decision—it is very likely that the scheme will end up in the Pension Protection Fund, because of the size of its deficit. Of course, we and officials are happy to discuss the issue in more detail with the hon. Gentleman, but when he makes his determination I urge him to keep in mind what the alternative might be.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement and the actions that have been taken so far. He will be aware, however, that this is not the only industry or business where the company is in distress and pensions are affected. The BHS situation, for instance, affects employees in my constituency. Will he, therefore, confirm that this proposal is being considered only because of the desperate need to save jobs in the steel industry, and that any changes would apply purely to the company in question?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have excellent protection for pensions when things go wrong in this country. We can all be proud of that. I think that we all agree that this is a unique situation. The Government said that we would look at all options and it is right that we have this consultation.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The Secretary of State said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) that this issue was not related to the mineworkers pension scheme, but there are lessons to be learned from it. Members need to understand that in 1994 it was estimated that the Treasury would get £2 billion out of the scheme over 25 years, but it looks like it will get £8 billion over 25 years, when retired miners and miners’ widows are struggling to survive. That is the lesson. What is the Treasury going to take out of the proposal if it is involved? Let us not let what happened in 1994 happen again.

Sajid Javid: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the options that may have been used in the past are not being considered. The consultation document is clear and relates specifically to the British Steel pension scheme.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thousands of members of the pension scheme at the old Round Oak steelworks in my constituency may need a buyer to ensure that we have a stable steel industry, but one of the obstacles to securing such a buyer has been the withdrawal of trade credit insurance over recent weeks. Will the Secretary of State do everything he can to ensure that appropriate guarantees are available?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. The provision of trade credit is a commercial matter for Tata, but I am confident from what I have seen that the company can identify solutions. We are monitoring the situation very closely.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State’s reassurance that Tata remains committed to being a responsible seller. Will he confirm that Tata has responsibilities in relation to the pension scheme and that we will make sure that it delivers on them, in partnership with other stakeholders, in order to deliver the Secretary of State’s stated aspiration that no pensioner will be worse off after the process is completed?
Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the scheme sponsor, Tata Steel UK, has responsibilities to the pension scheme. The reality is that the scheme is in a deficit of depending on how we measure it, anywhere between £700 million and £1.5 billion, and perhaps even higher on a buy-out basis. It is well understood that the company is not able to cover that deficit because of its financial troubles. That is why the scheme trustees have made their proposal, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, while we should not rush to any decision, it is right to consider it.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that paragraphs 141, 142 and 143 of the consultation are clear that, should the Government decide to regulate for change on indexation, revaluation or transfer, and the scheme were then to make a surplus, that surplus would be used in the best interests of members and not transferred out?

Sajid Javid: I can confirm that, should the changes proposed by the trustees take place, whatever surplus or change to the value of the scheme they bring about will be for the benefit of the members and no one else.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): I declare a financial interest for the 30 years I worked in the steel industry and the pension I receive, although it is meagre compared with the amount I will be entitled to next year for 30 years in this House. Should we not recall that steelworkers have served the nation well in an industry that is usually dirty, usually dangerous and always skilled? Is there not something repugnant about expecting pensioners, who have given so much, to pay for this rather than expecting the nation, which owes so much to the steel industry, to do so?

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Gentleman that the steel industry is absolutely vital. It is important for our economic security and our national security, and that is why the Government will do everything we can to find a long-term sustainable solution for Tata’s assets in the UK.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The steel industry has been crying out for the lesser duty rule to be scrapped, but the Government have shown utter reluctance to do that. UK Steel recently brought forward a possible pragmatic solution to the lesser duty issue to change how tariffs are calculated without necessarily scrapping the rule outright. What is the Secretary of State’s response to that proposal?

Sajid Javid: There was a meeting of the EU trade council last week, which the Minister for Trade and Investment attended. We think that improvements could be made to the trade defence mechanisms, particularly around speeding up investigations and reviewing how duties are calculated. We do not think that there is evidence to support changing the lesser duty rule, but further improvements can be made.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Tata Steel products plant in my constituency is part of the sale deal with Greybull. I thank the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise for the meetings she has had and the discussions we have had to secure that site. The workers at the plant are very concerned about their pensions. Some of them have been there for more than 40 years, and they are distressed and worried. They have been loyal employees, and they have given their working life to the plant. Will the Minister assure me that he understands how worried they are, and will he give them an assurance that they will get their full pensions?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady rightly refers to the hard work of the steelworkers—those in the industry now and those who have worked for it in the past—in this pension scheme. It is absolutely right that we listen to the trustees and see whether there is anything that the Government can do to bring about a better outcome. That is why we have announced the consultation. I am sure that when the hon. Lady has had time to go through it in detail, we will be able to speak further about the best way to take that forward.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): What consideration have the Government given to the impact that steel industry problems will have on the manufacturing industry and the economy across these islands and particularly in Northern Ireland, where rolled steel and other products are imported through Warrenpoint harbour and docks in my constituency?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady highlights the importance of the steel industry to manufacturing in the UK, whether it is our auto industry or our aerospace industry, and to the infrastructure needs of this country. That is one reason why we are doing everything we can to help.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): May I thank the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise for coming to visit Outokumpu and representatives of Forgemasters in my constituency, and for enabling my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and me to join in the conversation? That was really helpful. For the future not merely of Tata but of firms such as Forgemasters and Outokumpu, when are the Government going to act to take away from them the unfair burden of having to pay 85% more for their energy than do their competitors in Germany?

Sajid Javid: Again, the issue of energy comes up in the House, and hon. Members are right to raise it. That is why we have taken action with the compensation scheme, which is now effective and which is helping all steelmaking companies, including Outokumpu, and that is why we are going further with the exemption. We keep the matter continually under review.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): There are 133,000 members of this pension scheme, and I should say that they include many of my constituents, and my father. Given the enormous amount of work that so many people have put into their pensions, does the Secretary of State agree that even though time is extremely short in this four-week consultation, in order to be fair to all those people it must be as wide as possible and consider both the short-term and the long-term effects?
Sajid Javid: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have explained the sense of urgency in finding a credible buyer for Tata’s steel business in the UK. He is absolutely right to stress that the consultation should be wide-reaching and that we should make sure that it brings out the fullest information possible so that when a decision is made, it is made with all that information in mind.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Recently, Conservative MEPs were split over granting the Chinese Government market economy status. Can the Minister confirm for the House whether the Government’s position is still to grant market economy status?

Sajid Javid: The EU Commission is doing a detailed assessment of the question of market economy status for China. We await the outcome of that, and then we will respond. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman that even if China was granted market economy status, it would not prevent us from taking action on tariffs.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We ought to remind ourselves what pensions are: deferred income. I have some concerns when I hear the Business Secretary talking about a scheme that could go from a deficit of £750 million to one of £1.5 million and end up, as a consequence of the proposed changes, in surplus. We should recall that that is cash that should go to pensioners. Before the House votes on the matter, as it will have to do, we need the full actuarial assumptions so that we can understand the implications. We need to have a proper and thorough debate on the matter and consider the consequences for other occupational pension schemes. These issues are very serious and must be debated fully.

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Much more information needs to be available on any proposal that is brought to the House. As I say, the Government have not made a decision on this, but I think it is entirely responsible of the Government to listen to what the trustees have to say at this point—after all, they are legally responsible and have fiduciary responsibility for all their members—and to put these proposals in the consultation. Before action, if any, is taken, there needs to be a lot more information.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The steel industry would not be in the state it is in were it not for dumped Chinese steel. Does the Minister personally back market economy status for China, which could make the problem much worse?

Sajid Javid: It is fair for the hon. Gentleman to raise the issue of Chinese steel, because we have all seen the massive increase in Chinese output of steel over the last decade, but it would be wrong for Members to assume that that is the only issue facing the industry. Regarding market economy status, as I mentioned, a review is being conducted by the Commission. Once it has reported, we will consider it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): The penultimate choice: Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Five years ago, I asked the Prime Minister at Prime Minister’s Question Time whether he understood that the Chancellor—he is just taking his seat—“unilaterally setting the minimum price for carbon in Britain will drive out inward investors such as Tata Steel” in Swansea Bay. He responded: “I will of course listen to the hon. Gentleman, but I think that Ratan Tata knows a bit more about his business than he does.”—[Official Report, 30 March 2011; Vol. 526, c. 338.]

Having failed Tata, will the Secretary of State now promise, first, fully to fund the pension fund, indexed to RPI, so that we do not short-change pensioners or cause contagion in the pension industry; and, secondly, to ensure a 25% Government share for the long run so that investors, whether Tata or others, have confidence investing in the future?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the Secretary of State.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of energy costs. He should bear it in mind that although it is an important component of steelmaking, the total cost is often in the low single digits. Of course, that does not make it unimportant, and that is why we have taken action. We have introduced compensation and we are moving towards exemption, which will help.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Last but certainly not least, Madeleine Moon.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Talking to steelworkers yesterday, I heard over and over again how highly skilled members of the workforce were being poached by other industries. Does the Secretary of State appreciate the importance of maintaining the confidence of the skilled workforce in the steel industry? Perhaps one way he could do that would be to give an assurance today that public sector contracts will always specify a high percentage of British-made steel.

Sajid Javid: I hope the hon. Lady will agree that the Government have done a great deal to bring confidence to the sales process through changes in procurement, where for the first time we have allowed for economic and social factors to be taken into account when making those decisions. In addition, I think that what the Government have said about helping with finance on commercial terms has helped to provide confidence to the industry.
Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Have you had any notice about whether a Communities and Local Government Minister intends to make a statement on devolution to a combined authority in East Anglia? As we speak, the chief executive of Adnams brewery and Lord Heseltine are shuttling around the three counties of East Anglia offering jobs, offering budgets, getting rid of public bodies and, in short, rearranging this country’s constitutional settlement on the hoof. Is it not incumbent on Ministers to explain to the House what changes are envisaged and to demonstrate that there is proper accountability for such decisions in respect of existing and future legislation?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I have just checked, so I can say that we have received no notice—

[Interuption.]

The hon. Gentleman might be interested to hear the response, although I presume he knows it already. I assure him that we have had no notification at this stage. Nothing has been received by the Clerk or the Speaker’s Office. I can, however, tell him that Government Front Benchers are all ears and will be taking that point away. It is certainly now on the record.

Let us see whether we can now make some progress.

Debate on the Address

[6TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 25 May).

Question again proposed.

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

The Economy and Work

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendment (e) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and amendments (c) and (d), which will be moved formally at the end of the debate.

1.1 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (e), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to deliver for working people, to protect public services and to address the black hole in the public finances; further regret that the Government’s economic policy has unfairness at its core and includes tax cuts for the wealthy while failing to deal with inequality; regret the refusal of the Scottish Government to use its new tax powers to put an end to austerity in Scotland; regret that the Government is presiding over the worst decade for pay growth in nearly a century; call on the Government to adopt Labour’s Fiscal Credibility Rule to invest in a sustainable economy for the future and to adopt Labour’s Tax Transparency Enforcement Programme to tackle tax avoidance; regret that the Government has failed to defend the UK steel industry, believe the Government should reform the lesser duty rule and call on the Government to give Parliament a vote on giving China market economy status and to adopt Labour’s 4 Point Plan to save the steel industry as a part of a long-term industrial strategy; further call on the Government to reverse the cuts to Universal Credit work allowances; and call on the Government to abandon its misguided proposals to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998.”.

I rise to speak to the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, myself and several colleagues.

Last week was the first time I had actually visited the other place to listen to Her Majesty read the Queen’s Speech. Usually, I avoid the crush and stay here to have a chat with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). I have to say that my admiration for the Queen was immensely increased by her ability to keep a straight face while reading the fictional drivel that is called the Queen’s Speech.

The Queen’s Speech before us demonstrates conclusively the massive distance between the Chancellor and the real world. It opened with an extraordinary piece of doublespeak. The Government apparently think we live in a “strengthening economy”. They are seemingly not paying attention to their own statistics and their own forecasts. After precipitating the slowest recovery in modern British history, the Chancellor is now presiding over a recovery built on sand. Business investment has slumped again—by 0.5% in the first quarter, according to this morning’s figures—and the Office for Budget
Responsibility’s most recent forecasts are for downward revisions in business investment across the life of this Parliament. Consumer debt is rising at record rates, and is forecast to remain at unprecedented levels. The current account deficit has reached record highs. We are borrowing more than ever before from the rest of the world as a result. We are not, as the Queen’s Speech claimed “living within our means”—far from it, on the Government’s own figures.

Productivity has slumped under this Government. The gap between what the average hour worked in Britain produces and what the average hour worked in the US, France or Germany produces is bigger than it has been for a generation. Every hour worked in Germany produces one third more, on average, than it does here. Low productivity is the sign of a weakened, damaged economy. It means lower wages and more insecurity. The slump that has occurred in productivity has been far worse in this country under this Chancellor than in any comparable G7 economy. It is what has caused the Office for Budget Responsibility to revise its future forecasts downwards.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend accept that in the 10 years of the Labour Government to 2008—pre-crisis—the economy grew by 40% and that, after the banking crash, we left debt at 55% of the economy in 2010, a figure that is now 83%? Does that not show a failure to grow the economy effectively or to manage productivity?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I just say to the hon. Gentleman that he has already tested the patience of the House and should not continue to do so? I care about colleagues on both sides of this House and will make sure that everybody gets in, so—unfortunately—interventions must be very short. The list of speakers is very long, and I do not want any Members to miss out.

John McDonnell: I do not want to be discourteous to any Members, but as you suggest, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take only a limited number of interventions.

On the crash, let us be clear—[Interruption.] Well, let us talk about the crash. The policy of deregulating the banking system, turning the City of London into a casino, was the policy pursued by the Conservative Government for the previous 30 years.

Let us move on to the criterion of growth. Growth has been revised downwards for every year for the rest of this decade, and when the OBR revised its forecasts downwards, the Chancellor’s entire Budget plan was shot to pieces. He has been left with a £4.8 billion black hole of committed spending, but there is no committed funding. It is nonsensical to claim, as the Government’s Queen’s Speech did, that the public finances are being placed on a “secure footing” when there are gaping holes in the Budget and the Institute for Fiscal Studies thinks there is only a 50:50 chance of meeting the Government’s own fiscal surplus target. This is betting the nation’s finances on the equivalent of tossing a coin. There is nothing responsible and there is nothing “secure”, in setting unrealistic and politically motivated targets for public spending cuts.

It is useless to preach to us about the need for a “stronger economy” when, by his actions in office for six years, the Chancellor has methodically undermined the economy. This was his choice. Austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity. We all now live and are still living with its consequences. Because it was the wrong choice to make, the Chancellor has failed, and it is the British people who are bearing the cost.

The Chancellor has piled failure upon failure, but at the centre of it all is the failure to sustain productivity. Productivity is the key to growth in any modern economy and the surest way to achieve increased productivity is through increased investment. Increased investment means installing new equipment and replacing old infrastructure, yet business investment remains weak. When business investment is weak, the Government should step up to make sure vital, world-class infrastructure is provided—from high-speed rail to high-speed broadband. There is now consensus from the International Monetary Fund to the OECD, and from the CBI to the TUC, in urging Governments—not just in this country but across the world—about the need to invest in the future, but this Government are clinging to their fiscal surplus target, which is set actually to cut real-terms Government investment over the course of this Parliament. Mr Deputy Speaker, you could not imagine a more perverse and inadequate economic policy.

Behind the failure to invest lies the failure of our economic institutions. Too many of them have been captured by special interests or place short-term gain ahead of long-term growth. We have major corporations, which are sitting on a cash pile of up to £700 billion, paying out high salaries to senior executives while failing to invest. It is no wonder that in the past month we have seen a series of shareholders revolts against the remuneration packages of some chief executives.

We have a Business Department that does not actually believe in supporting business and refuses even to mention the words “industrial strategy”. In Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, we have a department for tax collection that does not believe in collecting taxes—not, at least, from major corporations. That was demonstrated by the fact that when it struck a deal with Google that reflected an effective tax rate in single digits, the Chancellor culls it a “major success”. I have written to the Chancellor to make sure he urgently contacts the French authorities, so that any information they find during their investigation into Google’s Paris headquarters is shared with us to give us a better understanding of Google’s operations in the UK.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us exactly how much money was raised from Google when Labour was last in power?

John McDonnell: It is interesting to note that the inquiry into Google was started under the Labour Government. It is also interesting that the last assessment that was made, not by us but by the Financial Times—an independent organisation—said that the measures introduced by that Labour Government would reap tax rewards 10 times greater than anything introduced by this Government. After six years, the Chancellor has no one to blame but himself.

The Queen’s Speech furnished us with plenty more unreal promises. The Government say that they “will support aspiration and promote home ownership”.

733 734 26 MAY 2016  Debate on the Address 734
Tell that to the hundreds of thousands of our young people who now have no serious chance of ever owning a home of their own. Home ownership has fallen to its lowest level in decades on this Chancellor’s watch. Rough sleeping has risen in London by 30% in the past year, the biggest rise since the current reporting procedures were introduced. Nearly 70,000 families are now living in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation. Nine in 10 under-35s on modest incomes could be frozen out of home ownership by 2025 according to independent analysis.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): That phenomenon is not just happening in London; we now have tents in the streets of Manchester. Is that not a shocking indictment of this Government’s housing policy?

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): It is a shocking indictment of a Labour council.

John McDonnell: I have a Conservative council. In my constituency tonight I will have possibly 200 families living in bed and breakfasts. There are individuals sleeping in our parks and along the canals. In my constituency, we have reinvented the back-to-back, where one family rents the front of a house and another rents the back. We have beds in sheds rented to families. It is a disgrace. This Government have been in power for six years and homelessness has escalated.

According to the Queen’s Speech, the Government will “spread economic prosperity”. Tell that to the steelworkers I met in Redcar, where the Government failed even to mothball the plant to save their local futures. Tell that to the British Home Stores workers facing redundancy as their boss, Sir Philip Green—a Government adviser—stripped their business clean.

In the Queen’s Speech the Government said they will “continue to support the… Northern Powerhouse.” That will be why they are closing its Sheffield office and threatening another six offices across the north with closure. That will be why, of the top 15 infrastructure projects with the most public funding, one is in the north.

In the Queen’s Speech, the Government say not that they will tackle poverty and deprivation, but that they will redefine them. The Chancellor’s shameful response to the 1 million people using our food banks every year is to “introduce new indicators for measuring life chances”.

His failed austerity programme has a human cost, with 500,000 more children in this country forced into poverty and nearly 13 million people now living in poverty. More than half of those people are in work. This Queen’s Speech offers no solutions to those who have barely enough to feed their families and cannot pay to heat their houses. Instead, the Government will simply make sure that they are counting those people’s misery properly.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Will the shadow Chancellor consider celebrating the fact that one third of the working constituents in Bexhill and Battle are receiving a pay rise because of the national living wage, taking those people off the breadline and further up the pay scale?

John McDonnell: I would celebrate it if it was a real living wage and if many of those people were not also suffering from cuts to universal credit.

The reality is that after six years of desperate efforts to impose cuts on our economy, against the best available advice from the economics profession itself, the Chancellor is staring an entirely predictable failure in the face. He started out with such high-flown promises. There was going to be a “march of the makers”, yet today, manufacturing is still smaller than in 2008. There was going to be a rebalancing of the economy, yet today for every three jobs created in London just one is created in the rest of the country. There was going to be a modernised tax service, but, as the National Audit Office pointed out in a damning report earlier this week, the quality of service at Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs has collapsed in the past year as a result of staffing cuts. He promised increased investment, but he cut Government investment spending and now plans to cut it further. In 2010 he forecast the fastest recovery in living memory, but he has delivered the slowest recovery in modern British history.

Let us talk about job creation. The Chancellor and his Government have, perhaps understandably, clung to the job creation figures. Every month they are greeted with rare enthusiasm by Ministers. The reality is that two thirds of those in poverty—nearly 9 million people—are in work. [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The Treasury Bench does not need to be echoing all the way along. Can we give it a break? The Chancellor will be speaking soon and you will expect me to treat people in the same way. I expect the shadow Chancellor to be heard, not shouted down. [Interruption.] Now, I have been very good so far, but I do not want to hear any more. I am sure that the Whips Office could do with someone to go and make a cup of tea. If they do not want one, I might later.

John McDonnell: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are a class act. The shout was, “Do we welcome the jobs?” Of course we do, but let us be clear: too many of the jobs created since 2010 have been poorly paid and insecure. Some 800,000 people are now on zero-hours contracts. Insecurity at work has been made worse by the undermining of employment rights by the Government. There is no need for that.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Trussell Trust, which provides the food bank in Southwark, is providing food bank support to hundreds of people in work? It estimates that 10% of the people it serves in central London are in work.

John McDonnell: We welcome new jobs, but insecurity and poor pay mean that the numbers in work who are going along to get support from food banks is growing rather than reducing.

Several hon. Members rose—
John McDonnell: I will press on, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I know we are under time pressure.

All this is the direct result of a failure to invest. Too many businesses have substituted cheap labour for expensive investment. To be frank, they cannot be blamed for that, as the Government have set the lead, cutting their own investment spending. Low investment and weak productivity have real-world consequences. They mean talent wasted and opportunities lost. Some people are stretched to breaking point, working long hours just to make ends meet. Others are left to languish, desperately searching for extra hours. Even the Government’s own forecasters do not expect wages to recover before 2020.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: I will in a second. Millions of people are now self-employed, but their average earnings have fallen by 22% since the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) became Chancellor. The Queen’s Speech tells us that the Government plan to create an economy “where work is rewarded.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who work hardest are being punished with cuts to tax credits, but tax dodgers and the super-rich are rewarded with tax cuts.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): On the subject of jobs, the former Leader of the Opposition—he is a proven winner who the shadow Chancellor and the current Leader of the Opposition want back on the Front Bench—said that the Government’s policy would cost 1.2 million jobs. Does the shadow Chancellor concede that that was plain wrong?

John McDonnell: As I said earlier, rather than invest, employers have tried to use cheap labour, and that has had an impact on wages and living conditions, which is unacceptable.

This Government have failed and will continue to fail on every measure they set themselves. They have failed in their target to reduce the debt, on their welfare cap target, and on their target to close the deficit. The Government have lost their way. Gone is the pretence of being the new “workers party”, as was trumpeted so loudly last summer. That disappeared when they started looking for another U-turn to make ends meet. Others are left to languish, desperately searching for extra hours. Even the Government’s own forecasters do not expect wages to recover before 2020.

There is consensus across this House that a strong economy is the foundation on which all else can be built. This Government have not created a strong economy—strong on rhetoric perhaps, and strong on creative accountancy, as the last Budget revealed, but the Chancellor’s economy is a jerry-built structure that rests on a recovery built on sand. The Chancellor has had plenty of opportunities to “fix the roof when the sun was shining”—as he so memorably put it in happier times—but he has simply failed. That would have meant taking a different approach, and we all hope that once the referendum is out of the way, the economy will pick up. Without change, however, the trajectory for our economy is clear.

We are trapped in a low-wage, low-skill, low-investment and low-productivity economy. We need a Government who adopt a sensible and credible fiscal rule, enabling long-term and patient investment in our economy, and we need a Government who use record low interest rates to invest in the future. As a minimum, the Government should now invest in the infrastructure, skills and technology that can help to transform how this economy operates. We need a Government who clamp down on tax avoidance. They could go further and overhaul a tax system that is manifestly failing to levy fair rates on those who can pay the most.

We need a Government with an industrial policy who back the steel industry, and who work with our European partners to clamp down on the flooding of our markets with cheap subsidised Chinese steel. The Government could also seek to transform the institutions that govern our economy, from the Treasury to the great corporations, unlocking potential that is otherwise wasted when vested interests dominate decision-making. The Queen’s Speech was an opportunity for the Government to accept that austerity has failed and to change course, but it was not taken. If the Government cannot write a speech for Her Majesty to undo the damage they have inflicted and set out a confident course for this country’s economy, it is clearly time for Labour to lead the way.

Let us be explicit: Labour rejects the failed and cruel austerity programme adopted by this Government. Instead, working in partnership with business, entrepreneurs and workers, Labour would create an entrepreneurial state to support innovation, create wealth, and drive growth, and we would share the proceeds of that growth fairly. By investing in our economy, Labour would lay the foundations of a new society that is radically fairer, more equal, and more democratic—an alternative based on a prosperous economy that is economically sound, environmentally sustainable, and where such prosperity is shared by all.

1.23 pm

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): On the last day of debate on the Queen’s Speech I rise to support our plan, which offers security and opportunity to working people in this country. That is what the British people entrusted us to deliver in the general election almost exactly a year ago, and that is what we commit to providing in the programme for the coming year.

There is, of course, a bold programme of social reform. We offer the biggest reform of the prison service since the Victorian era, so that we protect the public, and punish wrongdoers while also giving them a chance to rehabilitate themselves and contribute to society. We will overhaul social care and adoption to improve the life chances of some of the most vulnerable young people in our country, and we will continue to improve our education system, raising standards in schools so that our children are equipped with the skills they will need to lead fulfilling lives. We will reform our universities
so that they remain the best in the world, and are agents
for social mobility at the forefront of expanding human
knowledge. We will address the crisis of childhood
obesity that is damaging our children's health and threatens
to overwhelm our health service unless we act with a
new sugar tax on soft drinks. None of those reforms to
improve our healthcare, security and social care would
be possible without the bedrock of financial stability
and prosperity that our long-term economic plan is
delivering.

Geraint Davies: Does the Chancellor accept that if
the best universities raise their prices, the poorest will be
deterred from going? Instead of getting the best students,
we will get the richest, which is simply wrong.

Mr Osborne: I do not agree with that. Evidence
shows that as a result of university reforms introduced
by the Labour Government—which the hon. Gentleman
used to support—and by the coalition Government and
now this Conservative Government, not only are a
record number of students going to our universities, but
a record number of students from disadvantaged
backgrounds are going. I find it extraordinary that a
Labour party that introduced tuition fees is now promising
to scrap them and create a £10 billion hole that will
presumably be filled by taxes that are paid by those who
did not go to university and have lower incomes. That is
the so-called progressive policy of the so-called progressive
Labour party.

Neil Coyle: The Chancellor says he is proud of the
Government's track record on social care. How many
fewer older and disabled people receive social care
services from local authorities now than when he took
office in 2010?

Mr Osborne: We have put more money into social
care, and we have allowed the precept to be applied by
councils, many of which have taken up that option. As a
result, more money will go into social care in the
coming years. That is what we have done, but we could
not do any of those things such as support social care
or universities without a sound economic policy. I listened
in complete incredulity to yet another speech from yet
another shadow Chancellor promising yet more billions
of pounds of spending, borrowing, and extra taxes. It is
as if the scorching experience of the financial crash
eight years ago, and the crippling deficit with which
Labour saddled this country, never happened.

When the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington
(John McDonnell) mentioned the record of the Labour
Government he kept saying, “Up until 2008”; as if he
had forgotten that the biggest crash in modern history
was while the Labour party was in office. It is a bit like
saying to Mrs Lincoln, “Apart from the assassination,
did you enjoy the play?”

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the
Chancellor remind the House of whether he met his
deficit target for 2015?

Mr Osborne: The deficit has come down by another
£16 billion. When I first stood at the Dispatch Box as
Chancellor of the Exchequer we had a budget deficit of
close to 11% of our national income, and £1 in every
£4 that we spent on everything from hospitals to schools
and police had to be borrowed. This year that figure is
projected to be below 3%, and we are projected to have
a surplus by the end of this Parliament.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Will the Chancellor
also remind the House what he has managed to do to
employment rates in this country while cutting the
deficit?

Mr Osborne: A record number of people are in work
and we have created almost 2.5 million jobs in this
economy. Yesterday at the end of my remarks I referred
to a report that the Labour party has produced on its
future. This independent inquiry is chaired by the hon.
Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas). Let us see what Labour says about Labour:

“A tsunami of aspirant voters sank Labour… Voters abandoned Labour because they believed Labour lacked economic credibility… the
perception was that it would be profligate in government… Labour is losing its working-class support… Labour has marched
away from the views of voters… Labour is becoming a toxic
to itself.”

That is the Labour party’s own verdict on the Labour
party. It concludes by saying—

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy
Speaker. Surely this is meant to be a debate about the
Queen’s Speech, not the Labour party?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): How the
Chancellor chooses to use his speech is up to him. I
would have thought that, since it is his Queen’s Speech,
his focus would be on that, but it is up to him.

Mr Osborne: We cannot talk about the Queen’s Speech
unless we know what the alternative might look like.
This is what the Labour party says about itself: it says
the Labour party is becoming increasingly
“irrelevant to the… working people in the country.”

If we think Labour has learned any lessons, this is
what has happened today. The leader of the Labour
party has today appointed someone called Andrew
Fisher as the head of policy for the Labour party. This
is a man who campaigned against Labour candidates at
the general election in Croydon. This is a man who took
part in the 2010 student riots and boasted about breaking
through police lines, scaring the police and hurling
abuse at them. This is what his economic policy consists
of: public ownership of all land in the country; nationalising
all banks; and returning to a three-day week. This is the
man who has just become the Labour party’s head of
policy.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It
is interesting that the Chancellor is talking about Labour’s
future when his own is so shrouded in uncertainty. On
his own record, has debt as a percentage of GDP gone
up or down since he became Chancellor?

Mr Osborne: An 11% budget deficit means the debt is
added to every year. Until the deficit comes right down,
we cannot get the debt down. That is what we are doing
and why we want to avoid an 11% budget deficit.
Another sign of how the Labour party is changing is the motion it is asking us to vote on tonight. It contains an intriguing clause that relates to Scotland. It states that they “regret the refusal of the Scottish Government to use its new tax powers to put an end to austerity in Scotland”.

That is code for Labour wanting to put up taxes in Scotland. If it does not want the Scottish Government to use their tax powers to put up taxes to put an end to austerity in Scotland, how does it propose to do it? Labour fought the election in Scotland proposing a 1p increase in the basic rate of income tax. That was the Scottish Labour party’s policy, which was so successful in that election. Here, the UK Labour party is putting that into a parliamentary motion and asking the Labour party to vote on it tonight. We have a report from the Labour party saying that it is irrelevant to working people; the head of policy wants to nationalise land and return to a three-day week; and the parliamentary Labour party will be voting tonight to increase the basic rate of income tax. That is the state of the Labour party today.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The Chancellor has taken us through what has been happening in the Labour party recently. May I ask him to comment on what has been said about him and his leader by the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who took through welfare reform over the past five years? He called the Prime Minister “dishonest” and the Chancellor a liar and “Pinocchio.” Where does that leave you, Chancellor?

Mr Osborne: We worked together to bring welfare bills down and to make work pay. I am working with the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) to carry on that record in government. We will go on building that strong economy and the sound public finances that underpin a fair society.

Julian Knight: I thank the Chancellor for giving way. He is being most generous. I note that the Chancellor has been reading from the “Labour’s Future” report. I wonder whether he has seen the executive summary, which states: “Labour lost because voters didn’t believe it would cut the deficit. The Tories didn’t win despite their commitment to cut spending and the deficit: they won because of it. The Tories were trusted to manage the country’s finances, Labour was not.”

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If the verdict of this report is that Labour is on life support, the policies of the shadow Chancellor are “do not resuscitate”. That is what he is condemning the Labour party to.

John McDonnell: The right hon. Gentleman is more interested in talking about Labour’s policies than his own. May I remind him that the Tory party just lost every mayoral election in the recent elections?

Mr Osborne: Labour had the worst results for an Opposition party in more than 30 years and were reduced to third place in Scotland. And Labour Members think that that is a good set of results! As far as we are concerned, if they want to carry on in this parallel universe that suits us just fine. Meanwhile, we are going to get on with governing the country, improving the economy and reforming our society.

The Government have made huge progress in the past six years. We inherited one of the weakest economies in the advanced world, which had had one of the biggest crashes. It is now one of the fastest-growing economies in the advanced world. We inherited an economy in which millions of people risked losing their job, and hundreds of thousands had. We now have a record number of people in work. We reduced the budget deficit. Our commitment to the northern powerhouse has seen investment projects in the region increase by 120% in the past two years. The verdict of the IMF in its recent examination of the British economy is clear: “The UK’s recent economic performance has been strong, and considerable progress has been achieved in addressing underlying vulnerabilities.”

It said growth was robust and that “the unemployment rate has fallen substantially, employment has reached an historic high, the fiscal deficit has been reduced, and financial sector resilience has increased.” That is the independent verdict of the IMF. In the past, article IVs have been critical of the British economy; now they celebrate what we have achieved.

Many challenges remain, of course, and that is what the economic reforms in the Queen’s Speech will address. There is the immediate crisis in the global steel industry. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has just outlined to the House all our efforts to secure jobs here at home. There is a long-term challenge facing western societies of how we increase productivity growth. Improvements in productivity drive lasting improvements in living standards. That is a challenge for all countries. Indeed, the latest figures today from the United States show that productivity is set to fall this year for the first time in 30 years.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman mentions the steel industry. The judgment of the people of Teesside is not as favourable as he seems to think it might be. There is a nationwide proposal for innovation, research and development on the table from the Materials Processing Institute that would propel our steel industry through the creation of academy centres. Will the Chancellor encourage the Business Secretary to attend the site and examine the proposal for himself? It would benefit the whole industry.

Mr Osborne: It has been a very difficult time for steelworkers and their families on Teesside. We have provided financial assistance to those families. We have worked with local Labour authorities to help to remediate the site and bring more jobs and opportunities into the area. I will take a very close look at the proposal. As part of the Government’s industrial policy, we are supporting research and innovation through such things as the Catapult centres, which have been a real success.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stockbridge) (Lab): I am listening carefully to the Chancellor’s comments about investment in research and innovation, which is important for improving productivity in the steel industry. On that basis, will he reconsider the case for business rate relief for the installation of new plant and machinery by big industries such as steel?
Mr Osborne: I personally looked closely at this proposal, and it would cost more than £3 billion a year. It is a very expensive tax reduction, only a small proportion of which would go to the steel industry and none of which would go to the steel industry in Wales, where rates are devolved to the Welsh Government. That is why we have not taken that step. We have done other things to reduce business rates for small businesses and changed the uprating of business rates for all firms, including large industrial firms, to the consumer prices index, which will bring a massive saving over many years, but I judged that the hon. Lady’s proposal to help the steel industry was a sledgehammer and that only a small amount would get to the steel industry. It is better to use other forms of direct support for the industry. That is why we took the decision we did in the Budget. We thought there were better ways of helping.

The economic reforms in the Queen’s Speech continue what we are trying to do to improve the productivity growth of the British economy so that Britain, unlike many other advanced western economies, sees its living standards not stall but continue to rise. That is why we have increased expenditure on transport infrastructure, even in straitened times, and many projects, such as Crossrail, are now close to completion. That is why we introduced the apprenticeship levy—to drive up skills—accepting that low skills had been an endemic problem in the British economy for many decades; and that is why, in part, we introduced a national living wage—not just as a measure of social justice but to tackle low pay and drive up productivity in the workforce.

We will not rest there. The Queen’s Speech sets out a raft of other things. Measures in the Finance Bill will continue to make work pay by raising tax thresholds, helping 20 million people with an income tax cut and taking 4 million of the lowest-paid out of tax altogether. We are also making big changes in corporate taxation by closing loopholes, restricting interest relief and preventing the diverting of profits, while reducing rates of business tax to ensure that we remain the most competitive place in the world to do business.

The digital economy Bill will ensure that Britain remains at the forefront of the information revolution and provide the broadband network that is the equivalent of the canals, railways and motorways of the past that previous generations built for us. That is why, as mentioned in the Queen’s Speech, we are introducing the legal right for anyone to request a 10 megabit connection and drive up productivity in the workforce.

We are boosting competition with the better markets Bill and putting our new National Infrastructure Commission on a permanent statutory footing, for which people in both political parties have been calling for decades. It will now be one of the permanent fixtures of our country and has already made recommendations, under the excellent leadership of Lord Adonis, to improve transport connections in London, with Crossrail 2; to improve connections in the northern powerhouse and across the Pennines; and to plan for the future of our energy supplies by being able to store energy. All those recommendations, accepted by the Government, are now in the Queen’s Speech. I am also delighted that we have reached an agreement with Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, that Andrew Adonis will help develop the Crossrail 2 proposal, which is vital for our capital.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Chancellor mentioned energy. Despite the Government’s welcome move on the headline rate of tax, a further 475 jobs, predominantly in Aberdeen, have been lost at Shell. Despite their welcome announcement, it is clear that more needs to be done. Will he engage with us and the industry, through the Finance Bill, to focus particularly on exploration so that we can find and get at the 20 billion barrels of oil that remain in the North sea?

Mr Osborne: I saw the unwelcome news about the Shell job losses. Working with the Scottish Government, we will do everything we can to help the people who have lost their jobs and make sure that this industry, vital to our country, is protected at a time of low global oil prices. That is why we have worked with Aberdeen on the new city deal and to improve the harbour; and that is why, in the Budget, we chose, as the big tax measures in this area, the abolition of petroleum revenue taxation and a halving of the supplementary charge. We are ready and stand willing to help this industry at this difficult time, because it is world class and we want to make sure we get as much oil out of the North sea basin as we can.

We are also addressing, in the Queen’s Speech, other challenges in the British economy, such as the low savings rate, which we have had for many decades. We have reformed pensions and given pensioners access to their pension pots—250,000 pensioners have already made use of that innovation. I can also tell the House that today at our request—we asked it to impose a charge cap on exiting those pensions—the Financial Conduct Authority has announced that there will be just a 1% cap, which is lower than the range it was consulting on.

The Queen’s Speech also contains a proposal for the lifetime ISA that I announced in the Budget, so that young people no longer have to choose between saving for their home and saving for their retirement. In the words of Martin Lewis, the personal finance guru, it is the biggest change in personal savings this country has ever seen.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Martin Lewis, a very good man, just so happens to come from Weaver Vale. Will the Chancellor remind the House that pensions have gone up by more than £1,000 since the Government introduced their measures in 2010? I am proud of what they have done for pensioners through the triple lock. Will he remind the House of the good work we have done?

Mr Osborne: As a result of the triple lock on pensions, we have made huge strides in eliminating pensioner poverty in this country and seen the biggest real increases in the basic state pension for generations. I am proud that that has happened under a Conservative Government.

One of our biggest reforms, which also features in the Queen’s Speech, is the radical devolution of power across our United Kingdom. We have already devolved substantial new tax and spending powers to Scotland; there is a major piece of proposed legislation for Wales;
we are creating powerful new elected mayors, which are proving an attractive opportunity for shadow Cabinet members who think that their careers are not going anywhere in this place; and we have radical reforms to business rates, which people have talked about for many decades. When we came to office in 2010—when the Prime Minister first became Prime Minister—80% of council revenues were handed down in central Government grants, almost all of which were ring-fenced. Now, by 2020, 100% of local government revenues will stay with local communities. That is giving power to the people in a devolution revolution.

With record employment and one of the fast-growing economies in the advanced world, it would be easy to think, “Job done”, and to take our foot off the accelerator. By doing so, we could avoid controversy, duck confrontation and settle for a quiet life, but if we did that we would be failing the British people and would watch as their living standards and opportunities slowly declined. I did not come into politics to see that happen. I do not want to turn around to my children, as we watch other nations power ahead, make the new scientific advances, build the new high-speed railways and embrace the latest technologies, and say, “That used to be Great Britain.” I want this country and the people living in it to be the great success story of the 21st century. To make that happen, there will be controversy and battles ahead—making change and confronting vested interests are always difficult—but this Queen’s Speech demonstrates that we are ready and that when it comes to standing up for the hard-working people of Britain, we are up for the fight.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I want to warn the House that there will be a speech limit of four minutes after the SNP spokesperson sits down, which will allow us to include all 41 Members wishing to speak, if there are no interventions. I would be grateful if people could bear it in mind that when they take an intervention they are taking time from Members further down the list.

1.49 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Gracious Speech. I am conscious of the time, so I shall be as brief as I can. Before I talk about the measures contained within this Queen’s Speech, it might be worth reflecting on what is missing from it, particularly in economic terms: an economic proposal to grow the economy. What we other initiatives, would have formed the basis of solid economic impact. Again, all those things are missing.

It is almost as if this Tory Government are so consumed with bitter in-fighting over Europe and the EU referendum that they have pared back this legislative programme to the bare minimum required to give even the vaguest impression of a Government who are still functioning—not matter how rotten and divided they are over Europe.

The Gracious Speech could have announced an emergency summer Budget, putting an end to all the austerity that has strangled economic growth and seen the Chancellor fail to meet every single target across his key economic indicators: debt, deficit, borrowing, trade and exports. We could have had an economic plan comprising a series of economic measures to usher in an inclusive, prosperous economy through investment in infrastructure and key public services. We could have had signalled flagged-up provision for a modest increase in public expenditure. As we argued at the election, 0.5% could release something in the order of £150 billion for investment in infrastructure and our public services—spending to grow the economy, while ensuring that public sector debt and deficit continue to fall over the Parliament. That would have been sustainable and fiscally responsible.

Jeremy Quin: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us as to whether the Scottish Parliament has any plans for an emergency Budget by using the tax-raising powers it now has?

Stewart Hosie: We are using every single power available to us, and we will use all our powers over taxation when they come. How we choose to do that will be a matter for the Scottish Government. What I suspect we will not do is to impose a 5% increase on the poorest workers in Scotland, which was a plan posited by others and led them to come third in the election.

This Queen’s Speech could have been used for the delivery of vital and urgent aid to support trade and exports, and for measures to stimulate investment and growth to turn round what is now recognised in the real world as this Chancellor’s failed stewardship of the economy, which has seen the trade deficit widen to its worst level since the crisis in 2008 and will see the Treasury miss by £300 billion its own target of doubling exports to £1 trillion by the end of this decade.

We could and should have had a fair tax Bill, simplifying the UK tax system and delivering greater tax transparency; and, vitally, measures such as a moratorium on this Government’s programme of HMRC office closures. We should have had the establishment of an independent commission to simplify the tax code and strengthen tax transparency by guaranteeing that beneficial ownership of businesses and trusts—here, in the Crown dependencies and in the overseas territories—would be made fully public.

We should have had an energy security and investment Bill, facilitating an export-led sustainable energy sector. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) said, we should have had a comprehensive strategic review of tax rates and investment allowances in the North sea. In addition, we should have had a comprehensive strategic review of tax rates and investment allowances in the North sea. In addition, we should have had a comprehensive strategy to address the vast and ongoing cuts to our vital public services, which actually promote a positive economic impact. Again, all those things are missing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) said, we should have had a comprehensive strategic review of tax rates and investment allowances in the North sea. In addition, we should have had a review of securing the future energy supply of the UK and an ending of the UK Government’s commitment to the failing Hinkley C nuclear project. We should have been directing investment instead into renewable energy and into carbon, capture and storage. Those, among other initiatives, would have formed the basis of solid economic proposals to grow the economy. What we
ended up with in economic terms was a digital economy Bill, a criminal finances Bill and a better markets Bill. I shall deal briefly with those Bills.

We understand the benefit of digital connectivity and welcome the roll-out of superfast broadband, which has the potential to boost productivity. According to a Deloitte report commissioned by the Scottish Futures Trust last year, increased digitisation could boost the Scottish economy alone by around £13 billion. Increased digitisation and reach across Scotland would also have a direct impact on improving productivity, business creation, jobs, earnings, exports and tax revenues—and many more positive outcomes for public provision. The report suggested that if Scotland were to become a world leader, we could see a significant increase in GDP, something in the order of 6,000 extra small and home-based enterprises and potentially an extra 175,000 jobs by the end of the decade.

We therefore welcome moves by the UK Government to provide digital infrastructure, but we are unconvinced that this digital economy Bill will turn round the UK’s persistently Poor productivity levels in the way that it might have done. We are particularly unconvinced about whether the implementation of this digital plan, particularly the broadband roll-out, will deliver—not least because we have evidence that the UK Government have failed in this regard before.

As long ago as July 2013 the National Audit Office reported on the Government’s then broadband programme, saying that broadband roll-out was 22 months late. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported last year that the UK’s target dates for broadband had been changed many times, raising concerns that the target for delivering superfast broadband to even 95% of the UK was in jeopardy—in other words, not very good with targets at all. We nevertheless welcome the UK Government’s commitment to introducing a universal service obligation, not least because it was in the SNP manifesto and we believe that if it can be fulfilled, it would bring particular benefits to rural communities.

We welcome, too, Government moves to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, but the criminal finances Bill does not go far enough to combat this systemic problem. Following the release of the Panama papers, my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) called on the Prime Minister to go further with measures to crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, pointing out that illicit cross-border transfer financial flows are estimated at around £1 trillion a year, which is 10 times more than global foreign aid budgets combined. We believe that the Prime Minister and the Government should prioritise bilateral tax treaties, not least with places such as Panama and other tax havens, as part of the global efforts to co-ordinate better against tax avoidance.

Furthermore, we call on the UK Government to embolden compliance by guaranteeing that the beneficial ownership of companies and trusts is made fully public. It is also the case, as I alluded to earlier, that the UK has one of the most complicated tax codes in the world. That leads to a loss of tax yield and perpetuates opportunities to exploit loopholes. We have called on the Government to bring about a just tax system, which will assist in ensuring that all taxpayers are given a fair deal.

In our alternative Queen’s Speech, we call for the Treasury to convene a commission and report back within two years, following a comprehensive consultation on the simplification of the tax code. With a simplified—not a flat tax code—tax system, the Government could boost yield, encourage compliance, and avoid exploitative loopholes such as the Mayfair loophole. While we welcome the long-overdue measures by the UK Government to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, we wait with interest to see the detail of these measures.

Whatever good may come of this, however, the counterproductive decision to close 137 HMRC offices will strip local businesses and individuals throughout the United Kingdom of the support that they need to ensure that they comply with the law. If they are to tackle tax avoidance at all levels and continue to provide local support when it is needed, the UK Government must place a moratorium on HMRC office closures. We take the view that, by and large, individuals and business want to contribute to society by paying tax, and that a high proportion of the SME tax gap—caused not by fraud, but by genuine error and miscommunication—could be dealt with by removing the threat to local offices. It is extraordinary that, although tax compliance is now at the heart of much of our economic debate as it has not been for decades, the HMRC workforce have been cut by 20% since 2010.

The final Bill that comes under the broad heading of “the economy” is the better markets Bill, whose main purported benefits are to give consumers more power and choice through faster switching and more protection when things go wrong. That is welcome. The Bill would simplify the way in which economic regulators operate to make life more straightforward for business and cut red tape, and would also speed up the decisions of the Competition and Markets Authority for the benefit of businesses and consumers alike. That too is welcome.

The intention is to deliver a manifesto commitment to increase competition and consumer choice, particularly in the energy market. However, while we welcome Government moves to challenge rising energy prices by encouraging market choice, the Bill does not go far enough to combat the problem of fuel poverty at a structural level. According to the UK means of calculating fuel poverty, in 2014 some 2.5 million households were in fuel poverty. According to the methods used in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, over the last three or four years the figures have sat between 30% and 40%. The structural issue here is not a shortage of gas or electricity, it is not necessarily a shortage of competition, and it is not necessarily the ability to change suppliers quickly; it is a shortage of money to pay for the gas and electricity coming into the house.

I am sure that there are good intentions behind many of the economic measures in the Gracious Speech, but they are simply too little, too late.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): My hon. Friend has referred to fuel poverty. The Chancellor mentioned Martin Lewis. Is my hon. Friend aware that I was at a conference with Martin Lewis this week, at which he denounced universal credit as particularly hurting the
poor and their ability to save and to pay for energy? The very person whom the Chancellor mentioned is the person who is actually—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. That was a very long intervention. I have already said that there is a very limited time for a very large number of Members to speak.

Stewart Hosie: I was not aware that my hon. Friend was with Mr Lewis, but what he has said does not surprise me in the slightest. For all the talk of an increase in the minimum wage, I think that anyone on the progressive side of politics understands that a real living wage will be undermined by the Government’s cuts to in-work benefits and tax credit.

The Government are failing in respect of almost every key economic indicator. They have missed nearly every target that they have set themselves. The numbers—not the rhetoric—demonstrate beyond doubt that their claim to economic credibility is in tatters. We are asking for a genuine, comprehensive plan for trade, exports, innovation and productivity, and a genuinely rebalanced and fair economy. The Chancellor said that trade and exports would underpin his strategy for growth, but the UK current account deficit now stands at a record £96 billion, its highest ever cash level. The Chancellor promised a doubling of exports to £1 trillion by the end of the year, but exports fell last year to £511 billion. They are going in the wrong direction. On innovation, we continue to compare poorly with our competitors, and the Chancellor’s decision to change innovation grants to loans sends the wrong signals.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Hosie: No, I will not.

On productivity, we continue to lag behind other major economies, and our productivity rise is barely half the level of the rise that we saw during the pre-crisis period.

All those failures need a concrete plan to put them right, but instead we simply have spin and slogans such as “the march of the makers”, “the northern powerhouse” and “the long-term economic plan”. Those are empty, shallow words from a rotten, hollowed-out Government.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): The Gracious Speech tells us that “legislation will be introduced to ensure Britain has the infrastructure that businesses need to grow.”

In the next sentence, we are promised measures to improve access to high-speed broadband. Both those commitments are of huge importance to my constituency, and to the wider Anglian region of which it forms part.

The region is badly served by transport infrastructure. It has two railway lines, both of which are inadequate. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) has chaired a great eastern main line taskforce, and I have been charged with chairing a west Anglia main line taskforce. We have both illustrated the weaknesses in the present system and the importance of those lines to the development of business in our areas, but—understandably, given the short time that is available—I will concentrate on the west Anglia line taskforce. We have noted that, given Cambridge, Stansted, greater Harlow and the upper Lee valley opportunity area in Greater London, there is huge potential for growth, and jobs and housing will multiply over the next few years. That is a stark contrast with some of the tales of woe that we have been hearing so far during this debate.

One thing that is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech is the decision on where extra runway capacity will be provided in the London area, although one suspects that that decision will come quite soon. However, no choice will enable the capacity to be used other than, in the interim, at Stansted, and that brings into focus the inadequacy of the railway line that connects London with Stansted. It is not just a matter of getting passengers there; it is also a matter of getting the workforce there. I am proud to say that, for reasons related to the policies of the Government whom I support, the unemployment rate in my constituency has now fallen to 0.6%. Clearly, if job vacancies are to be filled, people must be conveyed to those jobs, and the railway is one of the most efficient ways of doing that. We must press on. Now that the Chancellor has made the imaginative decision to back the Crossrail 2 project, it is essential for the work in preparation for that project to begin with the four-tracking of the west Anglia main line. I hope there will soon be decisions that ensure that we do not wait beyond 2025 for the line to improve, because otherwise the date might slip to 2033, which would be unthinkable.

Broadband offers new methods of working, which may help some people to travel slightly less often than they have had to up to now. The face of rural England is changing: people are being dispersed, and some small businesses exist at the high-technology end. Superfast broadband is essential to those people and businesses, and they need clarity about what is available, whether from BT or from the other commercial providers. I hope that local authorities will be encouraged to show everyone what is available, so that implementation can take place more quickly. There must be equality of provision, so that everyone can expect the same standard.

My constituents commend the priority that has been given to those matters in the Gracious Speech.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Chancellor for the £5 million he earmarked in the Budget for Shakespeare North. May I press him a little further and ask him to waive the VAT on the construction costs?

I want to talk today about the link between poverty, economic progress and education. Before doing so, however, I should perhaps say a word about my position on the EU referendum. In the previous referendum, in 1975, I chaired the “Huyton says no” campaign. That merry band of naysayers was a fairly eclectic group consisting of Labour party Young Socialists, the Communist party of Great Britain and two Tories who ran a ballroom dancing academy. Fortunately, the people of Huyton sensibly listened to our local MP at the time, Harold Wilson, and voted to stay in.

The argument that I want to advance today takes its inspiration—fittingly, in the centenary year of his birth—from Harold Wilson’s “white heat of technology” speech.
Key to his argument in 1963 was that we needed to adapt to changing economic realities by embracing the challenges presented in science and technology. It also included an element about the importance of education as a pathway out of poverty. My argument is that we now face a similar challenge. How do we compete in a rapidly changing global economy? Do we, as some international corporations would suggest, adopt zero-hours contracts and other insecure forms of employment, or do we incentivise innovation and educate and train our workforce to take advantage of the opportunities that innovation creates? The first option is, in my view, a self-defeating race to the bottom.

However, we have to face up to some uncomfortable truths, one of which is the decline in manufacturing in the UK. In 1972, 32% of the UK’s GDP came from manufacturing. By 1997, that percentage was down to 14.5%, and by 2013 it had dropped further to 10.4%. The economic levers available to the Chancellor and the Government need to be remorselessly focused on creating incentives for innovation, using not only the taxation system but the export guarantee system and everything else available to ensure that the opportunities that exist in the world are brought within the reach of our country.

We also need to talk about education. We have serious problems with education in Knowsley. I do not want to go into too much detail, but we have a serious problem of under-attainment at GCSE level.

Andrew Gwynne: I just wonder how many secondary schools in Knowsley are academies.

Mr Howarth: That is the point. Out of the six secondary schools in Knowsley, four are already academies, so that is clearly not the solution to the problems we face. My own belief is that we need to start from scratch and completely rebuild the education system. Nothing should be protected from proper scrutiny or from modernisation. The curriculum, the public examination system, educational institutions and even the underlying philosophy behind education need rigorous questioning and frankly need to be radically redesigned to meet the real challenges that we face in the world. If we do not do that, areas such as Knowsley will continue to lag behind. We can, however, make bigger and bolder choices to meet the challenges and harness innovation and education as the twin engines of tackling inequality, deprivation and the random economic effects associated with where people live. Surely there is only one choice, and that choice must be progress.

2.14 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): There is nothing wrong with being an ideologue if you temper it with some restraint and reason. I confess that I am an ideologue for lower taxes, for less state regulation and for the supremacy of this Parliament. That is what I have worked for, with my colleagues, all my life here, and I judge every Queen’s Speech by how it advances lower taxes, deregulation and more devolution.

However, I think we should be wary of imposing our ideas on other people in a forced manner. We used to argue consistently that the one-size-fits-all neighbourhood comprehensive was wrong and causing a decline in educational standards. We therefore led the charge for academies, but I do not believe that we should force county councils, particularly rural county councils with small private schools, to academise all their schools. I understand why the Chancellor made that announcement in the Budget—I know where he was coming from and I agree with his long-term plans on education—but I welcome the compromise that has been made in relation to small rural private schools.

The same attitude applies to devolution and to mayors. I am a strong advocate of devolution. The fact is that central Government have imposed too much control on local government for too long. In Lincolnshire, we welcome devolution and we were prepared to have a very simple system in which powers were devolved to a board run by the leaders of the district councils and county councils, but there was no enthusiasm for an elected mayor in a large rural county. I welcome the fact that the Chancellor is still sitting in the Chamber, and I am sure that he is listening to what I am saying. I hope that he will also listen to the local people and not impose an elected mayor on us. That concept might be fine for Manchester, Birmingham or London, but it is not necessarily appropriate for a large rural county such as Lincolnshire.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I represent a large rural community that has not had the benefit of being offered a mayor. Does not my hon. Friend think it is worth trying having a mayor, to see how that might enhance rurality?

Sir Edward Leigh: We can certainly try it, but the difficulty is that we would have parish councils, district councils, a county council—which, by the way, the Conservatives have controlled for most of the last 100 years—an elected mayor, a police and crime commissioner, a Member of Parliament and a Member of the European Parliament. It would just be too much, frankly. Too many jobs for the boys!

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Would my hon. Friend consider jobs for the girls too?

Sir Edward Leigh: Absolutely. My hon. Friend has made some important contributions to our debates in the past year and I welcome what she says. I know that she has taken an interest in tax credits, and I believe that we have to make more progress in cutting welfare in order to cut the deficit, but it is probably a mistake to cut the welfare benefits or tax credits of people who are already on small incomes and depending on their tax credits. We have to give plenty of warning if we are going to do that. That is surely the lesson that we should learn from the debate on the raising of the pension age for women. We should have given proper notice of that. We did give 20 years’ notice, but we did not write to every woman saying, “Dear Mrs Jones, your pension age will be increased in 20 years’ time.” That is what we should have done, and we should learn from that.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), I am an enthusiast for lower regulation and lower taxes, but we have the longest tax code in the world, and there is still much progress to be made in that regard. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor
knows, because I have said this to him again and again, that I hope he will try to simplify the tax and benefit system with every Budget he introduces. I hope that he will strip away allowances and converge taxes so that we no longer have armies of accountants advising people how to avoid tax. We have made all too little progress on simplifying and converging our tax system. I know that it is difficult. I know that we cannot do it all in one step. I know that we cannot have an absolutely flat tax system because the top 1% of earners pay 25% of all taxes. I know all that, but we should make more progress every year in simplifying and merging the tax system.

Before I sit down, the Chancellor talked about announcements that have been made today, but there was an important announcement on immigration figures. The fact is that we still have net migration of 300,000 people into this country every year. It is absolutely unsustainable. We welcome people from eastern Europe coming to work here. I more than any other welcome Polish people and their culture of hard work. However, net migration of 300,000 people a year, fuelled by the imposition of the living wage on businesses and by an unreformed tax credit system, is simply unsustainable, particularly for London and the south-east. There is a vision of Britain leading the world towards free trade, controlling its own borders and proclaiming the supremacy of Parliament, and that is why, on 23 June, I for one shall be voting to leave the European Union.

2.20 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). The circulation of “Labour’s Future” on the Tory Benches is obviously having an impact on some of the policy areas outlined by the hon. Gentleman, such as the forced academisation of schools and the plight of the policy areas outlined by the hon. Gentleman, such as the forced academisation of schools and the plight of the working poor. Today, I will focus on tax transparency and prison reform.

In the Gracious Speech, Her Majesty said:

“My government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences.”

I certainly do not disagree with those sentiments, although I would question the strength of our economy. We debate the Queen’s Speech with a referendum on our membership of the European Union looming, the outcome of which could affect the Government’s ability to turn those words into action. It is my belief that our economy and security benefit enormously from our membership of the European Union and they would be at risk should we leave. Whatever happens on 23 June, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the power and responsibility that we have today as a national Parliament to tackle the challenges facing our country and to institute change. Unlike the defeatism and politics of despair expressed by politicians arguing to leave the European Union, I proudly believe in a British democracy that allows us to act independently of the EU while strengthening Britain and the EU through our membership.

We need a strong economy, but it will work only if everyone from the cleaner to the chief executive and from the corner shop to the corporate giant is paying their fair share of tax. On prison reform, crime robs our economy, ruins lives, demoralises communities and costs us more and more every time a prisoner returns to a life of crime.

Within the world of multinationals, aggressive tax avoidance, hidden behind corporate walls, is denying Britain and many other countries the taxes they are due. That is why tax transparency is the single most important thing that we can achieve. While international and European action is deserving of support, it should not paralyse the UK Government and stop them from taking a lead especially if multilateral proposals are not good enough. We need public, country-by-country reporting, which is why I will be seeking to amend the Finance Bill, in line with my ten-minute rule Bill of the previous Parliament, to ensure that that happens. I have cross-party support, including the support of every member of the Public Accounts Committee, and organisations dealing with development and tax transparency and fairness support my endeavours. I hope the Government will support them, too, because it is important to know not only what we should be getting, but what businesses in the developing world are doing and how developing countries are being denied what they should be taking in tax, having to rely on international aid instead.

Turning to prison reform, the Government announced that prison governors “will be given unprecedented freedom and they will be able to ensure prisoners receive better education”, but the story so far is not encouraging. The 2014-15 report of Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons states:

“You were more likely to die in prison than five years ago. More prisoners were murdered, killed themselves, self-harmed and were victims of assaults than five years ago.”

Assaults on staff were up 40% in the five years of the previous Government. All that comes while prison staff numbers are cut.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady recognise the role of legal highs in creating a volatile situation in prisons? Does she welcome the Government’s decision to introduce legislation to outlaw them?

Caroline Flint: Of course I do. I was proud to introduce drug testing on arrest for acquisitive crime to ensure that we could get prisoners into drug treatment before they even entered the prison system.

We had some 24,000 prison staff in 2010, but that number was reduced to just over 14,000 by June 2014. To tackle the illegal drug trade in prisons, we need staff and we need them to be able to do their job. I have three prisons in my constituency, two of which are closed. I have met Tim Beeston, governor at HMP and YOI Moorland—he is not even mentioned as the correct governor on the Ministry of Justice website—and he is committed to doing more, but he cannot do it alone. I have met and spoken to Mike Rolfe, chair of the POA, formerly the Prison Officers’ Association, about the problems facing his members and how they would like to do more. I commend the research produced by my union Community and its charter for safe operating procedures, which I am pleased to support.

We must recognise that the prison system is full of people whom the education system failed, and we need to do more. Why is it that we have mandatory assessment of literacy and numeracy, but it is not mandatory for...
someone to undertake education while in prison to improve those skills? If sentences are too short, continuing education should be a condition of probation upon release. That requires joined-up policies in and out of prison. It requires upskilling the Prison Service staff who provide education and training. I look forward to the Government’s announcement, but words are cheap; actions work.

2.26 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the reference in the Gracious Speech to improving Britain’s competitiveness and making “the United Kingdom a world leader in the digital economy.” Since 2010, the UK has—I should perhaps say the people of the UK have—created 2.9 million jobs. Jobs do not appear out of thin air; they exist because of the entrepreneurship of the people of the UK. Our unemployment rate has fallen from 8% to 5.1%. That is still too high, but it is an achievement. We need to maintain a high level of employment while tackling the major risks to our economy, which are the twin deficits of the balance of payments and the budget, and low productivity when compared with other countries. The two are interrelated. Higher productivity leads us to be more competitive, both domestically and internationally, to improved exports and lower imports, and to greater growth, with the corresponding tax revenues.

Long-term analysis of our productivity shows that there are three main issues. First is insufficient investment in research and development, the latest technology and infrastructure over not just the past year or six years but decades. Second is weak management. We have some fantastically managed businesses, but we also have some with below-average management. Third is inadequate education and training. The Government are working on all three areas, and, again, they are all linked. High-quality R and D and good management both depend substantially on a well-educated population. Weak management will prioritise the status quo over risky decisions to invest and train for the future. The Government have taken action through growth in apprenticeships and technical education and by placing an emphasis on the quality of apprenticeship and standards in schools, which are absolutely critical. I want to highlight the recruitment of teachers, which is a real difficulty in certain areas, such as maths and science, but I know that the Government are well aware of that and are working on it.

Investment in R and D and technology comes down to the availability of people, the willingness of companies to invest and the incentives to do so. Incentives cost, so I urge the Government to concentrate resources for investment in R and D on businesses that show the greatest willingness to invest, which are more likely to generate long-term growth and jobs.

Much has already been said about infrastructure, but with the advent of HS2, the rail network really needs strengthening in my area of Stafford. I ask the Government to look at that, because we might otherwise find that we get gridlock in an incredibly important area of the country while HS2 is constructed.

Britain is a world leader in the digital economy, which is also vital for competitiveness. The largest private sector employer in my constituency is now General Electric, which sees its future as a digital business. As its chief executive Jeff Immelt has said: “If you went to bed last night as an industrial company, you’re going to wake up this morning as a software and analytics company.”

My ambition for Stafford is for it to be a leader nationally in this digital economy. Not just manufacturing companies, such as General Electric, Perkins, JCB and Bostik are taking it seriously; we have a thriving community of software businesses that are growing steadily. We have financial services; rival, Microsoft’s 2015 partner of the year; Conexica, which supports the NHS; iProspect, which deals with digital marketing; and forensics. We also have three signals regiments, which will provide a very good workforce for the future when the servicemen and women complete their service. The future is digital, and the digital economy Bill is a strong part of that.

2.30 pm

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): This Queen’s Speech did nothing for the people I represent in my constituency. The Government should not have wasted taxpayers’ money on all the pomp and ceremony, as they could have sent a 140-character tweet telling people what was in it. The Prime Minister’s aim of course was to stop the unrest in the Tory party, which is pulling itself apart over the referendum. He did not even achieve that, because only days after the Queen’s Speech we had rebel Tory MPs joining us in opposing the undemocratic, corporatist Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. If the Prime Minister gets a message from that, it should be to dump TTIP in its entirety and defend our NHS.

As I alluded to earlier, there is more detail on the back of a bus ticket than was on that waste of vellum that was handed to the Queen. What did the Government say? They said we are going to create a spaceport—what a laugh! We are still waiting for a decision on another runway in London, yet they are talking about sending tourists to the moon in a rocket! That is absolutely daft. They are talking about privatising the Land Registry. That destructive move is even opposed by the Competition and Markets Authority. Only this Tory Government and only this Chancellor would contemplate gifting a valuable public service—a body responsible for registering the ownership of residential and commercial property—to a bunch of spivs and speculators. That proposal is wrong and the Government should withdraw it. Their move to end a fair rating system will cheat the people in poorer areas while enhancing and enriching the people in areas such as Kensington and Mayfair. It echoes the usual Tory motto: “To them that have most, give more. Give the lower paid and the middle earners nothing.”

This Queen’s Speech, taken together with the recent Budget, fell apart quicker than a badly assembled chest of drawers, and it just shows how this Government are disintegrating in front of us. Britain and areas like mine were crying out for a Queen’s Speech that values people, and champions decency and fairness. We needed the creation of good jobs with better incomes. We needed to build better homes which people can afford. We needed raised standards in schools, not academies. We
needed to resuscitate the NHS, which is ailing from Tory neglect. The country deserved a Queen’s Speech that fixes the problems and gives us solutions. What we got was a second-rate mishmash intended to win a referendum. On behalf of the Jarrow constituency and the people I represent, I will be proud to walk through and vote against this Queen’s Speech.

2.33 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I am pleased to be part of this debate on the final day of our consideration of the Gracious Speech—it is my second one. We are discussing vital matters focused on the economy and work. I am pleased to see action being taken on sugar levels, as tackling that issue is vital in my constituency, where diabetes and amputations stretch the NHS.

The apprenticeship levy is part of this Queen’s Speech. It will be introduced in 2017 for larger employers, and I truly welcome it. Apprenticeships are a fantastic way to help young people or to help older people to change career or re-skill. It was a real pleasure on the day of the Queen’s Speech to meet Calum from Hedge End, who is an Airbus apprentice. We are very lucky to have Eastleigh College, which puts apprenticeships at the heart of education and where Baxi supports a gas training centre—we are very short of gas engineers.

The Chancellor well knows that in Eastleigh we have B&Q, but he is also well aware that in Eastleigh we need the vital Chickenhall Lane link road. Only under this Conservative majority Government has real progress been made on bringing that forward. The link will increase productivity and reduce queues, so I am delighted to see it in the Budget book.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that our rail infrastructure in Hampshire has not had any investment for 60 years and that we need more investment to improve our transport, which will help productivity in both her constituency and mine?

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with what my hon. Friend says. It takes an hour to get between Portsmouth and Southampton, and that situation is untenable. We need it to take an hour into Waterloo from Portsmouth. Such investment will improve travel to Southampton airport, which will also see positive benefits from the Chickenhall Lane link road. That will also deal with the standing traffic coming into the town, where air quality is a real problem. Last Friday, I met the Solent local enterprise partnership, which is keen and ready to finalise its bid and make its business case to the large local major schemes fund. I thank the Chancellor for the support for this project in Eastleigh.

I welcome the commitment to build 200,000 starter homes, and I would like women in refuges to be given higher priority on housing lists. That will achieve more safety for their children and more stability in schools, and it will improve their life chances, which is what we wish to see in this Government’s programme. In Eastleigh, we have recently seen town centre land that would have been ideal for housing given away and designated for a car showroom and two drive-throughs—this in an area where there is a problem with air quality. That is the kind of unhealthy and unwanted town centre regeneration that I am not keen to see in my constituency. I pay tribute to the local campaigners who have sought to point out the perversity of the application.

Hon. Members will not be surprised to see that I intend to discuss the ongoing lack of a local plan in Eastleigh—there are no neighbourhood plans in Eastleigh. Planning to protect green spaces and planning for more affordable homes, and more transparent planning rules are vital in Eastleigh, where there is a strategic vacuum. It is crucial that the pace of the progress that central Government are making is matched by local authorities picking up the pace and dealing with this issue. Sadly, Eastleigh Borough Council continues to fail its residents by ignoring calls for local plans. I sincerely hope that it gets on with it, for the sake of residents and businesses, and that the planning Bill can help and take full effect in our area.

I also want us to protect our green infrastructure, as it is important. We need to protect our chalk streams and areas such as the River Itchen, where one might see my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) fly fishing or angling alongside local anglers. It is very important to support such infrastructure and stop the pollution of vital rivers. Our Bill will promote green spaces over brownfield land, which is currently not being distributed properly in my constituency. Residents in Bishopstoke see and feel this; there is no localism in Eastleigh and no local plan.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): My hon. Friend does a tremendous job for her constituents. Does she agree that a neighbourhood plan, giving locals a referendum, is the way forward to plan for housing and infrastructure?

Mims Davies: Absolutely. Locking residents out of the planning process continues to make housing an adversarial issue, whereas our communities need to work together to bring forward the infrastructure that we see proposed in the Bill and the tie-in that residents need. I should thank my hon. Friend at this point. Areas such as Botley are struggling on GP recruitment because of ongoing issues with a local plan and the fact that they cannot recruit the clinicians they need. I thank her for her work in encouraging clinicians and nurses to come forward in these important careers. Getting more women into STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and having that opportunity will help our local communities to grow and thrive.

The biggest decision of our generation will be made next month and it is clear that whatever the outcome it will have an effect on our economy. Clearly, opinions are divided, occasionally on the Benches in this Chamber and occasionally, as we see if we read The Times, in the Tea Room. But is it crucial that once we have voted we come back together—this Conservative majority Government—and unify, so that we can continue to deliver this strong economy and the services we need for all our constituents.

2.39 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). I echo many of the comments about the economy made by my hon. Friend on the Front Bench, particularly in relation to productivity, with the latest figures showing the largest quarterly fall since 2008.
I acknowledge that the Government have issued a challenge to areas such as mine to play their part in tackling the productivity and economic growth gap by developing devolution in the form of the northern powerhouse. I for one accept that challenge. I accept that Sheffield city region has to raise its game. We have to play our part and believe in ourselves, which we have not done for a very long time. Quite simply—as one employer said to me today in an email—we must believe that we have the skills, knowledge and ability to surpass London and become a generator of great wealth again.

However, the Government must play their part too, and at the moment they are not doing so. The announcement today about the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the relocation of staff from Sheffield to London belies everything that the Government have said on this point, but they can remedy the situation. I will be watching carefully the development of the infrastructure plan. In particular, I will be looking for confirmation that the new trans-Pennine links between Manchester and Sheffield will be given the green light, as they are essential to the future of the northern economy.

I will keep up the pressure on the Government to support a positive outcome to the steel crisis. Funnily enough, the crisis in South Yorkshire has triggered a revival in the faith and the confidence that we used to have in ourselves and in our engineering prowess. My plea to the Government today is: please do not let us down. We believe that we are the best steel producers in the world. If the Government believe in us, we will deliver.

Let me turn now to the biggest threat facing the economy in the next few years—the instability that is currently characterising our political system. Let us be clear about this: in the UK, politics is polarising. We know that it is happening on the Labour Benches, as we have shifted to the left. On the Government Benches, Brexit is tearing the Conservative party apart, and the centre ground is disappearing before our very eyes. What on earth happened to the politics of the art of the possible? This movement is happening globally. In some countries, the polarisation is even greater. One has to wonder whether the phenomenon will spread beyond party lines. It is a worrying trend, and polarisation of the political sphere is creating a vacuum that could visit lasting damage on the social and economic fabric of this country.

Globalisation is one of the main causes of the situation. I echo the words of Mr Blair who said today that the problem of the centre ground was that it looks “as if we are managers of the status quo and not changers of it”.

It is a worrying trend, and polarisation of the political sphere is creating a vacuum that could visit lasting damage on the social and economic fabric of this country. We bear a responsibility to resurrect the relevance of pragmatic politics. We need to demonstrate that centre-ground politics can deliver a progressive, prosperous and secure future for the people of this country. If we do not do that, the future of this country and its economy is very much in danger.
50 and 100 schools to create that number of pupils. We must be careful about how we deliver such a policy. There is also another problem: some local authorities are better education authorities than others, and that must be taken into account when considering changes.

I also welcome the lifetime savings Bill. The idea that we can help young people and people on lower wages to save is essential. In the past, not only did Labour spend too much taxpayers’ money, but we spent too much as individuals and did not save enough. I know that Governments love people to spend so that it boosts the economy, but there is also a great need for people to have greater savings. That is what we want to see happening.

I welcome the fact that the Queen’s Speech is very much a continuation of the Government’s policies in order to keep going. The one thing we must not do is change course. We must keep bringing down the deficit. On 23 June we need to make sure that we keep this country in the European Union so that we can prosper and grow our economy.

2.49 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The sugar tax is an interesting proposal, but the Government have left some careless loopholes in their plans. I am not sure whether you often drink milkshakes, Madam Deputy Speaker, but they are not particularly healthy drinks. One brand has 19.2 grams of sugar in a 200 ml bottle, which exceeds the recommended daily allowance for four to six-year-old children. A milk drink linked to a well-known confectionary brand has 36 grams of sugar in a 376 ml bottle, exceeding the RDA for seven to 10-year-olds. Finally, another popular milkshake drink has 50.8 grams of sugar in a 471 ml bottle, which far exceeds the RDA for adults.

None of those products is covered by the Chancellor’s sugar tax. That is a serious loophole because parents may infer from their exemption that these drinks are healthier. The response that I received from the Treasury states that “milk contains calcium and other nutrients which are vital to children’s health.” That is true, but if the goodness of milk is adulterated by huge volumes of sugar, the health benefits are seriously undermined. It would be sensible to include such drinks within the scope of the sugar tax.

There is another loophole that affects us as grown-ups. Pre-mixed alcoholic drinks such as cans of vodka and Coke or gin and tonic do not come within the scope of the sugar tax either. It cannot have escaped anybody’s notice that adults, too, struggle with obesity. They will not get an exemption from the sugar tax at the till, but there is a loophole if they choose to purchase vodka and Coke separately, rather than as a premixed drink. These drinks should be brought within the scope of the tax, as that would have benefits for all of us.

I am deeply concerned by the way in which this Government’s approach to the economy rewards those who are already at the top of the heap and punishes those who are already struggling. Experts from Sheffield Hallam University laid out the brutal impact of that. Their report, “The uneven impact of welfare reform—the financial losses to places and people denied the freedom to shrug off the blame on this Government. As I suspect that, sadly, Treasury Ministers will not even give it a glance, I will use this opportunity to lay out some of the key findings.

The report states that the cumulative loss experienced by claimants since 2010 is £27 billion a year—£690 for every adult of working age. The report finds that the welfare reforms are uneven geographically, hitting the most deprived communities hardest. The departing Secretary of State confessed as much to Andrew Marr, saying that the Tories were attacking benefit payments to people who “don’t vote for us”. In the constituency of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the Three Rivers area, the anticipated loss to claimants by 2020-21 will be £190 a year. In Blackburn the situation is much worse. Claimants there will lose £560 per year.

In Scotland, because our ability to make other choices is limited, we have made a difference, but Scots will still lose out to the tune of £320 per adult per year. We have been able to take the edge off. We have mitigated the bedroom tax, we have restored council tax benefit, and we will not bring in pay to stay. I very much look forward to the Scottish Government making use of the social security powers coming to us in the Scottish Parliament, because we are committed to everyone in Scotland, not just those who happen to vote for us.

In Glasgow claimants will lose out by £420 per year. This is money that is not ringing in the tills in the communities that I represent. It is money that ordinary people desperately need to put food on the table. It is money that my constituents need to heat their homes. It is absolute wickedness to punish people for the circumstances they are in, and worse because they are people who did not vote Tory.

I reject this economic model, which condemns people to a lifetime of poverty. The lasting effects of such social policies are still there in Glasgow, a hangover from the time of the loss of heavy industry, and of clumsy Scotland Office policy that built the new towns that left so many behind in poor quality housing. I commend to the House the recent report by the esteemed Glasgow Centre for Population Health, “History, politics and vulnerability: explaining excess mortality in Scotland and Glasgow”, which seeks to explain why Glaswegians continue to die younger than they should. The policy of this Government and of previous Governments has a lot to answer for, and we must not make the same policy mistakes now.

2.53 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate the Government on including in the Queen’s Speech a measure to introduce a levy on sugary drinks manufacturers. I do so because it cannot be acceptable in our society that we continue to allow 25% of the most disadvantaged children to leave primary school not just overweight, but obese. I congratulate the Chancellor on looking at the evidence that the gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children with childhood obesity has been increasing, based on data from the child measurement programme.

It is important to tackle the problem and to look not just at obesity, but at the effect on children’s teeth. We know that the commonest reason for primary school children to be admitted to hospital is to have their rotten teeth removed. The Chancellor is right to target sugary drinks manufacturers. As the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) pointed out, those are empty calories with no nutritional value whatsoever.
When we see that a third of teenagers’ calorie intake from sugars is from sugary drinks, it is right that we do everything we can.

The measure is progressive. I welcome the contribution that it will make as part of a wider strategy to tackle childhood obesity. It will encourage manufacturers to reformulate their products to bring in lower levels of sugar. I would like the Chancellor, perhaps when he responds to the debate, to set out what he is doing alongside manufacturers to encourage them to introduce a price differential associated with the levy bands so that we can guide people to make healthier choices.

I particularly welcome the fact that this money will be hypothecated. As a result, we will see a doubling of the school sport premium for primary schools. We will also see an expansion of the breakfast club programme in the most disadvantaged areas, and up to 1,600 schools will benefit. The accusation that is often made is that the levy is regressive, not progressive, but that is countered simply by the fact that it is the most disadvantaged communities that will benefit most from hypothecation.

Like the hon. Member for Glasgow Central, I urge the Chancellor to go further and to extend this measure to milky drinks with high levels of added sugar. Milk is good for children, and we should be sending a clear message that it is good, but milk with nine teaspoons of sugar in it is not good for children’s health or their teeth. I also agree with the hon. Lady’s point about alcoholic mixers. I therefore hope that the Chancellor will look again at extending this measure, because I think much more benefit could come from it if he did.

On the other proposals in the Queen’s Speech, I thank the Chancellor for the measures he will introduce on broadband. As a Member representing a rural community where businesses and local residents alike are disadvantaged by not having access to high-speed broadband, I think these measures will be very welcome. Likewise, I welcome the commitment to bring forward a fair funding formula for schools such as those in the west country, which have been severely disadvantaged up until now.

I know that many other Members want to speak, so let me say in closing that I welcome the measures in the Queen’s Speech. This is a bold and brave Chancellor—the Health Committee called for bold and brave measures to tackle childhood obesity, and that is what we have seen from the Chancellor in this Queen’s Speech. I hope he will stiffen his sinews, resist the efforts of the drinks manufacturers to oppose this measure and encourage them to look at how they can improve the health of our manufacturers to oppose this measure and encourage them to look at how they can improve the health of our

However, I have a few issues with the design of the scheme. For example, two years is a very long time in which to have to save regularly. Some 14 million people experienced at least one income shock in the past 12 months—that might be because of a job loss, a cut in hours, illness or a new baby. If money is withdrawn, people will lose the bonus they feel they have already gained. People on low incomes know they are going to experience some income shocks, and that could discourage them from saving.

We all know that it is good to save and that it is very worthy, and we all start things with good intentions. For example, when we join a gym, we intend to go every week—of course would do—but imagine if we had a two-year contract saying we had to go every week. Crucially, therefore, there should be some measures in the Government’s proposals to allow for irregular savings, where people cannot afford to put money into the scheme one month—after all, we have all missed the odd week at the gym. Things do crop up, and we should allow a couple of withdrawals.

We also need to look at the behavioural economics of people in relation to the scheme. People may need some encouragement and some incentives to join—for example, prize draws. We all know that people spend the odd pound on a lottery ticket in the hope of winning something, and encouraging people to save by offering them the incentive of a prize would be important.

I would like to say a quick word about financial education, which is really important. I am pleased that academisation has been taken out of the Queen’s Speech. However, there is a lack of financial education in the curriculum, and it should start earlier. My experience is that primary education is really important. I had a great scheme with a great tutor, Vernon Fuller, who ran a wonderful course for primary students over 10 years ago. I would love to see how they are getting on now.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady join me in congratulating the all-party parliamentary group on financial education for young people, which this week launched its report, of which I was the chair, calling for more Government support for financial education for primary school children, because children form their money habits at the age of seven?

Yvonne Fovargue: I will indeed. I read that report with interest, as financial education has always been an interest of mine, but I have to say that it is not a silver bullet.

All efforts need to be made to keep people out of the hands of the payday lenders and the rent-to-own sector. We need to make sure that support is given to alternative providers of finance such as Fair for You, and that they have a level playing field. For example, real-time data from everyone, including the banks, must be available to new market entrants so that they can make fair assessments of lending. We must also make sure that those data are accurate, as I have had reports of data from various companies being quite inaccurate.

Talking of fairness and level playing fields, I support the calls for transitional arrangements to help the women who have been adversely affected by the mishandled increasing of the state pension age. Perhaps I should declare an interest in this as a woman who was born in the 1950s. I urge the Under-Secretary of State for Work
and Pensions, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), to revisit this unfairness during the passage of the pensions Bill.

I welcome the savings scheme, but I would like it to be designed to reflect the real lives of people on a low income: the real life that has bumps in the road on quite a few occasions; the real life where sometimes buying a new pair of shoes or going out for the day with the family is more important than putting money away for a rainy day. I hope that the Government will recognise this in the design of the scheme.

3.1 pm

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) on her typically thoughtful speech. I particularly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on continuing, in his speech, the march of the makers. That stood in stark contrast to the march of the Marxists that characterised the shadow Chancellor’s speech. We certainly make things in the Midlands and inTamworth. We make great cars at Jaguar Land Rover, great engines at BMW, world-class circuit boards at Invotec, and fine braking systems at Alcon. We are making the jobs that people want to do, and we need to make the homes that people want to live in in the west Midlands.

I congratulate the Government on their work with the Help to Buy scheme, which Bovis tells me has been seminal in getting people on to the property ladder. However, we need to do more to get SMEs back into the supply chain—SMEs that left the industry owing to mergers and acquisitions in the 1980s and the housing market crash in 2008. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will use all his artistry, eloquence and influence to prevail on the Communities and Local Government Secretary to encourage big firms like Bovis to franchise out part of their land bank to SMEs. That de-risks Bovis and other big developers because it takes some of the costs away from them, but also helps SMEs to get into the industry again because it removes some of the up-front costs of planning. I hope that the Government will consider that thought. While they are at it, I hope that they will also look at the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. SME developers in my constituency tell me of the length of time that it takes for the inspectorate in Bristol to conclude its appeal decision process. Sometimes very straightforward decisions can take up to six months. If we can speed up that process, possibly by upskilling and up-staffing the resources there, then we can take some of the weight off those SMEs’ shoulders.

We need to build homes, and we also need to build the infrastructure around them. I welcome and congratulate the Government on the infrastructure plan and the work of Lord Adonis and the Infrastructure Commission. May I encourage the Government to look at one of the “Cinderella” infrastructure projects of the midlands—the A5 corridor, which runs through Leicestershire, through Warwickshire, and up into Staffordshire? I can assure the Chancellor that he will have a lot of support from me and my hon. Friends the Members for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), all of whom want the road to be upgraded and dualled so that we can build the homes near it for people to do the jobs that are being created in the midlands.

This was a Queen’s Speech for aspirational people who want to do the right thing and get on. That is why we made gains in the local elections in my constituency just a few weeks ago. In a town that had nearly 30 Labour councillors 16 years ago, there are now just seven. After the general election, the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) was quite right to write in his, I hope, non-ironic document, “Labour’s Future”:

“Labour lost because voters didn’t believe it”.

They did not believe Labour in 2015, and I assure the House that they did not believe it last month either.

3.5 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): The Queen’s Speech included a local growth and jobs Bill, which is intended to localise business rates, but councils fear that the Government’s approach will be unfair. Given that Ministers have given no indication of how they intend to go about achieving it, we can use only their past behaviour as a guide, and that is very worrying indeed.

The Government’s council funding cuts clobbered the poorest 10 councils with cuts 23 times bigger than those experienced by the 10 richest councils. This year’s £300 million cuts relief fund was gerrymandered to ease the pain in those Tory-voting areas that had suffered the least, while offering nothing to those areas that had suffered the most. It is no wonder that the National Audit Office is investigating that perverse decision.

If business rate localisation is gerrymandered in the same way, it will stifle growth in those parts of the country that need it most, thereby creating more poverty, fear insecurity and alienation.

This is all part of the Government’s ongoing refusal to challenge inequalities of power and wealth right across the society. The social contract that underpinned our society has been shattered. The promise was that if someone worked hard, they would get on, and if they could not work, they would be looked after. Today, however, even if someone works hard, they might not be able to pay the bills or put a secure roof over their family’s head, and if they cannot work, they risk being thrown to the wolves.

There are parts of my constituency in Croydon North where too many people feel left behind because work is insecure and incomes do not cover the basic household bills. Globalisation is certainly creating great innovation, wealth and opportunity, but it is being allowed to leave too many people and their communities behind. It is sharpening inequality, moving populations on an unprecedented scale, threatening the environment and stoking political and religious fundamentalism. Alongside strengthening regulation at the centre, devolution should be used to put real power into people’s hands to challenge the blatant unfairness of the system and to build communities’ capacity to manage those great changes on their own terms.

Just across the river from Parliament stands a newly built tower full of luxury apartments kept empty by foreign investors, while on the streets below there is a housing crisis. What a powerful symbol of just how far we have gone wrong.
Anger is rising across the industrialised world. If people do not have faith that a system is working fairly for them, they will kick back against it. When legitimate concerns do not get heard by the political mainstream, they push towards the margins. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said earlier, politics is polarising in a dangerous way. People are angry about a political system that is failing them, elites that are exploiting them and wealth and opportunity that are bypassing them; but instead of addressing all that, the Government are fuelling forces that are pushing inequality to breaking point, and the consequences of that will be as dangerous as they are unpredictable.

3.9 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): In the Most Gracious Speech, Her Majesty spoke of the Government’s intention to support the northern powerhouse. I welcome support for the regions and the regeneration of local economies across the country, but I particularly welcome the recognition of the importance of manufacturing to that regeneration. My constituency and the midlands have strong manufacturing traditions, and I look forward to hearing more details about the Midlands engine, and not least about the £250 million investment fund. Our region has been significant in the economic recovery, and we have 96,000 more businesses than we had in 2010.

Although the economy has moved in a positive direction in recent years, particularly in terms of falling unemployment, we should not be complacent about the manufacturing sector. In that spirit, I call for the creation of an industrial strategy.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Hear, hear.

Chris White: Thank you. There is a clear need to boost exports, and the Government’s target to reach £1 trillion-worth of exports by 2020 is ambitious. An industrial strategy would boost confidence for investors through greater stability in the system and clear direction from the Government, as well as allowing the Government to be held to account over the period to which the strategy applies. For a Minister to come to the House annually and to be scrutinised on cross-departmental support for such a vital part of our economy can only be to everyone’s benefit.

I turn to the make-up of the strategy. A central, cohesive and comprehensive document could shape clear objectives for the sector, outlining steps that the Government intend to take to provide a framework for industry to grow. In addition, there could be a clear statement from the Cabinet Office, acting across Departments, along with annual reports to Parliament detailing supportive measures taken in the interests of manufacturing.

This Government, and perhaps any Government, typically respond well to objectives and targets that give clear focus and consistency, such as a target of 3 million new apprenticeship starts by 2020. An industrial strategy would encompass a wide range of policy areas: apprenticeships, higher education, Catapult centres, innovation and the supply chain. We need to ensure that Departments do not operate in silos, and that our whole system works in harmony, so I would add energy policy, smarter procurement, access to finance and infrastructure. Implementing a strategy would be a major step forward, considering that the manufacturing sector is less able than others to respond to circumstances quickly. A long-term vision is, therefore, essential, and it will encourage investment in the UK.

Looking ahead, we will need to compete internationally in innovation. The reshoring of production must be a central aspect of our approach, and I see innovation as key to that aim. We can help innovation to flourish in the UK by supporting through-life engineering services and improving the availability, predictability and reliability of complex engineering products to deliver the lowest possible whole-life cycle cost. Initiatives such as high-value manufacturing catapults, Industry 4.0 and TES were not even on the table in 2010. I would add, however, that no matter how attractive an industrial strategy might be, we must make sure that we start with a long-term economic plan.

3.13 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) who made a thoughtful speech. I concur with him on the importance of an industrial strategy.

The Chancellor spoke today about the Government’s plans for devolution. I want to focus on that and, in particular, on the importance of devolution for the economy and jobs in the Liverpool city region. The number of young people in the Liverpool city region who are not in education, employment or training is significantly above the national average. Among 16 to 18-year-olds, the national figure is disturbing at 4.7%, but the Liverpool figure is 6.3%—one in 16 of those young people—which is far too high and a key challenge.

The agreement between the combined authorities and the Government does several things. It devolves the adult skills budget; it moves the responsibility to work on employment support for harder-to-help claimants, so that the city region will work with the DWP; it devolves the apprenticeship grant for employers; and it institutes an area-based review of post-16 education and training. There is huge potential to provide more quality and employment apprenticeship opportunities, and I hope that the combined authority and, next year, the newly elected Mayor will work with the Government both to use these powers and to explore what further devolution is needed.

The challenge of youth unemployment is enormous. I welcome the fact that it has fallen in recent years, although I share concerns about the quality of some of the jobs that have been created, particularly for the large number of young people on zero-hours contracts. Even with that fall in youth unemployment, our rate is double that of Germany. Part of the reason for this is the quality of the technical and vocational education that we provide in contrast to Germany’s.

I welcome the fact that we will have an area-based review in Liverpool, and I recognise that the failure fully to address the issue of vocational education is a long-standing failure by Governments of both parties. However, I seek assurances from Ministers that the
Liverpool city region will have the powers it needs to reshape and restructure local skills to meet the demands of a changing economy. I welcome the powers that are being devolved, but I would like us to go further. It is not sufficient for the city region to lead on skills at 19-plus; I want it to lead on skills at 16-plus and, in fact, I want it to lead on skills at 14-plus and to address the issue of 14-to-19 education.

Last week, I urged the Education Secretary to look at the potential for the devolution of powers held by her Department. There is a very strong case for the powers of the regional schools commissioner to be devolved. Liverpool city region could then take the lead in the planning and commissioning of school and other education places. It would be an opportunity for local communities, employers, young people and others to shape the education and skills programmes that we need.

Devolution is not just about power, but about funding. Liverpool city region has been hit hard by cuts in central Government funding since 2010. I support and welcome devolution, but this must not be an exercise in devolving the blame for cuts. I urge the Government to look again at the scale of the cuts taking place in cities such as Liverpool. The Chancellor spoke about localisation and I recognise its strong advantages, which my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) set out so eloquently, but for the poorest parts of the country, such as the city of Liverpool, there is a big downside. We stand to lose substantial resources, and I ask the Government to think very carefully about how they implement this change. If we get it right, devolution can make a real and lasting difference, creating the properly paid, high-quality jobs for the future that Liverpool city region needs.

3.17 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my colleague on the International Development Committee—the Chair of the Committee—the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg).

To have a strong economy, we need a strong society. That is why I welcome the many references in the Gracious Speech to improving life chances, especially for the young and disadvantaged. The Children and Social Work Bill and the prisons and courts reform Bill are particularly welcome in helping to give a second chance to those who, in so many cases, never had a first chance.

Last week, the review of prison education by Dame Sally Coates, “Unlocking Potential”, proposed that to improve the life chances of prisoners, a holistic vision of education is needed for them, including family and relationship learning and practical advice on parenting and financial skills. It is heartening to note that the Government have agreed to implement the review in full.

Another excellent report that has also just been published is Lord Laming’s “In Care, Out of Trouble”, in which he says:

“Remedial work and rehabilitation are essential but prevention is so much more rewarding and fruitful for the young person and wider society.”

He says that good parenting “creates the solid foundation” to give the child the best start, and that the “essential ingredients” are security and stability. He says that “in this context... young children develop self confidence, trust, personal and social values and optimism. Loss, neglect or trauma at this early stage in life often result in profound and enduring consequences.”

That is why the commitment in the Gracious Speech to “increase life chances for the most disadvantaged” by tackling poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability is so welcome.

Addressing this challenge is urgent. The needs are widespread, and not just for those at risk of entering the care or criminal justice systems. Years of evidence-based research by the Centre for Social Justice has shown it is demonstrably the case that growing up in a family where relationships are dysfunctional, chaotic or insecure is not only a key driver of poverty in itself, but a driver of other causes of poverty such as addiction, mental health problems, behavioural problems, poor educational attainment, worklessness, depression and debt. Teachers and mental health charity workers in my constituency tell me that disturbingly increasing levels of poor mental health among children, including very young children, frequently result from insecure family relationships.

Suella Fernandes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recently announced change to the measurement of life chances—from one based on an arbitrary relative income to one that takes into account worklessness in households and educational attainment—reflects the multifaceted nature of poverty and achievement?

Fiona Bruce: I do indeed. I also think that we should include family instability in that statutory footing.

Yesterday, Relate published a report on couple relationship distress in the UK. It states:

“Good quality, couple, family and social relationships are the basis of a thriving society... central to our health and wellbeing... poor quality relationships have far-reaching consequences. Inter-parental relationships have... been recognised... as a major determinant of children's life chances.”

However, Relate’s analysis estimates that almost one in five of adult couple relationships in the UK could be characterised as a distressed relationship, meaning one with a severe level of relationship problems that has a clinically significant negative effect on a partner’s wellbeing. Relate’s report estimates that almost one in five of adult couple relationships in the UK could be characterised as a distressed relationship, meaning one with a severe level of relationship problems that has a clinically significant negative effect on a partner’s wellbeing. Relate’s analysis estimates that almost one in five of adult couple relationships in the UK could be characterised as a distressed relationship, meaning one with a severe level of relationship problems that has a clinically significant negative effect on a partner’s wellbeing.

The figure for partners with children under 16 is even higher. Encouragingly, however, Relate also says:

“A broad range of relationship support services are effective at improving relationship quality.”

I hope Ministers will read the report and note its recommendation that we need to “expand access to a spectrum of support for good quality relationships, overcoming barriers of accessibility, availability, and affordability to ensure that anyone who needs it can benefit from support.”

I look forward to the publication of the Government’s life chances strategy. I hope that it recognises that poverty of relationships is a severe limiter of life chances, and that substantially increased support for stronger family relationships is needed in every local community. It is important to provide somewhere in every locality where people can go for such support and advice, at any stage in their family life—whether they are starting a family, bringing up toddlers or teenagers, coping with supporting an elderly parent, or simply a couple going through a rocky patch.
The troubled families initiative has been successful in providing intervention and support at a crisis stage. Let us learn from that, but provide support much earlier, when families feel they need help. Let us normalise asking for help and providing it. There cannot be a family in the land that would not benefit.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):

I must confess I thought the Queen’s Speech was fairly awful. It was not awful in its individual proposals on things such as prison reform or bus regulation, all of which have some merit. It was certainly not awful because of the delivery of it by Her Majesty the Queen, who even sounded reasonably excited by the news of a forthcoming state visit from the Colombians—something we can all get behind. It was awful because it lacked any sense of big thinking and any grand design for the state of our nation. As a constituency MP I see so many challenges and so many things I want to change that listening to the modest list of measures we heard last week only left me frustrated.

What makes me so impatient about those shortcomings is that I believe that with better leadership and a better Government, we could do so much better. We are a country where the divide between the very affluent and everyone else is too great, and where owning a home, having a decent job and being able to have a good family life are increasingly unattainable for too many people. Eight years after the financial crisis, our economy is still too dependent on the financial services sector, house prices and consumer spending, and is still too reliant on London and the south-east. There are obscene levels of extreme poverty and destitution, and homelessness is almost back to 1980s levels.

We have an ageing population, but core public services such the NHS and social care simply do not have enough money. Our welfare system is not fit for purpose; it gives too little support to many people while creating welfare dependency in a small group of others. We have chronic skills shortages in several major industries; that in turn fuels record immigration levels. Our lack of any kind of industrial policy has left several key sectors such as steel facing the abyss.

Some parts of our economy are overtaxed, particularly through the outdated business rates system, and other parts do not pay the tax they should. I could go on, because nothing in this Queen’s Speech made me feel as if our Government are considering these problems; in fact, nothing in it made me feel that the Government have a desire to do anything more than try to hold the Conservative party together over the next 12 months.

Suella Fernandes: I note the hon. Gentleman’s criticism of the Queen’s Speech. Does he share the same opinion about Labour’s future as that written by a member of his party, which said that Labour lacks credibility on the economy?

Jonathan Reynolds: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the extra time, and I will come on to those wider criticisms.

In some respects the Queen’s Speech was frankly dishonest. Whatever one’s view of the necessity of austerity, or the success of the Government’s deficit reduction programme, it is simply not true to say that public services are being reformed to help the hardest to reach—they are being reformed to remove them from the hardest to reach. It is also not true to say some of the deepest social problems in society are being tackled when some—homelessness, for example—are clearly getting worse. In Greater Manchester, one of the most dynamic parts of England, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has said, an entire community of people are now living in tents in Manchester city centre. That is not what success looks like. I am all for measuring life chances better, but we do not need a new set of indicators to understand that taking money from people who have serious disabilities—as the Government have repeatedly tried to do—will make their lives harder, not better.

If I were writing the Queen’s Speech, I would ask for it to include three things. First—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White)—we need a formal industrial strategy in the UK that is focused on making British industry as globally competitive as it can be. Secondly, we need a royal commission on the welfare state, to consider what will be required in an age of rapid technological change and digital self-employment. Thirdly, we need serious democratic reform, so that future Queen’s Speeches are much better than this one.

The tail-end of the Queen’s Speech contained a miserly reference to the supremacy of the Commons. If the Government do not want to lose so much legislation in the Lords, they should try to make better legislation. I do not believe the Lords to be the hotbed of democratic socialism that Ministers seek to portray. This Queen’s Speech was not a programme to transform our nation or tackle our biggest problems. It was all filler and no killer—a pick ’n’ mix of pet projects; a holding card until the next Conservative leadership contest reveals that party’s true direction. Britain deserves a legislative programme that engages our public, ignites our economy, and inspires our future. Britain deserves a lot better than this.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):

It is a great pleasure to speak about this Gracious Speech, which puts opportunity and life chances at the heart of our society. It is a one nation Queen’s Speech, and Britain is forecast to grow faster than any other major advanced economy in 2016. Growth is forecast to exceed 2% each and every year this decade, meaning that in 10 to 15 years we could be the biggest economy in Europe, outstripping the German economy. Average weekly wages have risen by 2.1% since last year, and the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that 2.9 million workers will benefit directly from the introduction of the national living wage, and estimates that a further 6 million could see a pay rise as a result of the ripple effect.

This Government were elected to back working people, and the best way to do that is to let them keep more of the money they earn. The personal allowance will rise further to £11,500 by 2017-18, giving 31 million people a tax cut. This Queen’s Speech makes it easier for people on low incomes to save. The lifetime savings Bill will introduce a help to save scheme, providing a 50% Government bonus on up to £50 of monthly savings, helping more than 3 million of the lowest earners to put money aside.
Over the past year, we have got on with delivering our manifesto commitments to give people security and opportunity at every stage of their life. Some 16% of working age people in the UK are disabled or have a health condition. The Government are committed to halving the gap between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people, to ensure that disabled people have opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. We spend around £50 billion every year on benefits to support people with disabilities or health conditions, which is 6% of all Government spending. That represents 2.5% of our GDP, and is significantly above spending in countries such as France and Germany, and the OECD average of 2.2%.

In the past two years, 365,000 disabled people have moved into work, with more than 3.3 million now in employment. Halving the disability employment gap, means helping around 1 million more disabled people to achieve their ambition of finding work. Later this year, I will be holding my first Weaver Vale Disability Confident fair. I give the Government credit for bringing forward this fantastic scheme to truly challenge attitudes to employing those with disabilities.

As a Cheshire MP I can say that INEOS Chlor and Tata Chemicals are significant employers for those living in Runcorn and Northwich. I recently met Ginni Rometty, the CEO of IBM, to talk about cognitive technology and artificial intelligence. Cognitive technologies are the future for this country.

Energy-intensive industries, and the jobs associated with them, are almost exclusively located outside of London. They are often high-skill, high-wage jobs. They form a vital part of the northern powerhouse, and regional growth and development. I am committed to closing the north-south divide. Our great northern cities and regions can be greater than the sum of their parts. The northern powerhouse is underpinned by world-class transport linking our great cities and regions to drive up productivity and our economic revival.

Colleagues will know that I have been campaigning to reinstate the Halton curve line for many years now. I am delighted to report that the final business case was examined by the Liverpool city region combined authority in April and it has approved the plans. That is significant because it will enable travel from north Wales to Cheshire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester.

This is a one nation Queen's Speech from a one nation Government. As someone who was born and grew up on a council estate, the Conservative party is the Government. As someone who was born and grew up on a council estate, the Conservative party is the one nation Government. As someone who was born and grew up on a council estate, the Conservative party is the one nation Government.

It is clear that the forthcoming referendum has had an inhibiting effect on the Queen's Speech and the Government's ambitions for this year in Parliament. We can debate at length whether inhibiting the Government is a good or a bad thing, but I can only say that I am disappointed they have not done more to address the widening social, economic and infrastructural inequalities that are opening up across these islands and leaving too many people behind, particularly in the constituency I represent in Northern Ireland.

On rural broadband, the widening divide between winners and losers is well embodied by the ongoing failure to provide rural communities access to reliable high-speed broadband. New technology provides the potential for rural communities to be more closely connected to the wider world of commerce, culture and government but despite that, a report from the European Commission found that over half of rural areas still do not have access to high-speed connections. In fairness to the Government, I welcome the commitment in the Queen's Speech to provide households with a right to high-speed connections. However, I am concerned about what that really means. Who will be responsible for delivering this right and who can rural communities turn to when they have been let down? I hope the Government are sincere in their intentions, but I must remain sceptical until further proposals are brought forward—hopefully in time to meet the Prime Minister's own broadband targets.

There has been no attempt, despite a letter signed by the Northern Ireland MPs, to reduce VAT on tourism—a fiscal measure and fiscal flexibility that would aid tourism in an area where we have to compete with the south of Ireland. A report published today says that we have the lowest level of disposable income and the highest number of visitors. The issues of air passenger duty and VAT on tourism have to be addressed.

On our farming communities, the regional inequalities that exist for Northern Ireland farmers place them at a severe financial disadvantage to their counterparts in Britain. That may be a market issue, but it has to be addressed urgently.

Finally, on the upcoming EU referendum, there is no doubt that, for Northern Ireland, a vote to remain will be of the greatest benefit to the local economy. In that respect, I urge the Government to ensure that the issues of poverty and deprivation and broadband connections and the needs of our tourism industry are properly and equitably addressed.

3.35 pm

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie). On this occasion, I sadly did not agree with everything she said, but I enjoyed her contribution.

The Gracious Speech contained many encouraging Bills for the coming parliamentary year, but I would like first to welcome the small charitable donations Bill, which innumerable sports clubs and charities in my constituency will welcome with open arms. For too long, our local charities have been hampered by the lack of gift aid on their collection, so I am pleased that this will now be addressed. The fact that the Government want to allow local sports clubs the opportunity of gift aid on their small
donations might be a saving grace for many local sports teams, but for some it might do more than put a little extra money in their pockets; it might go as far as to give them another season. Young farmers clubs might also benefit from the Bill. For those who do not know, young farmers clubs are groups of young people who get together and organise a wide range of events and community activities throughout the year, encompassing everything from barn dances to rural skills and debates on current affairs. My local Brecknockshire federation recently held a hustings on the EU, though I shall not go further into that one.

For me, however, the Queen’s Speech is not all plain sailing, as I have concerns over the economic consequences of the Wales Bill. Wales does not need further devolution to Cardiff Bay. At a time when the UK economy has chugged back into life and is now on track to further prosperity, owing to the hard work of the Westminster Government, giving further powers to the Labour Cabinet in the Welsh Assembly will slam the brakes on in Wales.

If we truly care about the Welsh economy, we have to ensure that powers over tax and other economic measures are held where the people of Wales want them. With the commitment in the Queen’s Speech to abolishing the need for a referendum on giving the Assembly tax-raising powers, I am concerned that constituents will not get a voice over whether this important power is placed in the hands of the devolved Government. It is not just my constituents who are worried. Many local businesses are concerned about the effect on them. Ultimately, the future of Wales and the devolved settlement should be for the people of Wales to decide, but the commitment in the Queen’s Speech does not give them a voice.

That voice is important. I hear a great deal about the importance of the northern powerhouse and the southern powerhouse, but where in this cacophony is the rural powerhouse? As I am sure many are fully aware, farming is one of the UK’s staple industries. In my area—but not just in my area—it is also the main driver behind the local economy. The agri-food sector employs more than 10% of the total UK workforce, and the food and farming sector is worth more than £100 billion to the UK economy. Farming is a great job creator. Farmers need a workforce of labourers and contractors of all descriptions. Sheep and cattle need feed grown by other farmers. When livestock are taken to market, there is an auctioneer—I was one before I entered the House—and auctioneers need clerks and staff. Finally, when livestock are taken to slaughter, the abattoirs need expert butchers and high-tech machinery, which has to be designed by someone—the list of jobs goes on and on. Yet farming is facing hard times. Milk and lamb prices are falling, and farms across the country are facing grave difficulties. We must do all we can to help support this vital industry, which does so much for the rural economy. I hope that the better markets Bill will include assistance for farmers by cutting red tape for the farming community and that other vital rural industry—tourism.

Finally, I would like briefly to touch on the digital economy Bill and how it will be of great benefit to my constituents and businesses and to the rural economy more widely—[ Interruption ]—but I will have to leave that to somebody else because I have run out of time.

3.39 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): In the few minutes available, I shall primarily address issues relating to the criminal finance Bill. In introducing the subject, I can do no better than recognise the extremely thoughtful contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) on Tuesday. In his peroration, he made these comments in referring to the Bill:

“We in this country are very bad at dealing with white-collar crime, and there is growing awareness of that. If someone wishes to rob a bank, they go to the LIBOR market; they do not put on a balaclava and pick up a shotgun—that is much less profitable. I hope I can be reassured that the Bill will tackle not just tax evasion, which is quite rightly high on the public agenda, but money laundering.”

He concluded this part of his speech by saying:

“London is still the money-laundering capital of the world.”—[Official Report, 24 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 450.]

The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly pointed out the nature of the challenge we face. Many of the biggest crooks are working in the City of London. This is a major challenge that we should all be willing to address. It would be commendable if the Government eventually produced a very strong Bill, but as is sometimes said in my part of the world, “I hae ma doubts”.

If people’s behaviour and motivation are so important, that raises a fundamental concern in my mind about the flawed approach to economics that seems to dominate much of current thinking. We find that Treasury civil servants and central bankers have presided over not only corrupt practices and economic failure, but intellectual failure, too. For example, their devotion to what most people know as neo-classical economics led to their failure to anticipate the largest recession since the 1930s, and revealed their powerlessness as policymakers in the face of the subsequent stagnation of output.

The penchant of the neo-classicals for putting all their eggs in the basket of simple mathematical and statistical forecasting is based on remarkably few variables, which leads them to ignore economic problems that are not easy to measure—whether they be legal or illegal. Even Mervyn King in his book “The End of Alchemy” hinted at this critique when pointing out the failure of existing models to take into account critical changes such as the political reforms in China that led to its rapid growth. I add the inability to see how attractive the City of London has become to—

Graham Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Roger Mullin: Certainly.

Graham Evans: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned London on several occasions, which makes me wonder whether there are no issues with people from Edinburgh. I remind him that Sir Fred Goodwin was a Scotsman in the Royal Bank of Scotland at the time. I can do no better than recognise the extremely thoughtful contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) on Tuesday. In his peroration, he made these comments in referring to the Bill:

Graham Evans: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned London on several occasions, which makes me wonder whether there are no issues with people from Edinburgh. I remind him that Sir Fred Goodwin was a Scotsman in the Royal Bank of Scotland at the time. I can do no better than recognise the extremely thoughtful contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for

Roger Mullin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the extra minute, but I never implied that at all. If he had been here at the beginning of my speech and was listening to it, he might have realised that I was citing the words of the right hon. and learned Member for
Rushcliffe, who was sitting in the same place on Tuesday, and it was he who raised this very issue. If the hon. Gentleman wants to take issue with the castigation of the City, or with my colleagues rather than to me.

Time does not permit me to go into a more detailed analysis of what needs to be done, so let me make a few suggestions. I think it would be useful if we vastly strengthened support for whistleblowing to give employees within banks and financial institutions greater confidence in raising issues such as suspected money laundering and the management of illegal assets.

As I reflect on what my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) said, I believe it would be wise for the Treasury to convene a commission into the simplification of the tax code. Put simply, the more complicated we construct a tax code, the easier it is for those will mal intentions to find their way into securing gains for themselves at the expense of others. I hope we get a Bill of some substance. I hope that the Government truly wish to address those vested interests that do us all so much harm.

3.44 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is, as ever, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), and I am grateful to him for his advice. As a neo-classicist myself, I now know that I need to keep an eye on my variables. I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying that it is an even greater pleasure for Conservative Members to know that there is now an effective Opposition in the Scottish Parliament, keeping an eye on his colleagues and what they are up to, up north.

I listened to every word of not only the hon. Gentleman’s speech but that of the shadow Chancellor. I do not know whether the shadow Chancellor rehearses his speeches in front of his colleagues, but, if so, he may have allowed himself a wry smile when he referred to the need to replace old worn-out infrastructure with something more effective. Having read “Labour’s Future”—a very Little Red Book!—I can only imagine that the shadow Chancellor’s advisers, Messrs Fischer and Varoufakis, have got their work cut out in the years ahead.

In the short time that remains to me, I want to say some positive things about what is a very positive Gracious Speech. I serve on the Financial Inclusion Commission, an honour that I share with the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), and I am particularly interested in the way in which the Government are setting out to improve financial inclusion and resilience. The scale of the problem, highlighted by an excellent paper published earlier this week by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Financial Inclusion Commission, is immense, but the Government are taking positive steps.

I welcome fee-free basic bank accounts, the lifetime ISA and the continuing successful roll-out of auto-enrolment, but I particularly welcome the Help to Save scheme, from which up to 3.5 million low-paid workers could benefit, I do not for one second underestimate the difficulty, for many families, of saving £50 a month, but from my experience of credit unions I know that some do, and if they do it through that scheme, they will be better off to the tune of £1,200. I welcome the scheme for its direct impact, but I welcome it even more for the culture of financial resilience that it could provide. Curbs on payday lending will get us only so far. Any step that helps to boost resilience, and thereby reduces demand for those crippling services, is to be welcomed.

Our main focus, however, must be on encouraging resilience by promoting national economic growth, and the Gracious Speech is imbued with policies that will enhance productivity. As has been mentioned a number of times during the debate, establishing a legal right to broadband connections will enhance productivity, and will also aid financial and social inclusion.

The Government’s commitment to transport is well founded. The performance of Gatwick’s local rail operator, Govia Thameslink Railway—not helped by the current industrial action—is woeful, but I recognise the Government’s commitment to investment in the line.

In the context of transport and productivity, the Davies commission made an unequivocal recommendation in favour of Heathrow. It said that Gatwick would deliver half the economic benefit, that it had insufficient transport connections, and that it would fail to provide the hub airport that Britain needs. For the sake of our national productivity, let us get on with expanding Heathrow.

Finally, let me welcome fair funding for schools. It will assist the recruitment of maths and other STEM teachers in West Sussex, and it will help to drive future productivity, enable us to create a generation throughout the country who are better equipped to seize the opportunities that the Government are creating, and boost financial inclusion and resilience.

3.48 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): There are measures to like, but beware: nothing shows the weakness of an Administration more than a failure to include big, controversial Bills in a Gracious Speech. This Queen’s Speech certainly contains policies that are wrong. The education Bill, for example, with its academisation programme and its national funding formula, marks an appalling return to the old obsession with structures rather than standards. The formula will take £18 million from schools in Brent, and will call that fair. We have reception classes with 21 different mother tongues, and an 8.6% per pupil spending cut for them is not fair. It is wrong.

So there are measures to like, but beware: nothing shows the weakness of an Administration more than a failure to include big, controversial Bills in a Gracious Speech. This Queen’s Speech certainly contains policies that are wrong. The education Bill, for example, with its academisation programme and its national funding formula, marks an appalling return to the old obsession with structures rather than standards. The formula will take £18 million from schools in Brent, and will call that fair. We have reception classes with 21 different mother tongues, and an 8.6% per pupil spending cut for them is not fair. It is wrong.

My point is that the Government have run out of steam or are too insecure about getting support from their own Members to risk big controversial measures. So perhaps in a spirit of mendacious assistance, I shall set out the Bill that I believe the Government could and should have placed at the heart of the Gracious Address. A green growth Bill would set a clear trajectory for the UK to lead the world in today’s low carbon industrial
A green growth Bill would also transform the Treasury model from its current fixation on GDP growth to one that focused on wealth maximisation. To understand that GDP and wealth are not the same, one only needs to recall that the 2013-14 floods were the single biggest contributor to GDP in 2014 while simultaneously ruining thousands of people's lives. GDP measures productivity, not wealth. A green growth Bill would make our country focus on what really mattered.

Businesses currently extract an estimated $7 trillion globally from the environment each year. This is in the form of free non-renewable goods and the equally free renewable services that they utilise. However, that $7 trillion does not appear on balance sheets; these are free goods—or externalities, as classical economics prefers to call them. No Government account exists to chart their contribution to the national wealth, yet they represent the annual income from a gigantic asset base that is quite simply the precondition of all other economic activity. What sort of economic managers do we have who fail to quantify an asset base of this magnitude and importance?

A green growth Bill would establish natural capital accounting so that by measuring nature we could make its contribution to our economy visible and allow for effective decision making. Such a Bill would appoint a Chief Secretary to the Treasury equivalent who would examine not just departmental resource and departmental expenditure limit budgets but their natural capital and ecosystem services depletion as well. Our natural capital debt is arguably a much more urgent issue than our financial debt, yet our Governments are failing spectacularly to reverse the decline in that asset base.

3.52 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), but I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Gracious Speech. I do so for three main reasons. First, it recognises that businesses create jobs. Secondly, it confirms that we want to ensure that people keep more of what they earn. Thirdly, it allows the Government to support families in looking after themselves better in the years ahead.

Businesses are creating jobs in North East Hampshire and the surrounding area, and people in my constituency are doing very well under this Government’s long-term economic plan. The reality is that only 0.5% of the economically active people there are unemployed. That is excellent news, but we must not be complacent. There are still 255 people who need work, and we must ensure that we create the opportunities for business to provide it. That is why I am pleased that small businesses will be helped by the universal service obligation for broadband. That is a major issue in some of the more rural parts of my constituency. People often want to set up their own business in those areas, and they need to be able to access the internet but cannot do so at the moment.

Further, I want to make the point on behalf of my constituents that their taxes must be well spent. They expect that, because North East Hampshire receives just over £350 per head on average in benefits, which is the lowest amount of all the constituencies in the country. This is a result of the strong economy, and taxpayers recognise that while there should be a welfare state to act as a safety net, it must not be a lifestyle choice. That is why it is important that we help people to keep more of what they earn, to incentivise work. The tax-free allowance has risen to £11,000, and we must go further in the future. Three million people pay no income tax at all, but many people in my constituency pay the higher rate of income tax. The rise in the threshold to £43,000 is a good step, but we must go further. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was on to something when he talked about the “squeezed middle”. It is true that there are people with reasonably paid jobs who need support because they still find things tough. That is what we are trying to address by increasing the threshold for the higher rate, and I encourage Ministers to go further.

The last thing that I want to cover in the time available is the most local issue of all: families and life chances. It is right that we create good schools for everyone and that people's lives should not be dictated by where they came from, but by their skills and abilities and by where they want to go. A key part of all that is the family in which they live. I am pleased that the Conservatives, in coalition with the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 and now in a Conservative majority Government, have recognised marriage in the tax system. The marriage allowance is an important step, but we should go further, because family breakdown costs the Government and taxpayers £48 billion a year. If we could tackle just a fraction of the family breakdown in this country, not only would we save taxpayers’ money, but we would improve people’s life chances. All the research shows that people with stable family backgrounds enjoy better educational prospects and better jobs in the future. While we must focus on ensuring that individuals get life chances, this is also about ensuring that we bring the public finances under control. By doing all these things, we will do just that.

3.56 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): After years of abandoning and punishing the most vulnerable people in society, we get a Queen’s Speech that talks about introducing legislation to tackle some of the deepest social problems and to improve life chances for the most disadvantaged. However, we all know the truth: this Government’s grand rhetoric is rarely matched by policy. In fact, their policies tend to be regressive and punitive, pushing more and more people into poverty.

No one living in poverty is there as a result of their own doing; the perpetuation of poverty and the rise in child poverty since 2010 is a clear failing of Government. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), but I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Gracious Speech. I do so for three main reasons. First, it recognises that businesses create jobs. Secondly, it confirms that we want to ensure that people keep more of what they earn. Thirdly, it allows the Government to support families in looking after themselves better in the years ahead.

Businesses are creating jobs in North East Hampshire and the surrounding area, and people in my constituency are doing very well under this Government’s long-term economic plan. The reality is that only 0.5% of the economically active people there are unemployed. That is excellent news, but we must not be complacent. There are still 255 people who need work, and we must ensure that we create the opportunities for business to provide it. That is why I am pleased that small businesses will be helped by the universal service obligation for broadband. That is a major issue in some of the more rural parts of my constituency. People often want to set up their own business in those areas, and they need to be able to access the internet but cannot do so at the moment.

Further, I want to make the point on behalf of my constituents that their taxes must be well spent. They expect that, because North East Hampshire receives just over £350 per head on average in benefits, which is the lowest amount of all the constituencies in the country. This is a result of the strong economy, and taxpayers recognise that while there should be a welfare state to act as a safety net, it must not be a lifestyle choice. That is why it is important that we help people to keep more of what they earn, to incentivise work. The tax-free allowance has risen to £11,000, and we must go further in the future. Three million people pay no income tax at all, but many people in my constituency pay the higher rate of income tax. The rise in the threshold to £43,000 is a good step, but we must go further. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was on to something when he talked about the “squeezed middle”. It is true that there are people with reasonably paid jobs who need support because they still find things tough. That is what we are trying to address by increasing the threshold for the higher rate, and I encourage Ministers to go further.

The last thing that I want to cover in the time available is the most local issue of all: families and life chances. It is right that we create good schools for everyone and that people's lives should not be dictated by where they came from, but by their skills and abilities and by where they want to go. A key part of all that is the family in which they live. I am pleased that the Conservatives, in coalition with the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 and now in a Conservative majority Government, have recognised marriage in the tax system. The marriage allowance is an important step, but we should go further, because family breakdown costs the Government and taxpayers £48 billion a year. If we could tackle just a fraction of the family breakdown in this country, not only would we save taxpayers’ money, but we would improve people’s life chances. All the research shows that people with stable family backgrounds enjoy better educational prospects and better jobs in the future. While we must focus on ensuring that individuals get life chances, this is also about ensuring that we bring the public finances under control. By doing all these things, we will do just that.
a year by 2020-21, which is a loss per working-age adult of £380 a year. South Tyneside, the council which covers my constituency, is the sixth worst-affected local authority. Even the introduction of the living wage has left the lowest-paid workers little better off, if at all. One of my constituents, a carer, is now in a desperate financial situation because the new living wage has taken her over the threshold to be eligible for carer’s allowance. An extra £8 a week has cost her £62 in lost benefits.

If this Government really care about life chances, they would not be running into the ground the services people that people rely on the most. They would not have closed over 800 Sure Start centres. They would not be presiding over a crisis in teacher recruitment. They would not be focusing resources on adoption to the detriment of social work that can keep families together. They would not be presiding over the collapse of the NHS and social care. They would not have made such a mess of the benefits system to the extent that more than 1 million food parcels have been handed out. Disabled people would not be losing more than £1,500 a year. The terminally ill would not be being declared fit for work and having their income slashed. Homelessness would not have doubled since 2010. We would not have rising wealth inequality in areas blighted by high unemployment. The Children’s Society has reported that children and young people in Britain are among the unhappiest, unhealthiest, poorest and least educated in the developed world.

This Queen’s Speech identifies an impotent and careless Government whose numerous U-turns reveal deep problems at the core of their policy making. Of the 30 announcements, we have heard 28 of them before, because we have for the past year had to put up with a Government obsessed with internal politics. We all know that the EU referendum has nothing at all to do with whether or not we are better off in or out of Europe. The Government have taken up precious parliamentary time with a prolonged, unedifying fight between—[Interruption.] You can have your say later. It is a fight between two middle-aged public school chums over who is going to run the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Even though that was said from a sedentary position, it is not “you” who has had your say—it is “he” who has had his say.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am going to end by saying that if this is the Prime Minister’s last Queen’s Speech, I am sure it is not a legacy that he or anyone on the Government Benches should be proud of.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. After the next speaker, I will have to reduce the time limit to three minutes. People will have to start speaking very quickly and take limited interventions. Still on four minutes, however, is Mr Craig Tracey.

4 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Many of the measures in the Gracious Speech will bring benefits to North Warwickshire and Bedworth, but, in the short time available to me today, I wish to focus on the digital economy Bill. The Bill is vital, not just in my constituency, where there are large pockets of rural communities, but across the whole of the UK, if we are to maintain our position as the fifth largest global economy.

I want Britain to be at the forefront of innovation and to be a nation where technology continually transforms the economy and society, but for that we need to up our efforts in creating a world-class digital infrastructure and delivering on our manifesto commitment to roll out universal broadband. We have made great strides since 2010, when fewer than half of UK properties had access to superfast broadband. Now, 90% of households enjoy it, and that figure is set to increase to 95% by 2017. Many of the benefits are clear: better connectivity brings more choice, more opportunities and greater competition; new markets for businesses are opened up, not just within the UK or the confines of the EU, but globally and in emerging markets; and consumers are more empowered, finding it easier to access a wider range of goods and get access to their finances. But there are other, less recognised benefits that greater connectivity brings: it can help to keep families in touch, including our military based overseas; it can ease pressure on our health services; and it can combat other social issues, such as loneliness, particularly in isolated rural areas. I have long championed the case for high-speed broadband. A great example of these benefits in operation is Prezzybox, an online retail company in the village of Austrey which operates from a farm building. It is wholly reliant on the internet, but has now been able to grow to employ 25 local people, thanks to the connectivity that has been delivered.

I have two observations, however, that I would like to share with Ministers. First, there needs to be better communication with local communities, both before and after the installation of new services. I have been contacted by many constituents who were not aware of the roll-out plans in place for their area and the fact that they were soon to be connected in any case. Once the service is activated, it is vital that the next steps are strongly communicated to those who now have access. I have lost count of the number of constituents who think that once the upgraded broadband is available their speeds will automatically increase. They do not realise that they have to activate a superfast service or often that they can pick from a range of providers able to offer them that service.

My second point relates to the not spots—the 5% who by 2017 will still not have access to superfast broadband and whose number the National Farmers Union puts at 1.2 million households, and the 10% who will still not have access to mobile phone coverage. Many of these affected areas will be rural and farming communities, and I know of several areas in North Warwickshire that offer little or no coverage, and slow download speeds, often of dial-up proportions. We must do everything we can to ensure that these communities are connected as quickly as possible, so as not to be left behind by the digital revolution.

It is clear that the demand is there, so what I am urging the Government to do is act decisively and look at all the available options. In all likelihood, these remaining properties are going to be the most difficult to reach so, in the best of entrepreneurial British spirit,
we may need to be creative and innovative. There are opportunities to look at alternative providers who can create separate infrastructure projects. There is the option of providing greater access to satellite provision. Importantly, we need to encourage community projects, for which there is currently no public sector funding.

In conclusion, many things in this one nation Queen's speech will bring great benefit as they are implemented, not just to my constituents, but to the UK as a whole. The continued focus of this Government on a digital economy can leave a legacy for generations to come.

4.4 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the Queen's Speech debate today if only for three minutes. As many people, both inside and outside this House, have remarked, this speech has felt a bit like a damp squib, or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) said, all filler and no killer. Perhaps that is because all eyes are on the referendum. It is astonishing that the Tories have been waiting for a majority Government since the 1990s and have already run out of ideas by their second Queen's Speech. That takes some doing.

As far as the economy is concerned, the sum total of Bills in this Queen's Speech does not add up to the comprehensive plan that would put the recovery on a more sustainable footing, or allow our citizens to meet the challenges of the labour market as it is today and also, more importantly, as it will be in the future. We are not producing enough secure, well-paid jobs, and the Government have presided over record low pay growth, so we badly needed a clear, bold and comprehensive productivity plan, which is totally missing from this Queen's Speech.

The Chancellor has been the steward of the UK economy for the past six years, but unfortunately for all of us he appears to be a one-trick pony struggling with his only trick. His only real plan for the economy is deficit reduction, and he continually misses his own targets. We know that he failed to eliminate the deficit in the last Parliament as promised and figures released by the Office for National Statistics on Tuesday showed that the Chancellor had missed his borrowing target from last year by £3.8 billion, with the deficit still standing at £76 billion. Manufacturing remains 6.9% below 2008 levels, and our export performance is really worrying. Although services continue to outperform, we are still lagging behind on goods exports, with the widest shortfall since records began. It is worth remembering that, in 2011, the Chancellor said that our exports were critical to our economic growth, and that he was going to double the value of exports to £1 trillion and increase the number of exporters by 100,000. His record shows that exports were not even mentioned in last year's Budget because there has been only a tiny increase in the value of exports since 2011. In fact, the number of exporters has fallen between 2013 and 2014. The Chancellor will try to blame the global cocktail of risk, but many of the problems are of the Government’s own making, because of their failure to do any serious heavy lifting in rebalancing the UK economy.

What we really needed from the Queen's Speech was a proper productivity plan, not just a vague ragbag of old failed policies that the Government have tried to put together under a new label. We needed a fresh start for exports, so that our performance in exports can start the rebalancing that our economy so urgently needs.

4.7 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): It is always a very great honour to stand up in this Chamber and speak for my constituents, whom I am so proud to represent.

On the first day of this debate, we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman). In an eloquent speech, she reminded every Member of this House of the incredible opportunities that we all have, each and every day, to change things for the better and to fight for the causes that we care about. She paid tribute to the willingness of Members from all parts of the House to work collaboratively in cross-party groups and friendships to fight for shared causes.

For all the disagreements that there are—on both sides of the House and in our own parties—there is a common desire to serve our constituents to the best of our ability and make whatever small difference we can in a world that all too often seems filled with injustice.

The Gracious Speech contained within it the very measures that drove me to fight so hard against the odds to come to this place. I am talking about social justice, social mobility and life chances. At its heart, the Gracious Speech is all about hope and possibility—specifically for those who have never had it easy. This Queen's Speech was about tackling the barriers and obstacles that often stand in the way of too many and that rob them of the hopes and ambitions that they might otherwise realise.

I am proud that this Government have placed a commitment to strong families at the heart of this speech, as it is a strong family that will give a child the very best start in life. Some might dismiss that as insubstantial froth or, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) put it, “fictional drivel”, but a strong family is at the core of a successful and thriving society. It is the children in struggling families, the children in care, the children in the our youth offending system who are denied the hope, possibility and chance of something better.

Too many do not want to talk about the underlying causes of disadvantage. We should not shy away from doing so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) rightly said, it is about family breakdown, addiction, mental health difficulties, repeat spells in prison and homelessness. Getting out of that cycle is so difficult.

Strong families take many forms. My mother was a single parent with five children, who struggled hard to keep our family together. She taught me that you can set your mind to anything and achieve it. You might have to fight harder, you might have to try harder, and there might be obstacles in your way that others do not face, but do not let that stop you.

I want for others the ability to make their way in the world, no matter where they came from and no matter what obstacles they face. That is why I wanted to come to this place to fight for those who are too often written off and whose lives could take another direction if only they had the chance.
4.10 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is self-evident that investment, jobs and skills are the key to solving many of the problems facing the country. That is no less true in my constituency, so I shall touch on those topics.

There has been a slowdown in private sector investment owing to the impact of the recession and slow or stagnant recovery in the north. In my constituency, the only recent significant industrial investment is in a facility in Netherton at a manufacturing printers. The most strategic investment is in the new deep sea berth in the port of Liverpool at Seaforth. However, although there are plans to build a new road or a reconstructed road to the port, the plans for rail freight are abysmal, with just £10 million investment over the next three years. Perhaps there should be a halt to the road development until we get a better and more symbiotic relationship between rail and road investment there.

Bootle constituency has a chronic deficit of private investment as its employment base is in the public sector, at 23% in the borough of Sefton compared with 17% in the UK, and private sector job increases have not replaced public sector job loss. This is compounded by the underinvestment in public infrastructure on rail, ageing water and sewerage systems and undersupply of electricity to development sites. I hope the devolution deal will deliver on its promise to attract more investment into the area.

I want to give a thumbs-up to Mayor Joe Anderson, the chair of Liverpool city region combined authority, who has robustly made that case for the whole of Merseyside, as Ministers will testify. Gaining investment and jobs stimulated by the Liverpool2 development and improved road and rail access connecting it to the northern powerhouse will be critical.

On jobs, the stagnant recovery is reflected in job levels in Bootle, although the recession has not affected chronic unemployment. The issue of skills is a bone of contention nationally. We have managed to raise the level of skills, but there must be something wrong with an economy that can spend £20 million on a garden bridge across the Thames and £10 million on rail investment in one of the largest ports in the country. There is something wrong with that system and it must change. I hope this Queen’s Speech will change it, but I doubt it.

4.13 pm

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd).

I welcome the Queen’s Speech because it builds upon the Government’s already strong progress over the past six years and gets Britain fit for the future. For example, on jobs, since 2010 and during the course of this Parliament, employment is set to rise by 3 million, which is a huge achievement. In Havant the number of people on jobseeker’s allowance has more than halved since 2010.

I welcome the Gracious Speech not only because it strengthens Britain’s economy today, but because it prepares our economy for tomorrow by equipping the country to lead in what is becoming known as the fourth industrial revolution, helping to create jobs and strengthen economic growth. The first industrial revolution used steam power to mechanise production, the second used electricity to create mass production, and the third used information technology to create the internet and launch the digital revolution. Now a fourth industrial revolution builds on the third, characterised by a fusion of technologies that blurs the lines between the physical, the digital and the biological.

At the core of this fourth industrial revolution are advances such as high-quality manufacturing, robotics, the new digital economy and life sciences. The fourth industrial revolution is a systematic shift that will transform the world’s economy in the decades ahead, and it is because of this Queen’s Speech that Britain’s economy and workforce are set to play a leading role.

I therefore welcome the digital economy Bill, which will give Britain world-class digital infrastructure. People in Havant and across the country will benefit from the new broadband universal service obligation, which will, for the first time, enshrine in law a right to the fast broadband connections that underpin every aspect of the digital economy and modern life.

Just as Britain pioneered the steam train and the jet engine, we are poised to be leaders in the next generation of transport innovations. I welcome the modern transport Bill, which places the UK at the forefront of new technologies, such as driverless cars. It shows investors that we in Britain are committed to transport innovation and the many jobs that will be created by it.

If we in Britain are to lead the fourth industrial revolution, to create jobs and to grow our economy, we cannot just sit back and watch this revolution pass us by. We have to give our businesses and communities the tools to strengthen our economy and to create those much-valued jobs up and down the country, in constituencies represented on both sides of the House. That is what I believe this Queen’s Speech does. It deserves the support of the House, and I will be voting for it in the Lobby this evening.

4.15 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): In the 1980s, the UK Government decided to abandon the shipbuilding industry in my constituency. The subsequent catastrophe resulted in the loss of thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs and the decimation of an industry that people could take pride in. The UK Government pulled the plug from shipbuilding without even the façade of a workable regeneration programme for Inverclyde. By 1987, companies reliant on the shipyards began closing, and the area’s male unemployment rate skyrocketed to 25%.

The IBM facility in Spango valley was highlighted as an example of the skilled, sustainable and long-term employment that could offset the decline of traditional industries. In March 1988, Margaret Thatcher visited the IBM site to champion the cause of the private sector and to explain how it would save Inverclyde in the wake of the shipyard closures.

If we fast forward to the present day, we find the Queen’s Speech promising to spread economic prosperity, but we now know that, by the end of 2016, there will not be a single IBM job left at the Spango valley site. Two other major employers in Inverclyde—Sanmina and Texas Instruments—have also recently announced job losses. The cumulative financial and emotional toll of these losses on individuals, families and the wider community is impossible to quantify.
[Ronnie Cowan]

There are successful companies in Inverclyde, but the area is still trying to set sail against the winds of economic stagnation and population decline. I have written to the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister for Employment to ask them to visit Inverclyde to see the potential our area has to offer.

I know that many other constituencies across the UK are suffering from economic pressures, but Inverclyde seems to have suffered disproportionately for decades. We have had 30 years of economic decline, 30 years of depopulation and 30 years of UK Government indifference.

We are not looking for handouts. The people of Inverclyde are resilient and have an invaluable work ethic, but they lack opportunity. We need more than a token visit or a reactive taskforce every time a major employer announces redundancies. We need a workable plan for regeneration, and we cannot wait 30 more years for it to be implemented.

After the pain of the 1980s, the UK Government have a historical debt to Inverclyde. The Conservative Government of the time had an undesirable zeal and commitment to closing the shipyards. Sadly, that has not been matched by an equally energetic and unwavering commitment to regeneration. Some may say that this is ancient history, but my office deals with constituency cases every day that are a direct legacy of the decisions made by the UK Government in the 1980s.

I hope that the UK Government, as the only Government in the UK with the full range of economic powers at their disposal, will be part of the solution. If they are unwilling to help, they should give the full range of powers required to the Scottish Government and let them get on with the job.

4.18 pm

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Somebody once told me that there is no such thing as luck. Luck, they said, is a place where opportunity and preparation meet. Many of us in this Chamber will have grown up with everything pretty much sorted: a stable family, a decent household income, a great education and good health—that perfect mix that prepared us to control our lives and to make use of opportunities that came our way.

When we talk about a life chances strategy, therefore, we are talking about identifying the things the Government can do to plug the gaps for individuals who are not as fortunate as us and for whom one of those key ingredients is missing. I applaud the Prime Minister for making this one of the essential themes in his work. It is certainly why I came into politics. Now we have the challenge of translating that policy aspiration into detail. That challenge is huge, not just because we are still recovering from economic turbulence, but because one of the solutions cannot be so easily measured, nor have metrics attached. People transform the lives of others, with hearts, heads, promises, support, mistakes sometimes, but above all trust.

Returning to my premise that this is all about opportunity and preparation, Government can certainly develop policy to provide the opportunities, and they have done that very well already, with an improving economy, record levels of employment, an increase in the minimum wage, transformation of the benefits system, investment in the NHS, and help to buy schemes. Admittedly, we would all agree that we have much more to do on affordable housing, especially in constituencies like mine, and we are still uncovering the enormity of the mental health challenge, but overall those policies will provide those essential opportunities, and many millions of people are benefiting from them already. Focusing on the preparation part of the luck equation, how do we help those who do not have those building blocks? When I think of all the people I know who have transformed their lives, the single common denominator has, without fail, been another person. There may have been Government interventions in the mix somewhere—a grant to set up a business, perhaps—but alone that would not have been enough. When you really need to turn your life around, you need another human being to help you.

Every Government Department has a role to play. Ministers need to identify where people touch their Departments and embed the big society in their areas of responsibility. The Department for Communities and Local Government has been fantastic on troubled families. Croydon Council is doing amazing work to break down internal silos to put the best interests and potential of its residents at the heart of everything it does. I applaud the Department for Education for its work on local employees being mentors for children. What about the parents, too? Think of Billy Elliot’s father! Our GPs are also at the heart of this support, but Lord knows, they are at breaking point and they may need the extra funding to be provided now.

Another army of mentors and champions is desperate to help this revolution—those in the third sector, almost totally frozen out of the Work programme but desperate to get involved. We should bite their hands off and bring their expertise to the centre of this debate. One thing they have in abundance, far more than any politician or Government, is trust in the people they want to help.

4.21 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There is a growing army of people in this country for whom the economy is no longer working. They will have looked hopefully at the Government’s plans for the next year and found that there is nothing there for them. It is simply not good enough that we have a Prime Minister who is happy to sacrifice an entire parliamentary Session tinkering at the edges because he is too afraid of causing even more divisions in his own party. How much of what is in this agenda will even see the light of day anyway? This Government have made 24 U-turns in the past year alone. It is unprecedented to see a Government offer so little so soon into a new Parliament. Just a year after a general election, we have a zombie Government and a Prime Minister who cannot wait for it to be 28 days later.

Yet there are serious problems that need to be tackled now. For the first time in a decade, child poverty is rising under this Government. There has been a worrying increase in the number of children relying on food banks—up by 13% in my constituency in the past year alone. What was the Government’s response? They rebranded the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission by removing “Child Poverty” from its name, and attempted to remove the statutory duty to
measure child poverty at all. The chair of the commission notably said that young people now face an “existential crisis”—a crisis that this Government seem determined to exacerbate.

What will our economy look like for the workers of tomorrow? The sad reality is that manufacturing in this country is in long-term decline, and I see nothing from the Government to rebalance the economy either on a sectoral or a geographic basis. In my constituency, economic growth is hampered by the lack of investment in key infrastructure projects such as the electrification of the Wrexham to Bidston train line or improvements to the M56 motorway, yet grandiose schemes continue to take shape elsewhere in the country. Getting better connectivity in my constituency is undoubtedly the key to unlocking growth, but we are told that any improvements to the M56 will not even be considered until the end of the decade, and there is currently nothing on the horizon to improve the rail line. People in parts of my constituency have no reliable access to public transport at all, yet Crossrail alone is earmarked to receive nine times more funding than all the rail projects from the north’s three regions combined.

What of the growing ranks of the self-employed? Julie Deane’s independent review for Government on self-employment appears to be gathering dust on the shelf. The review found that the number of self-employed in the UK is at an all-time high of 4.6 million, and that the number is growing and the trend set to continue. That group now represents 15% of the UK workforce, making a considerable contribution to the country’s economy.

The report makes a number of important recommendations and I want action to be taken on one in particular:

“Government should consider extending support to the self-employed in areas where there is discrepancy between support for the self-employed and support for employees.”

It also makes a recommendation with regard to those who are self-employed through necessity. There is no doubt that there are people who should not be classed as self-employed, but because they are classified as such they are offered no basic protection, such as the minimum wage. Urgent action needs to be taken on the recategorization of self-employment.

In conclusion, this has been a missed opportunity to tackle the inequalities that exist by region, gender, age and employment status.

4.25 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). Rural broadband is a key issue and it has been raised by Conservative Members. I know that broadband is an issue in some urban areas as well, but it would help the rural economy significantly. It will not address the farming crisis that some Members have mentioned—the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) highlighted a number of difficulties in the agricultural sector—but it will help bring better perspective to the rural community and to farmers in particular.

On the anti-corruption summit, Her Majesty’s Speech said that 

“legislation will be introduced to tackle corruption, money laundering and tax evasion.”

I hope that that works in Northern Ireland, because we have a huge problem with fuel laundering and smuggling, and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs does not seem to be getting to the root of it. It is almost an economy—an illegal economy—in itself, but it exists in Northern Ireland and we really need to grapple with it. I ask the Government to provide more powers to the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland so that it, rather than HMRC, can be the lead partner. That would be hugely beneficial and productive.

I do not have much time, but I want to touch quickly on the proposed adoption legislation, about which I speak from a personal perspective. It is vital that additional legislation is promoted to help all these young people and to give them a fair and equal chance. Education legislation has also been proposed, and I make a plea for co-operation between the education authorities and those who will be responsible for the adoption provisions. Adoptive kids are sometimes short-changed by the education sector, because those involved in it are not fully aware of the needs of adoptive and looked-after children.

I welcome the proposed adoption legislation, although I know that it will apply only to England because it is a devolved matter. Northern Ireland does not even have adoption legislation—we still rely on a children’s order. I do not know about the other devolved regions, but there is a huge gap in the legislation in Northern Ireland. These young people need the best start possible in life, and one way of doing that is to provide facilities and support, by which I mean not just assessments, but action by local authorities.

4.28 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): The Queen’s Speech was a missed opportunity to change course on the decision to make cuts that will result in 2.5 million working families losing more than £2,100 a year, the impact of which will be to hit the vulnerable people in our society the hardest. The opportunity provided by universal credit to create a simpler benefits system is being undermined by financial decisions and, as a result, we are failing to protect vulnerable groups in particular.

I want to focus on a vulnerable group who are often overlooked, namely young carers. At present, severely disabled adults who are living without a non-disabled adult to provide care for them may be eligible to receive the severe disability premium, which is intended to help them with the additional costs they face. The Government have proposed to have no equivalent of the SDP in universal credit. They propose to use the savings from the SDP to raise the level of benefit paid to those entitled to receive the higher disability addition. However, once universal credit has been fully implemented, severely disabled people with no adult to assist them will be entitled to about £58 less a week than those in the current system.

Between the Office for National Statistics censuses in 2001 and 2011, there was a 20% rise in the number of unpaid carers. As a Welsh MP, I am particularly concerned about the issue, because Wales has a higher proportion than England of young carers providing unpaid care. More than 11,500 children in Wales aged between five and 17 provide unpaid care. If their parents do not have
support and protection through universal credit, those children will face additional disadvantage. In four out of 10 households with a disabled lone parent, children help them for more than 15 hours a week. Around 25,000 disabled lone parents receive the severe disability premium. In those families, young carers, especially children aged over 10, are taking on a significant caring role.

The impact of the loss of SDB could be very severe: 83% of those who are eligible for it said that a reduction in benefit would mean that they had to cut back on food, and 80% said that they would have to cut back on heating. Will the Government please consider implementing the Children’s Society recommendation that universal credit should include a self-care element to provide additional support to disabled adults who have no other adult to look after them, to help them with the additional costs that they incur and to ensure that the burden of additional care costs is not placed on young carers?

4.31 pm  

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees). The Prime Minister declared this to be a one nation Queen’s Speech for a one nation Government. He said that his Government were a Government for whom “economic security always comes first”—[Official Report, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 22.]

He said they were a Government with a “long-term economic plan”. But, once again, we have seen nothing to substantiate those grand plans. All we have seen is stasis.

The British economy in its current state is best described by the saying, “All that glitters is not gold.” At first glance there is the semblance of a positive picture, but scratch away at the surface and a very different story emerges: a story of low productivity, ballooning personal debt, a yawning trade deficit, creaking infrastructure, a dangerous over-reliance on financial services and a growing chasm between London and the rest. To put it simply, our economy is too unbalanced and too unstable to be resilient and to serve the British people. It is too short-sighted, too inward looking and far too unequal.

In my constituency, we have seen the costs of the Government’s failure. For more than a year my Labour colleagues and I have called on the Government—we have raised the issue more than 230 times since the general election—to snap out of their stupor and take action to stand up for British steel. We were met with a mixture of indiffERENCE and incompetence. Only when the crisis became a PR problem did the Government wake up and seek a last-minute fix to a problem that we have pointed to for a year. The steel crisis really sums up the Government’s approach: it is a problem only when it hits the front pages. If the Government had a real long-term economic plan and a real strategic approach to governing Britain, the crisis could have been averted. Instead, we have a Government with a long-term economic plan that is not a plan at all but a bookkeeper’s to-do list. They are focused only on reducing costs without giving any thought to the generation of revenue through sustainable growth. They think that the solution to everything is to reduce the size of Government and retreat from the challenges of the future rather than addressing the faulty foundations of our economy. That is why the Queen’s Speech was yet another missed opportunity, and that is why I shall vote against it this evening.

4.33 pm  

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): My part of the country is an area that is rightly perceived to be successful. Cambridge is, in many ways, a model for the future of Britain, with many innovative, high-tech, high-skill jobs linked to world-class research embedded in excellent local institutions. Public and private are mutually interdependent, and not seen as being at odds.

Last year, as part of the city deal process, the local business-led organisation Cambridge Ahead worked with all the local partners, at the Government’s request, and developed “The Case for Cambridge”, which was a powerful, evidence-based argument for what was needed to maintain that success. We should be implementing that case but, instead, we have lost almost a year on an extraordinary and bungled attempt to shoehorn three counties together into a devolution deal with an elected mayor. A few weeks ago, following an over-subscribed Westminster Hall debate on the East Anglia devolution deal, I suggested that the House have a more substantial discussion not only on the East Anglia deal but on the wider issues, because what is happening across England—this bungled mix of devolution and local government reorganisation, or lack of it—has profound consequences.

At this time of all times, with the parallel debate on the relationship between Westminster and Brussels, what an opportunity this was to have had a proper consideration of how each level of government could work with another, based on mutual respect. Instead, we have had a debate on Europe that has been intellectually largely bankrupt and a devolution process that in the east was reduced to, “You’ve got three weeks to make up your mind”, and “Oh, you’ve got to have an elected mayor or two”.

What is really needed and what the business community in particular is crying out for is the imagination, the freedom and the flexibility to unlock the massive potential that exists in and around Cambridge. Unfortunately, our strengths are also our weaknesses, and we struggle on housing and transport. There are so many possibilities, including the proposals put forward by the London-Stansted-Cambridge Consortium, which would unlock growth between Cambridge and London if only we could take advantage of such opportunities.

There are other threats to Cambridge’s knowledge economy. Having already trebled tuition fees for university students and scrapped maintenance grants, the Government now want fees to rise again. Few students will welcome paying more when so many feel that their contribution is already too high. When they make comparisons with other countries, they are right to feel aggrieved. We are all pleased that the Government have promised to protect the dual funding system of research, but there are real risks that such separation will be eroded over time.

Let me conclude by making the wider point that whatever the strength of a research-based, high-tech economy, we still need to make sure that the benefits are
shared fairly. When I look at the rising number of people turning to the Cambridge food bank, see more and more people on short-term and zero-hours contracts and see the visible evidence of more and more rough sleepers on the streets of Cambridge, it is clear the economy is working for some but by no means all. One looks in vain for measures that will address that very real unfairness, while the measures on housing and benefit changes passed in the last Session will make the situation in my city worse, not better. Those are all reasons why I will oppose the Government tonight.

4.36 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP) rose—

Hon. Members: Hooray!

George Kerevan: Wait for it. This afternoon, the Chancellor promised us a better markets Bill to improve competition. We on the SNP Benches are in favour of that and will give it what help we can, depending on what is in the Bill. It is a matter of record that, in the UK, we have the most monopolised banking system in the western world. Four big banks dominate, with 80% of the market share. If we want genuine competition and better markets in finance, we need to have six, eight or 10 banks of a similar size. Until we have that, there will be no better markets or better competition.

Here is a tale: the two main regulatory bodies set up by this Government and this Chancellor to ensure more competition and better markets in finance—the Competition and Markets Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority—have failed to deliver. Why is that? There is a suspicion among SNP Members, and I suspect among Government Members, that those regulators are perhaps looking over their shoulder at the Chancellor and asking themselves, “Does the Chancellor really want us to close down, intervene in or break up those banks? Maybe we are being told to say one thing and to do another.” That is why, when we look at the small print of the Bill, we will want to see whether this is just shadow-boxing and a subterfuge that allows the Chancellor to get up and say, “I’m in favour of competition, but actually—shush, shush—don’t do anything about it”, or whether it will really have teeth to take on the big banks.

I want very quickly to look at some of the things that are going on. The FCA has brokered a deal with the big banks on arbitration for small businesses who have suffered mis-selling and been bankrupted. Unfortunately, the FCA has turned a blind eye to the fact that the big banks are now signing up solicitors across the UK, including in Scotland, so that those solicitors, who are on the banks’ books and waiting for work, will not take up the cases of small businesses who feel that the arbitration process has gone against them and want to take the banks to court.

Roger Mullin: Corrupt.

George Kerevan: I hear from a sedentary position the word “corrupt”. I will not use that word, but I will certainly be looking to the Chancellor and this Government to make sure, through this Bill, that such practices by the big banks are done away with.

Finally, in my constituency of East Lothian, RBS has just announced the closure of its only branch in the town of Prestonpans. That is a surprise because the population of East Lothian is growing, and we are about to have 10,000 more houses in the general area of Prestonpans. Banks do that kind of thing: they do not care about their customers. This Bill has to reverse that, and that is the test we will apply to it.

4.39 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I am delighted to see that the Chancellor has come back to join us for the close of what has been an excellent debate today, to hear the Opposition’s view that, by any stretch of the imagination, this Queen’s Speech is a desperate missed opportunity. It could have addressed the deep-seated problems in our economy or the poor quality of work experienced by so many under this Conservative Government. Time and time again this afternoon, I have heard right hon. and hon. Members lament those problems, and ask in their different ways where the meat was last week.

Where was the Bill to address the deep-seated problems in our economy, and the yawning inequality that is spreading across Britain? For example, where was the Bill that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) put it, could boost our economy through investment in our public services? What a question to have to ask on a day when the Government have sacked 250 BIS workers in the heart of the northern powerhouse in Sheffield. The Government should reflect on that.

The Government should also reflect on the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth): where was the Bill to revive manufacturing? My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) asked where the Bill on tax transparency was. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn)—that mighty place—made a barnstorming speech lambasting the Chancellor and the Government for preparing to flog off the Land Registry as another private sector monopoly.

The Government should also reflect on the powerful speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who are continuing their fight to stand up for steel jobs just 24 hours after the brave steelworkers came to London to petition the Government to save their jobs and protect their pensions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) asked, where was the Bill to sort out education and the savings crisis in Britain? My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) asked where the Bill was that could deal with the rising tide of destitution that is sweeping Britain under the Tories. He reminded us that in the great city of Manchester there is now an emerging tent city. What an unbelievable token of this Government’s failure it is that people are living in tents at the heart of one of our greatest cities. Where were any of the Bills to deal with any of those problems? Where was the Bill to support the self-employed or to support carers? Where was the Bill to reverse the cuts to universal credit or to really deal with devolution?

I have my own question for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chancellor: where was the Bill to save the steel industry? Today of all days, when
we have had a half-baked announcement by the Work and Pensions Secretary—[Interuption.] I support the fact that there has been a written announcement, but decry and deplore the fact that he did not have the nerve to come to the House to explain what some of the downsides might be, because we have heard scant evidence from the Government on what this situation means for some of the steelworkers. [Interuption.] I have said I support it—he keeps chuntering. I support the production of the consultation document and the fact that he is looking at the issue, but he should have done it a year ago. That is the truth—he should have been addressing it long since.

When the Secretary of State replies to the debate, he will have the opportunity to give us some of the answers that we did not get from his right hon. Friend the Business Secretary today, such as who will definitely disbenefit as a result of the changes? What precedent will be set for other industries? Are we content to see other industries in future take a similar route and shift uprating of pension benefits from being in line with the consumer prices index to being in line with the retail prices index, with workers losing out? He needs to tell the House how he will ring-fence that so that it affects only steelworkers.

Now I come to think of it, where was any sort of industrial strategy in the Queen’s Speech? One of the most telling contributions today was made by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White). I do not know whether it is just because he looks a bit like me that the brother wants to come over to our side—[Interuption.] He could be a Welshman with an inside leg that length. He sounded like a Labour man when he spoke earlier. He asked, essentially, “Where is the industrial strategy? Wouldn’t it be marvellous if the Tories had one?”

Chris White rose—

Owen Smith: I’d love to give way—tell us, where is the industrial strategy?

Chris White: I remind the hon. Gentleman that at the end of my speech I said that for an industrial strategy to happen, we need a long-term economic plan.

Owen Smith: I heard it. There was that one soundbite, that one belated effort to draw back from the brink, but we had three and a half minutes of the hon. Gentleman attacking the Chancellor before then, and complaining that there was no industrial strategy.

What do we have in the Queen’s Speech? We have a bit of nonsense about spaceports and electric cars. In Port Talbot where people are worrying about the steelworks, they are not too bothered about spaceports unless the Government are planning to stick one in Aberavon and create 1,000 jobs. This is window dressing. Where on earth is the industrial strategy? Where is the Bill to deal with this country’s productivity crisis, which is greater than just about anywhere else in the western world? Where is the Bill to deal with disabled people who under this Secretary of State are languishing on the scrapheap? Where is the Bill to halt the spiralling of personal debt to record levels? The Chancellor used to talk about the problem of debt, but he never speaks about personal debt or the fact that consumers are the basis on which he is trying to rebuild our economy. Where is the Bill to deal with the fact that our earnings are flatlining in Britain? The Queen’s Speech contains not a sniff of any such Bills. Many Labour Members have suggested that that is because the Government have run out of ideas and the Chancellor has run out of steam, but I do not think he has—I am looking across at him and he is looking as fit as a butcher’s dog. He has his 5:2 diet and a personal trainer on-tap. He looks full of ideas—he is certainly full of it.

The real reason why none of those things were in the Queen’s Speech is because they do not fit with the narrative that says that everything is tickety-boo with our economy. We have the makers marching, jobs for everyone, and the new national living wage: “Nothing to see here, move on, move on. Let’s keep going with where we are”. Of course that is absolute nonsense, because on every measure in every serious analysis of our economy, the Government are missing their targets. The deficit was meant to be cleared long since, but it is £76 billion. The national debt is meant to be falling as a proportion of GDP, but it is now £1.6 trillion—£600 billion more than when Labour left office. The Chancellor used to talk about not bequeathing debts to future generations, but that debt has increased by £600 billion on his watch.

What about business activity? It has gone through the floor. What about corporation tax receipts? We used to be told—I remember it well—that the secret to getting all that extra foreign direct investment, receipts and investment was slashing corporation tax rates, but just this week are told that that figure is down to 5.1%. That is not the mark of an economy that is booming by any stretch, and little wonder, because our trade deficit is at a record high. The gap between our exports and imports is bigger than it has ever been. [Interuption.] It is £13 billion, if the Chancellor wants to quibble about it. That is a big problem for him, and it is happening on his watch and because of him. That is the reality of this country’s economy, and the consequences for working people are significant.

The Government continually point to the jobs market as the one bright spot, and Labour Members welcome those new jobs. [Interuption.] I welcome those jobs, as I welcome every new job. We believe that people in this country are better off if they are working, but that will not stop me asking what people are earning. What if they are taking home less than they used to, and their wallets are getting thinner at the end of the month as a result of the poor quality jobs that Britain is now generating? What if the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is compounding those ills by cutting work allowances under universal credit?

I was at the Elephant and Castle jobcentre earlier this week, and I heard what a great problem low wages are. The Chancellor is making his savings, and the Government are going gangbusters as people move from Labour’s better resourced, more generous tax credits over to the less generous, universal credit under his Government. He will hit the £10 billion of savings that he wants, but on the backs of working people in this country. They are the people who are paying the price for this failing economy and this failing Chancellor. He looks at me across the Dispatch Box. I simply wonder when his
Back Benchers are going to realise that he is failing them, as well as failing the country. If we look at the record, it tells its own story: he is the third-worst-performing Tory Chancellor on growth in the past 60 years and he is the worst-performing Tory Chancellor on the economy bar none. We need to get rid of this Chancellor. We need a vote against the Queen’s Speech tonight. We need to vote for Labour.

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): It is a real pleasure to conclude this debate on the Gracious Speech. I thank all hon. Members, on both sides of the House, who have made contributions today. A wide range of subjects has been covered by Members from all parts of the United Kingdom and from both rural and urban communities. It has been a very good debate.

As the Prime Minister made clear, the Queen’s Speech is about using the strong economic foundations we have built to make a series of bold choices that will help to deliver opportunity for all at every stage of their lives. Improving life chances starts as a foundation for ensuring a healthy, strong and growing economy. Through our long-term economic plan, that is what we are doing: the deficit is being cut, the economy is growing and it is forecast to grow faster than in any other G7 economy this year.

It is true that, thanks to the strength in the economy, we have seen some remarkable things in our labour market in recent years: we have seen the highest level of employment on record ever and the annual rise in the employment rate is the largest anywhere in the G7. Now, we are not complacent. We know we need to go further. However, we also know that behind this picture of national economic recovery are hundreds of thousands of individual stories of people whose lives have been transformed. In the past year alone, over 400,000 people have moved into work. We have more women in work than ever before. In the past two years, more than 300,000 more disabled people have moved into work. We have also seen big increases in youth and long-term employment. I am delighted that the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, for the very first time in six years, has at the Dispatch Box welcomed the fact that unemployment is falling.

Let us just remind ourselves that since 2010 more than 2.5 million people have moved into work. That is more than the whole population of the fantastic city of Leicester moving into work each and every year we have been in government. It means 764,000 more households in work. It means nearly half a million more children growing up seeing a mum or a dad go out to work each day. By any measure, that is a really encouraging record. We salute, in particular, our small businesses and our entrepreneurs who are the real engines of this jobs recovery, something recognised in the excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena).

This recovery has not happened by chance or by accident, and we know that we need to go further. It happened because we had a clear economic plan for jobs and growth. I see a couple of Opposition Members shaking their head. Let us remind ourselves of what they left behind in 2010. Unemployment had risen by nearly half a million. The number of women out of work went up by a quarter. Youth unemployment rocketed by 44%. Long-term unemployment doubled. Nearly 1.5 million people had spent most of the previous decade on out-of-work benefits. That was an appalling record of wasted lives and wasted potential left by the previous Labour Government. The fact is that during 13 years in government, the Labour party stopped believing in the power of work to transform people’s lives. The Labour party gave up on welfare reform. It became the party of welfare over work. It was far too relaxed about parking people for a whole lifetime on benefits. That is why it takes Conservatives in government, with Conservative values, to bring the reforming spirit needed to transform the life chances of people in our—

[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It is impolite to make a noise when the Secretary of State is speaking. Members should be arguing with him, not chattering about him.

Stephen Crabb: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As one nation Conservatives, we will not be complacent, write people off or walk by on the other side, and that is why we are developing a plan for transforming life chances.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The Secretary of State talks about life chances and the Queen’s Speech talks about parenting classes for families. Will he reflect on what use parenting classes will be given that low-income, in-work families are ever more reliant on food banks to put food on the table? What use is a parenting class if they cannot afford to put food on the table?

Stephen Crabb: All the evidence shows that the top three drivers of disadvantage and poverty are worklessness, low educational attainment and family instability. The hon. Gentleman talks down the value of supporting parental stability and families, but they have an important contribution to make.

It is a sign of the underlying strength of the economy that there are more than 750,000 job vacancies across the country, but there is another story here too. For a teenager coming out of prison wanting to turn his life around; for a single mum shouldering enormous burdens, on which point my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) touched insightfully; for someone overcoming an addiction to alcohol or drugs; for a young person with a mental health condition—for all of them, I want those job vacancies to represent a world of opportunities too. But for too many, taking one still feels a world away. That is why we are determined to improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged in our society. We are not just talking the language of social justice but, as the Queen’s Speech shows, taking the action needed to make a real difference to people’s lives.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I am grateful to the Government for accepting the amendment, in my name and that of many other right hon. and hon. Members, calling for a Bill to protect the NHS from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Will the Secretary of State tell the House when the Bill will be published or its contents made
known and assure us that it will be before the referendum? If it is not, we will know that something fishy is afoot and that the only way to protect the NHS is to vote to leave the EU.

Stephen Crabb: I am absolutely clear that our national health service is protected from TTIP.

One group in society who have faced particularly difficult barriers are disabled people. We are committed to our ambition to halve the disability employment gap, which we must do by learning from and listening to those who know most about what works—disabled people themselves. That is why I will be publishing a Green Paper later this year. I want to consult and engage fully with them and their representatives to build a strategy that we know will work. I hope that Members on both sides will see it as an opportunity for us all to move forward together.

The Queen’s Speech demonstrates the Government’s commitment to improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged while delivering security for people in work and strengthening our national security so that we keep our country safe. I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) on our Bill to improve adoption. Our education for all Bill will ensure better outcomes for children, especially those in disadvantaged homes and communities. Our higher education and research Bill will allow the creation of new universities so that young people have more choices for continuing their education.

That is the kind of society I believe in, but I also believe in a society that gives people a second chance, which is why we welcome the prisons and courts reform Bill, which will put a greater focus on rehabilitation in our prisons, greater support for prisoners with mental health conditions and better education and training. At the heart of the Queen’s Speech are real reforms that provide support for the most disadvantaged at the start of life; support for people making those big leaps in life, such as leaving care; and support later in life for those looking for a second chance. None of those reforms would be possible without the foundations of a strong economy, but at no point in the last six years has Labour shown any willingness to recognise that point. We will never forget how night after night, in the last Parliament, Labour trooped into the Division Lobby to vote against every single measure we introduced to fix our national finances. It opposed all our efforts to reform welfare and restore the value of work.

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 189, Noes 300.

Division No. 2] [4.59 pm 799 800 MAY 2016

**AYES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABBOTT, MS DIANE</th>
<th>ALLEN, MR GRAHAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABRAMS, DEEBIE</td>
<td>ANDERSON, MR DAVID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALEXANDER, HEIDI</td>
<td>ASHWORTH, JONATHAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALI, RUSANARAA</td>
<td>AUSTIN, IAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAILEY, MR ADRIAN</td>
<td>Gwynne, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECKETT, RH MARGARET</td>
<td>HAIGH, LOUISE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENN, RH HILARY</td>
<td>HAMILTON, FABIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERGER, LUCIANA</td>
<td>HANSON, RH MR DAVID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETTS, MR CLIVE</td>
<td>HARMAN, RH MS HARRIET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLACKMAN-WOODS, DR ROBERTA</td>
<td>HARRIS, CAROLYN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLINKINSOP, TOM</td>
<td>HAYES, HELEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRADSHAW, RH MR BEN</td>
<td>HAYMAN, SUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAKE, RH TON</td>
<td>HEALEY, RH JOHN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENNAN, KEVIN</td>
<td>HENDRICK, MR MARK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWN, LYN</td>
<td>HEPBURN, MR STEPHEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWN, RH MR NICHOLAS</td>
<td>HILLIER, MEG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUCK, MS KAREN</td>
<td>HODGKINS, MRS SHARON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURDEN, RICHARD</td>
<td>HOLLMAN, KATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURGON, RICHARD</td>
<td>HOPKINS, KELVIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURNHAM, RH ANDY</td>
<td>HOWARTH, RH MR GEORGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUTLER, DAWN</td>
<td>HUNT, TRISTRAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BYRNE, RH LIAM</td>
<td>HUQ, DR RUPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CADBURY, RUTH</td>
<td>JARVIS, DAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMPBELL, RH MR ALAN</td>
<td>JOHNSON, DIANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMPBELL, MR RONNIE</td>
<td>JONES, GERALD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARMICHAEL, RH MR ALSTAIR</td>
<td>JONES, HILARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAMPION, SARAH</td>
<td>JONES, MR KEVIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPMAN, JENNY</td>
<td>JONES, SUSAN ELAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEGG, RH MR NICK</td>
<td>KANE, MIKE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIWYD, RH ANN</td>
<td>KINNOLPH, STEPHEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COFFEY, ANN</td>
<td>LAMB, RH NORMAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOPER, JULIE</td>
<td>LAMMY, RH MR DAVID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOPER, ROSIE</td>
<td>Lavery, Ian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOPER, RH YVETTE</td>
<td>LEWELL-BUCK, MRS EMMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORBYN, RH JEREMY</td>
<td>Long Bailey, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COYLE, NEIL</td>
<td>Lucas, Ian C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAUSBY, RH MR DAVID</td>
<td>MACLAGGART, RH FIONA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREGH, MARY</td>
<td>MADDERS, JUSTIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRESSY, STELLA</td>
<td>MAHMOOD, MR KHALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRUDDAS, JON</td>
<td>MAHMOOD, SHABANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRYER, JOHN</td>
<td>MALHOTRA, SINDHU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUMMINS, JUDITH</td>
<td>MANN, JOHN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUNNINGHAM, ALEX</td>
<td>MARRIS, ROB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUNNINGHAM, RH MR JIM</td>
<td>MARSDEN, MR GORDON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAKIN, NIC</td>
<td>MASKELL, RACHAEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DACZUK, SIMON</td>
<td>MATHESON, CHRISTIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVIES, GERAIT</td>
<td>McCabe, Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE PIERO, GLORIA</td>
<td>McCARTHY, KERRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOUGHTY, STEPHEN</td>
<td>McDONALD, ANDY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOWD, JIM</td>
<td>McDONNELL, JOHN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOWD, PETER</td>
<td>MCFADDEN, RH MR PATRICK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DROMLEY, JACK</td>
<td>MCNEAN, LIZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUGHER, MICHAEL</td>
<td>MCMAHON, JIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DURKAN, MARK</td>
<td>MEAIE, SIR ALAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAGLE, MS ANGELA</td>
<td>MEAMS, IAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAGLE, MARIA</td>
<td>MORDEN, JESSICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFAORD, C.IMAGE</td>
<td>MORRIS, GRAHAME M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLMAN, MRS LOUISE</td>
<td>MULHOLLAND, GREG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELMORE, CHRIS</td>
<td>ONN, MELANIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTEMBER, BILL</td>
<td>ONWURAH, CHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARRELLY, PAUL</td>
<td>OSAMOR, KATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARRON, TIM</td>
<td>OWEN, ALBERT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIELD, RH FRANK</td>
<td>Pearce, Teresa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FITZPATRICK, JIM</td>
<td>Pennycook, Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLILO, ROBERT</td>
<td>PHILLIPS, JESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINT, RH CAROLINE</td>
<td>POUND, STEPHEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLYNN, PAUL</td>
<td>QURESHI, YASMIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fougargue, Yvonne</td>
<td>Rayner, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furness, Gill</td>
<td>Reed, Mr Jamie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gapes, Mike</td>
<td>Reed, Mr Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardiner, Barry</td>
<td>Rees, Christina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass, Pat</td>
<td>Reeves, Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glindon, Mary</td>
<td>Reynolds, Jonathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Kate</td>
<td>Rimmer, Marie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwood, Margaret</td>
<td>Ritchie, Ms Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith, Nia</td>
<td>Robinson, Mr Geoffrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellers for the Ayes: Vicky Foxcroft and Holly Lynch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thomas, Mr Gareth</th>
<th>Gibson, Mr Nick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas-Symonds, Nick</td>
<td>Glen, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timms, rh Stephen</td>
<td>Goldsmith, Zac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turley, Anna</td>
<td>Goodwill, Mr Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, Karl</td>
<td>Gove, rh Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twig, Stephen</td>
<td>Graham, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaz, rh Keith</td>
<td>Grant, Mrs Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaz, Valerie</td>
<td>Gray, Mr James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West, Catherine</td>
<td>Green, Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead, Dr Alan</td>
<td>Green, rh Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Hywel</td>
<td>Greening, rh Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Mr Mark</td>
<td>Grieve, rh Mr Dominic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Phil</td>
<td>Griffiths, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnick, Mr David</td>
<td>Gummer, Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winterton, rh Dame Rosie</td>
<td>Gyimah, Mr Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Mr Iain</td>
<td>Hall, Luke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeichner, Daniel</td>
<td>Hammond, rh Mr Philip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tellers for the Noes: Cleverly, James</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Nigel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afriyie, Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldous, Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan, Lucy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Heidi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amess, Sir David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew, Stuart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansell, Caroline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arger, Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkins, Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Mr Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker, Mr Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Harriett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baron, Mr John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barwell, Gavin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebb, Guto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellingham, Sir Henry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benyon, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beresford, Sir Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry, Jake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry, James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingham, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackman, Bob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blunt, Crispin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boles, Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bone, Mr Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borwick, Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottomley, Sir Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Karen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady, Mr Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazier, Mr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgen, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brine, Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokenshire, rh James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce, Fiona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckland, Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns, rh Sir Simon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrowes, Mr David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt, rh Alistair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns, rh Alun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmichael, Neil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartlidge, James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash, Sir William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caufield, Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalk, Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chishti, Rehman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chope, Mr Christopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill, Jo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, rh Greg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clive, Sir Geoffrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton-Hamilton, Dr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton-Hamilton, Dr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton-Hamilton, Dr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crabbe, rh Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crane, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant, rh Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Mr James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Mr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greening, rh Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieve, rh Mr Dominic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffiths, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gummer, Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyimah, Mr Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Luke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond, rh Mr Philip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond, Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock, rh Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands, rh Greg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper, rh Mr Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrington, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris, Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart, Simon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, rh Mr John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heald, Sir Oliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heappey, James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaton-Harris, Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaton-Jones, Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson, Gordon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinds, Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollingbery, George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollinrake, Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollobone, Mr Philip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holloway, Mr Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins, Kris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howarth, rh Sir Gerald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howell, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howlett, Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huddleston, Nigel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Mr Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, Margot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javid, rh Sajid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayawardena, Mr Ranil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkin, Mr Bernard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkyns, Andrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenrick, Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, rh Sir John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Gareth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Joseph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, rh Mr David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Mr Marcus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawczynski, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy, Seema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirby, Simon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knight, rh Sir Grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knight, Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwarteng, Kwasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster, Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham, Pauline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadsom, Andrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Dr Philip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefroy, Jeremy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh, Sir Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie, Charlotte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letwin, rh Mr Oliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, Brandan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, rh Dr Julian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liddington, rh Mr David</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Souby, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, lain
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tohurston, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevielyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vazquez, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Sarah Newton and
Stephen Barclay

Cameron, Dr Lisa
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Ferrier, Margaret
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hoie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Law, Chris
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCag, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.

McGarry, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Patserson, Steven
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whitelord, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

NOES
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Ann
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyie-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr lain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Elliott, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:
“but respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included in the Gracious Speech.”—(Mr. Lilley.)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33). That the amendment be made.

Question agreed to.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:
“but regret that the measures set out fail to meet the challenges facing the majority of people living in the nations and regions of the UK; call in particular for your Government to change course on plans for austerity spending cuts, which are damaging the UK’s economic growth and punishing the incomes of hardworking people, and to consider a modest investment in public services to stimulate economic growth; and further call on your Government to withdraw proposals to waste as much as £200 billion on new nuclear weapons, to go further than the recommendations of the Strathclyde Review by abolishing the House of Lords, to work more respectfully with the nations and regions of the UK to deliver meaningful devolution, to acknowledge its responsibility as a member of the international community in contributing to the resolution of the refugee crisis in Europe and to acknowledge its responsibility to outline a positive vision for the UK’s continued membership of the EU.”—(Stewart Hosie.)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33). That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 52, Noes 303.

Division No. 3] [5.15 pm

AYES
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Bosman, Philip
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 237.

Division No. 4] [5.27 pm

**AYS**

Adams, Nigel
Afiyie, Adam
Al الدوسي, Pate
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bolsover, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria

**Tellers for the Noes:**
Sarah Newton and Stephen Barclay

**Question accordingly negatived.**

**Main Question, as amended, put.**

**The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 237.**
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gauke, Mr David
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gleave, Mrs Sarah
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justice
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hallon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Hundtston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leasom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Merrer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Millling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, Andrew
Phelps, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Presi, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Purseglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seland, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alun
Shebrook, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shaihesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Bob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sarah Newton and
Stephen Barclay

NOES
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowen, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddidas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiell, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendick, Mr Mark
Heppburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollick, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Janvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinnock, Stephen
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Macaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCaa, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Steward Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGarry, Natalie
McInnes, Liz
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Meall, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Grahaile M.
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Ohm, Melanie
Onurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Paterson, Steven
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotherham, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Shuker, rh Mr Gavind
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Starmer, Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thewlis, Alison
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Michelle
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twig, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, rh Mr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Wrimack, rh Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Holly Lynch

Question accordingly agreed to.
Resolved.

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament, but respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included.

We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament, but respectfully regret that a Bill to protect the National Health Service from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not included.

Address to be presented to Her Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of Her Majesty’s Household.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. By an unusual coincidence, our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament have been casting votes in Divisions this evening as well, and 106 MSPs have voted that Scotland should remain in the European Union while eight have voted against, including one Oliver Mundell MSP, who is, I believe, acquainted with the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). That might explain why the right hon. Gentleman wanted to veto his candidacy. However, my point is this; the MSPs cast their votes in almost less time than it took this House to appoint the Tellers for the first Division, nearly 40 minutes ago. I wonder what routes are open to those Members who would like to see our voting procedures vastly modernised to bring forward proposals for reform.

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that that is a matter initially for consideration by the Procedure Committee, of which I had thought he was himself a distinguished ornament.
Mr Speaker: The nod of the head has sufficed to confirm that my recollection is correct. What is more, the Committee is chaired, with alacrity and distinction, by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), so the wise heads on that Committee can deliberate on the matter and take evidence as they see fit, and even pronounce in due course, and then the normal processes of the House will be available, and probably required, for the matter to be further considered. I have expressed views on that matter in the past, but on this occasion I will spare the House that burden. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

Patrick Grady indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: The nod of the head has sufficed to confirm that my recollection is correct. What is more, the Committee is chaired, with alacrity and distinction, by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), so the wise heads on that Committee can deliberate on the matter and take evidence as they see fit, and even pronounce in due course, and then the normal processes of the House will be available, and probably required, for the matter to be further considered. I have expressed views on that matter in the past, but on this occasion I will spare the House that burden. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

Coal Authority (Compensation Procedures)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

5.41 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to discuss the case of my constituents, Mr and Mrs King of No. 61 Myrtle Terrace, Tipton, Mrs Freeman of No. 59, and Mr and Mrs Shaw of No. 57, all of whom purchased their homes between 1975 and 1980. Prior to purchasing their homes, and as a condition for receipt of a mortgage, they were required to have a search for mine shafts in the immediate vicinity of their properties. It was conducted by the National Coal Board, which is now known as the Coal Authority.

All the searches confirmed that the properties were “clear” of any mine shafts. I have a copy of the letter sent to Mr and Mrs King’s solicitors from the NCB surveyor. It is dated 12 November 1980 and states clearly that “the property is clear of disused mine shafts and adits as shown on our records.”

Fast forward to 2011: the Coal Authority wrote to the owners of these properties, indicating that it wished to carry out an inspection for old mine workings in the immediate vicinity. Imagine their surprise and horror when, following the inspection, it was confirmed that Mr and Mrs Shaw had a mine shaft immediately under their kitchen floor and that both of the other properties had shafts very close by in their gardens. It is fair to say that it was most homeowners’ worst nightmare. I reassure the street’s other residents by emphasising that the inspection identified no other mine shafts in the immediate locality.

It appears that the location of the shafts was identified on maps from 1870—I have a copy of one myself. The Coal Authority and its predecessor body, the NCB, had maps with these locations in their possession, certainly since 1936. It would appear that when the surveyor certified the location as clear from mine shafts, they totally failed to identify them from the records that they had in their possession.

My constituents have had extensive correspondence with both the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Coal Authority, neither of which will accept responsibility for the inaccuracy of the original NCB report, and they have been met with nothing more than an evasive smokescreen designed to obscure the relative level of their culpability.

When confronted with such evidence, the usual tactic of the Coal Authority has been to give reassurances on safety and to point to compensation schemes that are available in the event of damage or subsidence arising from instability. That ignores completely the stress arising from the doubt and uncertainty caused by these revelations and the wider financial implications of purchasing a house with mine shafts underneath or in the immediate vicinity. Those concerns were not helped by the fact that in 1999, which is in most people’s recent memory, a house in nearby Moxley disappeared down a mineshaft and, I believe, subsequently a considerable number of adjacent properties had to be demolished.

The safety of the houses is not the only concern; residents are also worried about the reduction in the resale value of their properties. The Department of
Energy and Climate Change, in correspondence with the residents, has suggested that the Coal Authority has no responsibility in relation to property devaluation and that its responsibility is limited to subsidence claims, which may, in some cases, result in the loss of value. To counter that, the residents obtained an independent evaluation, in which the surveyor suggested that “usually the likelihood of subsidence problems related to old mine shafts is remote, and consequently the location of a mine entry should not significantly alter the value of a property.

However, the public’s perception of properties located within the zone of influence of a mine shaft is usually negative, and this is often the case with their surveyor and solicitor, upon whose advice they rely.

From a logical perspective the value of the property should only be marginally affected. However the public perception is not always based on logic and it is likely that one will find with a resale of a house within the zone of influence of a mine shaft will prove more difficult than would normally be the case”.

That is a masterpiece of understatement. The surveyor went on to say that, from their 25 years’ experience, the location of a mine entry under a property with no records of it being filled could deduct 30% from the resale value of the property, and potentially up to 50%.

That does not deal with the added issue of mortgage lenders, who are often reluctant to lend on properties with mine shafts nearby. That is not altogether surprising, because I cannot believe that anyone would pay the full asking price for a house with a mine under the kitchen. I would not; perhaps the Minister would like to confirm whether she would. If she would, I am sure that my constituents would be interested.

My constituents have been left trapped in houses that could be sold at only a fraction of the asking price of properties of similar size in the area. They are effectively denied the option normally available to people of their generation of selling their house and moving to suitable accommodation that might be more appropriate to their needs as they get older. The devaluation of my constituents’ homes was accepted by the listing officer when the properties were revalued for council tax purposes in December 2013. The properties were revalued downwards to reflect what had happened.

By failing to provide my constituents with proper, sound advice, the NCB denied my constituents the opportunity to make an informed choice about the initial purchase of their homes. Not only would they probably not have proceeded with the purchases, but even if they had wanted to, it is unlikely that their mortgage provider—the then Midshires building society—would have given them mortgages on those properties.

The residents believe that the actions of the negligent surveyor sentenced them to spending the next 25 years paying a mortgage on properties that they could never hope of selling at prices comparable with those of unaffected properties.

Residents’ demands for compensation were met with complete indifference by the Coal Authority, which resorted to a breath-taking abuse of logic to justify this indifference. The Coal Authority claims that because the information was available in 1980 to the surveyor, who failed to identify it within the time limit, but was only revealed in a subsequent inspection 31 years later, they could not claim because the time had expired. In effect, the residents are excluded from claiming because they failed to identify an error made by the National Coal Board when the only evidence that could be used to identify the error was in the hands of the National Coal Board and its successor, the Coal Authority. The only other way in which they could have satisfied that particular demand was to have taken their own initiative and to have dug up their kitchen floor or back garden to identify whether there were any rogue mineshafts.

My constituents took their case to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The ombudsman’s report confirmed maladministration in the way the Coal Authority handled their complaint, and it recommended a small sum of compensation for each complainant. It also confirmed that DECC is responsible for any errors in NCB mining reports, and criticised the Coal Authority for failing to advise the complainants of that fact. However, the ombudsman’s remit was confined to adjudicating on the process of dealing with the complaint, not on the merits of the complaint itself. Therefore, the substantive issue of compensation for my constituents is still unresolved. They are still condemned to living in houses they cannot sell at a realistic market price, as a result of mistakes made by the NCB and which are now the responsibility of DECC.

Mine searches are a vital part of the process of purchasing properties. They allow the purchaser to make an informed decision about whether they want to proceed on a property. A positive or negative search vastly affects the value of a property. My constituents paid full price for their property, based on the assumption made by the National Coal Board—the experts—that the property was clear of mines. This was clearly negligent because the surveyor clearly did not access the correct records to make the informed decision on which my constituents relied.

My constituents have done everything right. They have worked hard, got on, paid taxes and bought homes. Now, however, because of an oversight over 30 years ago by a professional specifically employed to avoid such a situation, they are unable to enjoy the fruits of their labour and are trapped in properties they have no hope of selling for their normal market value. My constituents have no way and no process by which they can have their case heard and adjudicated without recourse to a court of law. It is unjust that people of their age and financial circumstances have to invest in what might be an expensive legal process to obtain justice.

I ask the Minister and DECC to ensure that the Coal Authority treats sensitively any future complainants with issues of this nature and give them appropriate guidance about how they can best get redress for their particular concerns, as the Coal Authority clearly did not do in this case. To do that, there needs to be a change of culture and a change in the ownership of responsibility for these issues. I also ask the Minister to set up a tribunal and an adjudication service within DECC, to which people affected by such an issue—there may be many others now or in the future—can take their complaint, and have it assessed by experts and adjudicated on, so that they do not have to suffer in the way that my constituents have suffered.

Not only were my constituents denied the right to make a properly informed decision when they brought their homes, but they are now being denied the right to receive compensation for that error that was not of their making and was beyond their control, and which will have a significant impact on their finances for the rest of their lives.
5.54 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I sincerely thank the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) for securing this debate on what I fully recognise is a very serious issue for his constituents. I will start by providing some background on the work that the Coal Authority undertakes and, in particular, on its procedures relating to subsidence and compensation, which are highly relevant to his constituents’ situation.

The coalfield areas of England, Scotland and Wales cover some 26,000 sq km, or 11% of those countries’ surface area. Since the start of the industrial revolution, human settlement has followed natural resource availability, industry and employment. The coalfields are consequently some of the most densely populated parts of the UK. Some 7 million properties lie within them; 1.5 million properties lie above workings where coal has been mined at depths of less than 30 metres, and at least 172,000 coalmine entries are known about.

Although there is little active coalmining today, centuries of underground and surface extraction have created a huge legacy of environmental issues and public safety hazards. The Coal Authority was therefore created under the Coal Industry Act 1994, when the previously state-owned coal industry was privatised, to regulate the industry and manage those legacy issues. It helps DECC to manage the UK’s energy legacy safely and responsibly.

A substantial legacy of mining hazards remains in many major conurbations. One third of the 172,000 documented coalmine entries are in urban areas. Surface collapses above abandoned workings and shafts present the most common risks to the public. A 24/7 hazard line allows the public to report mining hazards around the clock, enabling immediate responses. Approximately 1,000 surface and subsidence incidents are reported each year, about half of which are found to be mining related.

The scale of the issue means that costly proactive remediation of the surface effects of shallow mineworkings and mine entries is carried out only where there is a higher risk to persons or property. Known shafts represent zones of risk. In 2008 the Coal Authority therefore began a mine entry inspection programme to identify such areas for proactive remediation. To date some 130,000 shafts have been inspected, 1% of which have required remedial treatment.

That brings me on to the remedies for property owners where coalmining-related damage occurs. In a coalmining area, a home or property may be damaged by coalmining-related subsidence. If a property has suffered such damage, there are powerful remedies under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, as amended by the 1994 Act. Responsibility for dealing with a claim rests either with a mining company or with the Coal Authority.

The authority manages the effects of past coalmining, including those subsidence damage claims that are not the responsibility of licensed coalmine operators. That includes responsibility for remedying and meeting the costs of subsidence associated with coalmines, for public safety and for administration of claims for coalmining subsidence damage from property owners.

The authority’s work on handling subsidence and safety issues associated with former coalmines is a statutory duty under both the 1991 Act and the 1994 Act. Those duties were established to protect the public and their property from the potential impacts of past coalmining. The 1991 Act sets limits to that liability by defining coalmining subsidence damage and setting time limits for liability.

Where a claim is made and the Coal Authority is found to be liable, in general it will carry out repairs to a property. Those repairs should make good the damage, but in certain circumstances the Coal Authority will pay compensation instead of making repairs. If a home becomes unsafe or uninhabitable because of subsidence damage, there are arrangements for people to be provided with, or receive payment for, equivalent alternative accommodation. If a home has been damaged by subsidence and cannot be sold at its former undamaged value, the Coal Authority may—depending on the circumstances—be under an obligation to buy it for its undamaged value. Where property has been so badly damaged that it has to be demolished, the Coal Authority will either rebuild it, or pay compensation based on its full market value in its undamaged condition. I hope that background has been helpful in setting out the size of the issue and how it is dealt with in statute.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman’s constituents in Myrtle Terrace, it is important to note that there is no statutory basis for the award of compensation for any perceived loss of market value due to the mere existence of a shaft or coal workings in the vicinity of a property. The legislation and protection that it affords covers only actual subsidence damage that has been caused by a shaft or mine entry. For the residents of Myrtle Terrace—and other residents in coalfield areas—future prospective purchasers of their properties are afforded enormous protection first by the powerful remedies of the subsidence legislation, and secondly by an insurance product on a prospective buyer’s mining search report that offers protection against loss sustained by the owner of the property, and the lender, if any new problems or adverse conditions are revealed in a subsequent coal and brine search report that were not revealed by the original report to which the policy was attached. Thirdly, the Council of Mortgage Lenders advises that the presence of a mine entry within 20 metres of a property will not, in principle, be a barrier to obtaining a mortgage.

Compared with other types of risk, such as flood risk or other types of mining, purchasers are significantly better off. No house insurance policy is required for coal subsidence, as all expenses are paid for actual damage. Although it is a matter for individual lenders and insurance companies, they have the reassurance offered by the powerful remedies of the subsidence legislation to manage their risks.

At the point of last inspection, there was no actual subsidence damage to the properties under discussion. However, if residents are aware of any issues caused by the presence of those shafts, the Coal Authority will re-inspect properties for any signs of coal mining-related damage. I completely sympathise with the hon. Gentleman’s constituents, and I realise that this will be a disappointing reply for them. However, I hope he will appreciate that it is not affordable or practical to underwrite non-existent damage for 7 million properties.

Question put and agreed to.

6.3 pm

House adjourned.
The Secretary of State was asked—

Specialist Domestic Violence Refuges

1. Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of local commissioning criteria on the availability of specialist domestic violence refuges.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): Domestic abuse is a devastating crime, and we are determined to ensure that support is available to every victim. We have secured £40 million in the spending review for this purpose, and we will shortly publish a national statement of expectations, drawn up with local government and domestic violence charities, which will set out what every area should offer to ensure victim safety.

Sarah Champion: The Secretary of State knows how devastating domestic violence is and how the services provide a literal lifeline. However, specialist services, particularly LGBT and black and minority ethnic services, face a huge funding crisis and many are going to the wall. In the national statement of expectations, will he commit to supporting and ring-fencing money for those specialist services?

Greg Clark: Yes, it is important that we have specialist services. That is part of the discussions we are having with the charities through the drawing up of the national statement. We have secured more funding than has been available—three times as much funding—and that will be important. I think there is a wider point here, too, because there are connections between the public space and the domestic space. It is incumbent on all of us to maintain a public sphere in which women are safe from abuse, bullying and harassment, and that example should start from public life.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I welcome what the Secretary of State has just said about the statement and about the additional money, but a recent Women’s Aid report stated:

“One major challenge facing specialist refuge provision is the awarding of tenders to large generic providers”.

The report also includes the shocking fact that one in six specialist refuges has closed since 2010, and it states that on one particular day, 103 children and 155 women across the country were turned away because a place was not available. What part does the Secretary of State feel the Government’s cuts may have played in this loss of services, and will he agree immediately to review the present procurement practices to ensure that the best possible quality of specialist refuges is available in every single community?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there needs to be total confidence. Any person who suffers from domestic violence should be confident that they can have a place of safety. That is behind the statement of expectations that is being drawn up, and he will be pleased that that is continuing. He should know that the number of bed spaces in refuges has increased in the last two years, according to UK Refuges Online, but we need to make sure that that confidence is there. I am sure he will agree that true success is when women do not have to move from their homes because they have been the victims of violence by their partners. True success is when women can be confident in staying there, and when the perpetrators of such abuse have to leave.

Starter Homes

2. Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the building of starter homes.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): The Government are implementing our manifesto commitment to extend to young people the opportunity to own a home of their own. Working with councils, housing associations and builders, the starter homes programme will bring that opportunity to 200,000 young people across the country.

Richard Graham: The Secretary of State will know that there are some situations in which it is not viable to have shared equity on properties—perhaps on infill or brownfield sites. In such situations, the local housing association may still be keen to build, but to rent. Will my right hon. Friend commit to meet to discuss a specific situation and consider support funding?

Greg Clark: I am always delighted to meet my hon. Friend. It sounds as though there is the prospect of another trip to Gloucester, which is always very enjoyable. We want to see more housing of all tenures, and our funding provides housing for rent as well as to purchase, but starter homes provide a big opportunity to people who have been losing out on meeting their aspiration to own a home of their own. That is true on brownfield sites as well as on any other site. I hope that in his city of Gloucester, there will be starter homes on those brownfield sites.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): How can these homes be called starter homes when someone would have to be on £90,000-plus to have a shot at even a one-bedroom version in my constituency? They are not starter anything: they are ending the hopes of a generation for whom affordable housing to buy and social housing to rent have all but vanished.
Greg Clark: I do not agree with the hon. Lady. She will know that the average price that a first-time buyer pays outside London is £181,000, which, with the discount of 20%, is £144,000, and under the very successful Help to Buy scheme, that would require a deposit of £7,500. That is making home ownership possible for the rising generation of young people.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, in villages in places such as North East Hertfordshire, it is very expensive for young people to own a home. Will this scheme or any other scheme the Government are promoting at the moment help young people in villages in areas such as North East Hertfordshire to make a start with getting a home of their own?

Greg Clark: It will, indeed. We have embarked on the biggest programme of house building since the 1970s. Unfortunately, when they were in office, the previous Government accumulated a housing deficit and debt of similar proportions to the financial deficit and debt. This Government are correcting that: we are building homes for young people across the country so that they can do what previous generations did, which is to count on having a home of their own.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): That is slightly misleading, because only 7% of local authorities think the new starter homes initiative is any good and 60% think it will be useless in their area. Is that not a fact? Look at this all-male, middle-aged group on the Government Front Bench who are saying to young people in our country, “There’s no hope of a home—not in their lifetime.”

Mr Speaker: I am sure the hon. Gentleman intended to insert the word “inadvertently” before the word “misleading”.

Mr Sheerman indicated assent.

Greg Clark: There is nothing misleading, inadvertently or otherwise, about our commitment to giving many hundreds of thousands of young people the chance to have a home of their own. I would have thought that, for the next generation in his constituency, the hon. Gentleman would be promoting the availability of starter homes, giving people who have not been able to buy a home the possibility of doing so. He should get behind that scheme.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Many brownfield sites in my constituency had planning applications granted before the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act 2016. What advice does the Secretary of State give developers who are now looking to change those planning applications to ensure that they can integrate starter homes into the plans?

Greg Clark: It is always possible for developers to have discussions with local authorities if they want to—they are not bound by such applications—but I hope they will press ahead with making available the homes that are needed in my hon. Friend’s constituency as well as in other parts of the country.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State must be getting used to headlines in the housing and planning press that say, “Starter homes will crowd out genuinely affordable homes”, or “Traditional affordable rented homes are being swapped for discounted Starter Homes”. Will he therefore tell us how many genuinely affordable homes for rent or equity share will not be built as a result of the starter homes initiative, and what specific measures is he taking to prevent that from happening?

Greg Clark: We are building more homes than have been supported by Governments since the 1970s—400,000 starter homes. The hon. Lady should be delighted to know that £8 billion of funding has gone in to providing them. With every decision we make, whether on starter homes or in giving the right the buy, we are putting ourselves on the side of the ordinary working people of this country who want a home of their own. In their opposition to such measures, Labour Members are showing how much further they are drifting from understanding—still less, representing—the ordinary working people of this country.

Affordable Housing

3. Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Whether the Government plan to revise their definition of affordable housing.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): As the Minister says, 86% of the population want to own their own home. Surely the term “affordable home” should now be expanded to include low-cost home ownership, including schemes such as the excellent Wiltshire Rural Housing Association, which has a variety of shared equity schemes. Surely those homes should also be affordable, as well as homes for rent.
Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, highlighting exactly the point I was making. As 86% of the population want to own their own home, most people have always found it slightly bizarre and illogical that when we talk about affordable homes we talk only about homes to rent. People want to own their own home, so it is absolutely right that affordable homes should also include homes that are affordable to buy.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Government’s housing plans sit alongside their policy of neighbourhood planning. The Minister will recall that in the Adjournment debate he answered earlier in the year he recommended that the people of Haughton Green went away and produced a neighbourhood plan. They have started that process, so what assurances can he give them that the Two Trees site will not be brought forward for development by Tameside Council before they have had the opportunity to say how they want the site to be sustainably developed?

Brandon Lewis: I am sure the hon. Gentleman. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot comment on any particular planning application owing to the quasi-judicial role. As I said in that debate, neighbourhood planning is at the heart of our planning model. It delivers more homes than are delivered in areas that do not have a neighbourhood plan and allows the local community to work out where homes should be and what type of homes best suit them. It is fantastic that more than 200 plans are now in process and approved, and more than 2,000 are coming through. I look forward to seeing the conclusion of the plan in his constituency.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I think you know, Mr Speaker, that I believe that claims that there will be pestilence and war if we leave the European Union might be inadvertently misleading. The latest claim, that house prices will fall if we leave the EU, is, if true, possibly a good thing for creating affordable housing. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Brandon Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend on many things, but on this I have to say that the problem is that people who own their own home would end up in negative equity, people who are looking to buy would struggle because supply would fall through lack of investor confidence, and, given that as mortgage rates go up the cost of buying also goes up, affordability could get worse.

Tayside Region City Deal

4. Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What progress has been made on discussions on a Tayside region city deal.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): Discussions on a Tayside city deal are going well. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland met Dundee City Council on 16 May to further those discussions. More work is being done but we welcome what has been done so far.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: A Tayside region city deal will be great for people across Tayside and for my constituents in South Perthshire. Will he set out the timescale agreed for finalising the deal, and, more importantly, whether the UK Government expect that they will be the majority funder of the project or, as is the case in Aberdeen, they expect the Scottish Government to underwrite the majority of the investment?

James Wharton: I do not wish to pre-empt the conclusion of the discussions that are underway. As I said, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland met Dundee City Council on 16 May. He is meeting the leaders of Scottish cities again on 8 June. I hope the deal can be concluded quickly, with agreement, as it will benefit not only all those who live there, but the UK economy as whole.

Supported Housing

5. Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of planned reductions in social rents and housing benefit support on supported housing.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): The Government have always been clear that the most vulnerable will be protected and supported through our welfare reforms. Following our review of supported housing, which is due to report shortly, we will continue to work with the sector to ensure that appropriate protections are in place.

Mr Hanson: That is all very well, but why then do St Mungo’s, Centrepoint, the Salvation Army and the National Housing Federation, to name just a few organisations, all think that the Government’s proposals will hit supported housing hard and will reduce the number of places available? Should the Minister not listen to the people who are providing the service rather than to his own political dogma?

Brandon Lewis: I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman that Howard Sinclair, the chief executive of St Mungo’s Broadway, has said: “This is a sensible and reasoned decision by the government”. The chief executive of YMCA England has said that the Government “has taken appropriate action to protect supported housing.” We have decided to delay things for a year while we work with the sector to make sure we have a good and well-protected sector in future.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I welcome the Government’s review of supported housing and their commitment to preventing homelessness, both financially in the autumn statement and Budget, and in a likely statutory duty to prevent homelessness. Does that progress not fly in the face of putting a local housing allowance cap on supported housing, which in effect would pull the rug from under very vulnerable tenants who the Government are supporting at the moment?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend rightly points out that the spending review put in £400 million of funding to deliver 8,000 new specialist affordable homes. As I
said, the delay of a year is to work with the sector, and the review that we have commissioned jointly with the Department for Work and Pensions will be published shortly. We have made it clear from the beginning that we will ensure that the most vulnerable people are protected and supported through all the reforms.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): If the Government continue with their rent and benefit changes it is likely that most supported housing will close, so it is welcome that they have instituted the review. In that review, will the Minister consider an issue that has been raised with the Communities and Local Government Committee as part of its inquiry into homelessness, which is whether, when people who are out of work and homeless go into supported housing, costs are covered through housing benefit? Under current arrangements, people who are in work can find themselves worse off than those who are out of work, so in the review will the Minister consider whether that problem can be rectified, along with the other issues?

Brandon Lewis: The review will consider all issues that affect the sector, and we are working with the sector on that—yes, absolutely, we will take that point on board.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Recently published research by Scottish Women’s Aid in partnership with survivors of domestic abuse in Fife reveals that women and children are often forced to make themselves homeless to be eligible for domestic abuse support. The recently proposed cap on local housing allowance will also have a devastating impact on the future provision of specialist refuge accommodation in Scotland, which is largely in the ownership of local authorities and housing associations. What steps are being taken to protect the provision of support for survivors of domestic abuse under those circumstances?

Brandon Lewis: As the hon. Lady will know—it was outlined a few moments ago by the Secretary of State—we have put extra funding into women’s refuges, and we have introduced a delay of a year while we work with the sector and the review is completed. That review will be published shortly, and all those issues will be taken into account when ensuring that we continue to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Alison Thewliss: Perhaps the Minister will give us a wee bit more assurance on that. The delay for a year is welcome, but many domestic abuse charities are worried about what will happen at the end of that. They need a bit of certainty and to be able to plan in the years ahead for those vital services on which women and children depend. Can he give us any more certainty about when the review will be published?

Brandon Lewis: First, we have outlined a further £400 million to go into providing 8,000 more homes, which shows our commitment to that sector. We have always been clear that we want to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected, and that the right provision is in place, and that is what the review is about. It will be published shortly, and we will respond to it. That is why the sector has widely welcomed the year’s delay, and as I said earlier, we are working with the sector to protect those most vulnerable people.

Violence against Women and Girls

6. David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help tackle violence against women and girls. [905268]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Our manifesto commitment is to create a secure future for women’s refuges, and in the new strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, we set out our ambition for prevention, not crisis response, to be the norm. We are determined to ensure that victims get the help they need when they need it, and we will fund local areas to make the changes needed.

David T. C. Davies: Some interpretations of sharia law advocate and condone violence against women, and women’s rights groups such as One Law for All are concerned at the spread of sharia courts in the UK. What support are the Minister and his Department giving to women’s groups such as One Law for All, which want to protect women against religiously sanctioned violence?

Mr Jones: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are strongly committed to women’s rights. The independent review of sharia courts announced by the Home Secretary will enable us to understand the extent to which sharia law is being applied in a way that is incompatible with UK law, and we will then be in a position to identify whether further actions are required to promote women’s safety.

Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Regional Deal

7. Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What progress has been made on the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city regional deal. [905269]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): Discussions continue positively on a city deal for Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. Officials have had a number of meetings and progress is being made, and Members across the House hope that an agreement can be reached so that something can be delivered that will benefit the hon. Lady’s constituents and our economy as a whole.

Deidre Brock: I have heard that one local authority involved in the Edinburgh city region deal, West Lothian Council, has distanced itself from the development of the deal and now appears to be intending to step away altogether. How will the Minister encourage it back into the ring on that deal?

James Wharton: The processes are by agreement, but we hope that all local authorities look to see the positives in what can be delivered, and the difference that can be made to the local economy, when city deals are agreed. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary at the Scotland Office will meet the leaders of Scottish cities on 8 June.
I will draw his attention to the hon. Lady’s comments in the hope that he can bear them in mind and perhaps overcome some of the obstacles.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab) rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Edinburgh and south-east Scotland are a very long way from Hove. Notwithstanding the hon. Gentleman’s considerable ingenuity, I find it hard to see how he can relate this to Hove. He should be patient and have another go on another question. Keep waiting, man, and keep in good spirits. We will get you in somehow.

**Social Care Costs**

8. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on local authority budgets of social care costs. [905270]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government** (Greg Clark): The spending review provided up to £3.5 billion of funding to help to meet the demographic pressures on social care—more than the £2.9 billion that local government and the directors of adult social services estimated was needed in their submission to the spending review.

**Diana Johnson:** Social care in Hull is facing a perfect storm, and GPs tell me that it is starting to impact on hospitals. We have had the deepest cuts in local government since 2010, and the national living wage is adding to costs. Will the Secretary of State accept the clear evidence of a growing funding gap that outstrips the social care levy, and that it is worst in areas of greatest and rising demand?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady never misses a chance to be miserable about Hull, a great city that is on the rise. Hull has benefited to the tune of nearly £7 million a year from the local government settlement—it is one of the biggest gainers in the country. The last time she made that point, the leader of her council wanted not to take what she said at face value, and said: “I do wish people would stop talking the city down. There is so much going on here…and a lot to look forward to.”

20. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am grateful for the Secretary of State’s visit to Shrewsbury the other week. He will have heard from the council of the big pressures it is under as a result of increasing costs in adult social care services. We have more senior citizens in Shropshire than the national average and the number is growing at a faster rate than the national average. What lessons has he learned from his visit to Shrewsbury, and what further assistance will he give my council to deal with that very important issue?

**Greg Clark:** I enjoyed my visit to Shrewsbury, as I enjoyed my visit to Hull. One thing that was welcomed in both places was a review of the underlying needs assessment, which has not been changed for many years, to ensure that the underlying pressures are properly reflected in the new settlement that, as a result of the Government’s reforms, comes in when 100% of the business rate is retained by local government.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): Clinical commissioning groups in my county of Norfolk have told the county council that they are withdrawing the money from the better care fund that was available for the protection of social care last year, leaving at least a £7.5 million gap. What is the Secretary of State doing in his discussions with the Secretary of State for Health to ensure that social care is protected? The risk of elderly, frail people and disabled people losing out more is very real.

**Greg Clark:** The right hon. Gentleman knows from his experience in the Department of Health how important it is to ensure that the social care system and the healthcare system are joined up. Part of the integration of health and social care is ensuring that people, whether they are NHS patients or cared for by the local authority, have the best care available delivered in the most efficient way.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Unitary councils have been established in that manner—with the health service embedded within them. What evidence is there that combining health and social care means that those services will be delivered more effectively and more efficiently?

**Greg Clark:** We know that where relationships are most embedded and advanced between local authorities in the NHS, people can be confident that they will have the best level of care without falling between the cracks of the two systems. Local government can do that working with the NHS, which is why that has been a prominent feature in some devolution deals.

**Pay to Stay**

9. **Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Whether his Department has made an estimate of how many families will move home as a result of the Pay to Stay provisions of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 over the course of this Parliament. [905271]

19. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Whether his Department has made an estimate of how many families will move home as a result of the Pay to Stay provisions of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 over the course of this Parliament. [905281]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government** (Mr Marcus Jones): The Government believe that tenants on higher incomes should contribute towards a fairer level of rent. More than 90% of tenants will be unaffected by our plans. Many above the threshold will be protected from big rent rises through our tapering approach. This is not about forcing households from their homes.

**Angela Rayner:** Given the gap between social and market rents, many of my constituents—teachers, nurses, junior doctors, electricians, bricklayers, call centre staff and shop workers—will pay thousands of pounds extra a year. Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm that the Government have abandoned any claims to being the workers’ party?
Mr Jones: Despite the hon. Lady’s tone, I am sure she agrees that social housing should be prioritised for those most in need. I reassure her and her constituents that the assumption that in the first year thousands of pounds extra could be paid in rent is definitely not the case. We have a taper: for every £1 households earn over the income threshold, they will pay only an extra 15p in rent.

Daniel Zeichner: In the past week my local newspaper, Cambridge News, has run a series of articles about the impact of the housing crisis in a high-cost city such as Cambridge. The council warns that the Pay to Stay proposals will affect a significant number of families on modest incomes and in some cases cost them an extra £3,000 a year. What advice can the Minister give to those people? Where should they move to? Should they quit their jobs or do fewer hours?

Mr Jones: As I outlined a few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman and the council seem to be basing their figures on a false premise. Once the policy comes into effect, the average cost of housing for people affected will be about 15% of their income, bearing in mind that they are higher earners. In the private rented sector, people are having to pay 50% of their income.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My constituents are always keen to hear news about improving work incentives and making work pay. What will the Minister say to my constituents who have written to me about the Pay to Stay proposals, saying that their introduction will mean a choice between cutting hours, turning down a pay rise or refusing promotion, because it is not economically worth their while to earn extra income?

Mr Jones: The taper is designed to ensure that it always pays to work. I reassure the hon. Lady and her constituents that many things—child benefit, tax credits, personal independence payments—are not taken into account under this policy.

Departmental Civil Servants: Coventry

10. Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): If he will take steps to increase the number of civil servants of his Department based in Coventry.

James Wharton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s enthusiasm, but at present there is no intention to relocate existing offices of this Department to Coventry. In April 2010, 3,382 people were claiming jobseeker’s allowance in Coventry. We welcome the fact that, thanks to the Government’s long-term economic plan, that number has fallen to 1,284. We want that trend to continue. The hon. Gentleman is quite right: as we devolve power to local areas, giving more responsibility to local economies and the people in them, we would like rebalancing to take place.

Enterprise Zones

11. Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effect of enterprise zones on rates of employment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): Enterprise zones have made a significant contribution to growing our economy. Those announced in 2012 have contributed to more than 620 businesses and to nearly 24,000 jobs. Nearly £2.5 billion has been invested in those enterprise zones to support our economy and create employment for our constituents.

Graham Evans: Daresbury enterprise zone in Weaver Vale employs thousands of people, including 500 scientists working on cutting edge technologies such as big data. With nine enterprise zones in north-west England, does my hon. Friend agree that this highlights the Government’s commitment to closing the north-south divide and rebalancing the economy by building a fantastic northern powerhouse?

James Wharton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We saw in the autumn statement a doubling of enterprise zones in the north of England and investment in the northern powerhouse. He has been a passionate advocate for this enterprise zone in particular and has impressed on me its importance and contribution to our economy. I hope that I might visit it soon with him to see at first hand what he is delivering for his constituents, working with this Government, as we stick to our long-term economic plan.

24. [905286]Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Unemployment in my constituency has nudged upwards in the last year. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the enterprise zone at Warton provides valuable opportunities to people in Fylde?

James Wharton: I welcome my hon. Friend’s question; he is a passionate advocate for his constituency and the enterprise zones that lie within it. I have visited Samlesbury but not yet Warton—perhaps my namesake enterprise zone is due a visit shortly, and I would be delighted if he were to welcome my joining him in attending it. We will offer what support is needed to ensure that enterprise zones are successful, create jobs and drive forward our economy. I am always happy to talk to him about the particular needs in his constituency.

Mr Speaker: I am sure its residents will feel excitement and anticipation in equal measure.
Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): Will the Minister give a commitment that no enterprise zone or council will lose funding as a result of the localisation of business rates?

James Wharton: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman’s question. He knows as well as I do that local government has been asking for many years for the localisation of business rates, which will give real incentives to drive local growth. He also understands that enterprise zones already sit differently within the business rates regime from local authorities, which we will have to take into account as we develop the system.

Local Enterprise Partnerships: Growth Deals

13. Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the level of support for local enterprise partnerships from growth deals.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): During the last Parliament, we devolved £7.7 billion of central Government funds in local growth deals, and in March, I invited applications for a further £1.8 billion of funds to further support local growth.

Mr Mak: Solent local enterprise partnership supports the regeneration of Dunsbury Hill Farm business park, which is creating more than 3,000 new jobs in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State continue to support LEPS, through the growth deals, to continue job creation in Havant and across Britain?

Greg Clark: I will indeed. My hon. Friend has been a big champion of the Dunsbury Hill Farm link road, which was funded by the LEP. I understand that the business park has its first tenants signed up and is creating 3,500 jobs, which is a further boost to the very successful time already being enjoyed on the Solent and in Havant in particular.

Right to Buy: Low-cost Housing


15. Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to help increase growth, prosperity and the number of jobs in coastal communities.

Mr Francois: I should hope that fracking would not have an impact on tourism as such, although I understand the sensitivities involved in that issue. We are doing a lot to support tourism in the hon. Lady’s constituency through the coastal communities fund. Wyre Borough Council was given a £1.55 million grant in 2014 to create new attractions along Fleetwood seafront to attract more visitors throughout the year. Lancashire County Council got just under £250,000 in 2015 to unlock the heritage potential of Lancaster’s historic St George’s quay. I believe the fund is doing well around the country, particularly in the hon. Lady’s constituency.

Hannah Bardell: The right to buy has had a disastrous effect on the availability of affordable housing. The SNP Scottish Government have had the courage to abolish it and have built more than 6,000 new council houses in Scotland. Has the Minister carried out an assessment of the effect that abolishing the policy would have on the supply of housing UK-wide?

Brandon Lewis: Abolishing the policy would actually reduce supply. We are extending it to 1.3 million more people, and, as I outlined, because a new home is being built for every home sold, it will, by definition, increase the supply of affordable homes.

Margaret Ferrier: The Institute for Fiscal Studies has highlighted the fact that the Scottish Government spends 85% more per head on social housing than England and Wales. Unlike the UK Government, the SNP Government are hitting their targets for affordable homes. Does the Minister acknowledge the abject failure of the UK Government’s policies to increase the affordable housing supply?

Brandon Lewis: I am proud that the Conservative-led Government in the last Parliament were the first to finish a Parliament with more affordable homes than they started with. We lost 420,000 under the Labour Government, who sold 170 homes for every one they built. That is why the one-for-one provision increases housing supply. We went ahead of our target in the last Parliament and we now have the largest building programme since the 1970s. That is something for us to be very proud of.

Coastal Communities

16. Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of the right-to-buy scheme on the availability of low-cost housing for people on low incomes.

The Minister for Communities and Resilience (Mr Mark Francois): We have invested more than £120 million across the UK through the coastal communities fund, which is helping to create or safeguard more than 18,000 jobs, provide more than 12,000 training places and attract more than £200 million of match funding. We have also announced a £90 million four-year extension to the fund.

Cat Smith: The Minister will be aware that tourism plays an important role in our coastal communities, so how damaging does he think the potential fracking wells on the Fylde coast would be to our tourism industry in the Blackpool area?

Mr Francois: I should hope that fracking would not have an impact on tourism as such, although I understand the sensitivities involved in that issue. We are doing a lot to support tourism in the hon. Lady’s constituency through the coastal communities fund. Wyre Borough Council was given a £1.55 million grant in 2014 to create new attractions along Fleetwood seafront to attract more visitors throughout the year. Lancashire County Council got just under £250,000 in 2015 to unlock the heritage potential of Lancaster’s historic St George’s quay. I believe the fund is doing well around the country, particularly in the hon. Lady’s constituency.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome what the Minister has said about support for coastal communities, but he will be aware that they have been particularly badly affected by membership of the European Union
and the impact of the common fisheries policy. This has resulted in much derelict and redundant dockland. What additional support can the Government offer to regenerate our now redundant dockland?

Mr Francois: Returning briefly to the coastal communities fund, I should point out that it has been highly successful and has helped to generate a tremendous return. For every £1 invested by the fund we get about £8 back. We regard that as highly successful, which is why we have extended the fund over another period of four years, with a budget of £90 million. In England, bidding for round four is now open. I believe the coastal communities fund would do very well for the coastal communities of our country, whether or not we are in the European Union.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Coastal tourism is valued at more than £8 billion and is a key contributor to the UK economy. A recent report from the National Coastal Tourism Academy identified significant opportunities for further growth and highlighted the need for strong partnerships between the public and private sectors. What is the Minister doing to foster these strong partnerships?

Mr Francois: I thank the hon. Lady for pointing out the National Coastal Tourism Academy report. From memory, we helped to fund the creation of that body, so it looks as though we are getting good value for money there, too. She talked about the importance of partnerships; we entirely agree. We have set up 118 coastal communities teams around the country to bring together in partnership local authorities, voluntary groups, charities and residents to design an economic plan for the revival of their areas. We will be celebrating the success around what we now like to call the Great British coast with a Great British coastal conference in Brighton on 30 June. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to come down in a spirit of partnership and celebrate it with us.

Neighbourhood Plans

17. Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): What plans his Department has to enhance and extend neighbourhood plans.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): We have already seen a revolution in neighbourhood planning, with 193 neighbourhood plans approved at referendum and nearly 2,000 groups across the country involved, covering nearly 10 million people. We announced in the Queen’s Speech that we will introduce a new package of measures further to strengthen neighbourhood planning in the forthcoming neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill.

Mr Jayawardena: My constituents are strong supporters of neighbourhood planning as a way of influencing the planning system in their local areas. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the forthcoming Bill and how it can give more weight to neighbourhood plans, local views and, indeed, permitted development where neighbours agree?

Greg Clark: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. Neighbourhood plans are one of the most important successes of the Localism Act 2011 and they are catching fire across the country as more and more communities want to be able to shape the character of their communities. It is notable that when they go to referendum, the average yes vote is 89%. I think either side of the referendum campaign would regard that as emphatic.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Some councils, including Leeds City Council, are prioritising “easy” areas with neighbourhood plans and ignoring and not properly assisting those where it is difficult and there are huge pressures, such as Aireborough. Will the Secretary of State look at the guidance issued to councils, particularly as developers can carry on developing even though neighbourhood plans are being produced?

Greg Clark: I hope the hon. Gentleman will involve himself in the scrutiny of the new Bill, which is designed to help precisely those neighbourhoods where support from the local authority has not always been forthcoming and enthusiastic, so that they can insist on that and proceed apace.

Brownfield Land/Green Belt

18. Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to (a) ensure the use of brownfield land and (b) protect the green belt.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): We are committed to retaining strong protection of the green belt, and its boundaries can be changed only in exceptional circumstances. Brownfield land has an important role in delivering new housing, and we have taken steps to maximise the number of dwellings built on suitable brownfield land.

Pauline Latham: I thank the Minister for that answer. The approach to ensuring that brownfield land is built on and that the green belt is protected is absolutely the right one. What plans have the Government made available to support the remediation of brownfield sites?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend has pushed passionately in her own constituency to ensure that the maximum use for brownfield land is found. Through the Housing and Planning Act 2016, planning permission in principle for brownfield registers is coming through, and there is a £1.2 billion fund for starter homes, which is obviously applicable to the brownfield sites. We have also made more money available in the spending review, which will be put in the public domain later this year, to make sure that we get planning permission for 90% of all the brownfield land by the end of this Parliament.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Stoke-on-Trent has swathes of brownfield land, yet vulturesque developers are trying pounce on green sites off Meadow Lane in Trentham and down in Lightwood. If the developers get turned down at the planning stage, they get right of appeal after right of appeal, but if my communities lose, that is it—‘they are dead in the water.’ They want to know why they cannot have the right of appeal to stop developers building on green sites when there are so many brownfield sites available.
Brandon Lewis: The best protection for these areas comes from having not just a local plan but neighbourhood planning in place. We have made it clear that a neighbourhood plan should be respected and has weight in law. The appeals system is part of natural justice when it comes to how the planning system deals with the landowners’ use of their own land, as we outlined in the last stages of the Housing and Planning Act. I would encourage the hon. Gentleman’s local residents to get a neighbourhood plan in place. That will give them the best protection to make sure that they have development they think is appropriate in their area, and put pressure on the local authority to make the best possible use of its brownfield land.

22. [905284] Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is vital to take steps to unlock the potential for brownfield housing developments while continuing to protect the precious green belt, which is integral in areas such as Aldridge and Streetly in my constituency. Will the Minister assure me that where brownfield sites are clustered together, as parts of a combined authority or in plans such as those for the black country garden city, each local authority will retain control and responsibility for planning decisions under its control?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The planning authority is the local authority, which has planning and decision-making power over its own land. I stress that for all such areas a neighbourhood plan has weight in law, and thanks to the Housing and Planning Act 2016, local authorities will make brownfield registers available to identify and make it clear for developers where the brownfield land that can be developed is located. They can then look to getting the funding together to develop it.

Planning and Development: Local Views

25. Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on giving due consideration to the views of local people on maintaining green, open spaces when developing their own land holdings. [905287]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Local planning authorities are required to determine all planning applications, including those on their own land, in line with their local plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, having regard to the views of local people. Planning policy provides strong protection for open space.

Nic Dakin: I thank the Minister for his answer. Local people are supportive of North Lincolnshire Council’s desire to develop the former Brumby resource centre site, but are anxious for the green open space that has been there for generations to remain so. Does the Minister agree that North Lincolnshire Council needs to think very carefully before building houses on a green open space?

Mr Jones: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot comment on what sounds likely to be a live planning application. However, I can tell him that the national planning policy framework recognises that access to high-quality spaces is an important contributor towards the health and wellbeing of communities, and that it is quite clear that existing open spaces should not be built on unless replaced by something similar.

Topical Questions

T1. [905223] Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): Since our last questions, the Housing and Planning Act 2016 has received its Royal Assent. I would like to thank parliamentary and departmental colleagues for their incredibly hard work on a landmark piece of legislation. With two further Bills set for the new Session, there can be no doubting the centrality of housing and devolution to this Government’s agenda.

Since our last questions, a respected leader of local government, Darren Cooper, the leader of Sandwell Council and deputy chair of the proposed west midlands combined authority, died at a young age. He was a champion of devolution for the black country and the west midlands, and I would like to pay tribute to him and his work.

More happily, last month marked the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was my privilege to pay tribute to officials for their dedicated service. I do regret not inviting former Ministers in the Department to the celebrations. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) would have been greatly encouraged by the progress made by the Department over the last six years, especially after the calamities of its first four.

Paul Flynn: The number of civil service jobs has been cut in most parts of the country, but the proportion of such jobs in London has increased by 16% since 2010. Why condemn people to live in overcrowded London, with its grossly polluted air and sky-high house prices, when they could live in the broad green acres of Wales where the air is sweet and the house prices are genuinely affordable?

Greg Clark: That enticing invitation to come to live and work in Wales will have been heard across the country, and I think the same applies to our great cities, towns and counties right across the country. Part of our devolution agenda is to take away the powers and resources that have been locked up in this city and to make them available across the country so that they can be locally led and bring about the revival that the hon. Gentleman refers to.

T2. [905224] Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Sabden, one of my beautiful villages, has a population of about 1,500. It has just had its bus service withdrawn by the operator. That service was part-subsidised by Lancashire County Council, but the council now refuses to subsidise even a skeleton service, which means that the elderly and the young have been set adrift: they cannot get into work or go to the doctor. Will the Secretary of State consider top-slicing the necessary
money from the county council and giving it to the
districts so that local people can get the service they
deserve?

**Greg Clark:** Clearly, that is a great disappointment
for my hon. Friend’s many constituents who rely on
those services. In the local government financial settlement,
we have been able to make available a flat cash settlement
over four years to councils across the country, giving
them the certainty of four-year funding. That is intended
to allow them to plan ahead for precisely the sort of
services that he describes.

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I welcome
the Secretary of State’s tribute to Darren Cooper. For
many of us, he was not just a good local Labour council
leader but a good colleague and a friend.

May I take the Secretary of State back to the answer
he gave the House in reply to Question 2, when he
talked about the Government’s housebuilding programme?
The latest official figures show that the number of new
homes is down by 9% and that, six years on, it is still a
third below the peak achieved under Labour. This is the
housebuilding recovery that never was. Does he not
agree that when housing policy fails so badly, it gives an
opening to those who want to fuel resentment and
division? Will he therefore today disown the comments
he gave the House in reply to Question 2, when he
talked about the Government’s housebuilding programme?

**Greg Clark:** The right hon. Gentleman should go
back and check his record—as a former Minister, I am
sure he has access to the files. Under the previous
Labour Government, including during his time as Housing
Minister, 420,000 homes were lost from this country’s
affordable housing stock.

An important source of investment in housing, including
in social and affordable housing, comes from the European
Investment Bank, which has invested £2 billion in our
housing stock over the years. It is important that we
continue to have access not only to that investment but
to investment from private sector bodies, all of which
benefit from the confidence and stability that we have
had through our arrangement, including the wholehearted
commitment of a Government determined to increase
house building.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):**
I completely agree with my hon. Friend. One only needs
to look at the parallel between the Labour Administration
in Wales and when the Labour party was in Government:
council tax doubled over 13 years. Since 2010, council
tax has been reduced in real terms by 9%.

T5. [905228] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): South
Hayling Island’s coastal community team was awarded
a £10,000 grant last year to help the local economy by
improving local signage. Will the Minister congratulate
Rosemary Satchwell and the whole team on their hard
work in promoting local businesses?
The Minister for Communities and Resilience (Mr Mark Francois): I am very happy to congratulate Rosemary Satchwell and the South Hayling Island coastal community team. Its economic plan highlighted the importance of signage in boosting business and tourism on South Hayling Island. I hope that Rosemary Satchwell will attend our “Great British Coast” conference in Brighton on 30 June to tell us more about it.

T8. [905231] Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State inform the House of the latest position on the devolution deal in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire?

Greg Clark: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the discussions in the north midlands are well advanced. While a top-down process, dictated from Whitehall, might be tidier than the current negotiated process, in which proposals are made from the bottom up, I think he would accept that that would be to miss the point.

Mr Marcus Jones: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on that, and I am delighted to hear about the continental market in Salisbury and his support for Love Your Local Market campaign. Does he Minister agree that thriving high streets and local markets are good not only for the local economy but for a city’s sense of community?

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): City, regional and growth funds have the potential to transform areas across the country, from Edinburgh North and Leith all the way down to Hove. The Secretary of State had a meeting with Brighton’s council recently. Many areas in the south-east showed enthusiasm for these funds in the early days, but this has not translated into deals being struck. I know he had a constructive meeting in Brighton and Hove recently, so will he update the House on his thinking and on how he is going to get the balance right between urban areas and the hinterlands and the countryside, to make sure that cities do not lose the power they need?

Mr Marcus Jones: I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done, that a £40 million fund is being put towards women’s refuges across this Parliament. That is an unprecedented amount of funding, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will be carefully considering bids from across the country, from organisations and charities representing all types of groups, such as the one he mentions.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): Thanks to the Conservatives in government, community groups now have the right to protect facilities and other much loved buildings or land by listing them as assets of community value. How many of these assets have been listed in such a way and, more importantly, what support is available to local communities to take up this exciting opportunity?

Mr Jones: More than 3,000 assets of community value have been listed to date, including 256 sports facilities. On the support we are offering, we fund the My Community website and network, which provides information, case studies and resources for people interested in taking up community rights and getting involved in their local neighbourhood. I congratulate my hon. Friend, as I understand he has organised another massive fundraising day, which this time is a golf day rather than a cricket day. I wish him every success, because over a number of years he has raised tens of thousands of pounds for charity.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Empty homes are a blight on our local communities, with some becoming derelict and dangerous, meaning that not only are local people deprived of somewhere to live, but entire areas can appear run down or unkempt. What is the Minister’s assessment of the number of empty homes and what is his Department doing to improve the situation?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and he has made the case to me before outside the Chamber about ensuring that we make the best use of the housing stock we have. I am pleased that under our Government we have seen a drop to the lowest level on record—a third down on the peak—and that in Thurrock the number of empty homes has dropped from 319 homes to 214. But we need to keep going, which is why our changes on the powers over council tax and the new homes bonus give a real incentive to local authorities to make sure we get these empty homes back into use. We should keep pushing.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Further to Question 6, will the Minister give a pledge now that if the Home Secretary reports that sharia courts and other institutions have been over-reaching themselves, he will fund the appropriate women’s organisations at a level that means that they can protect women who are vulnerable?

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that children’s services and child protection are a crucial part of local government, for which he is responsible? Has he talked to his colleagues in the Department for Education about this? Has he seen the evidence showing that as the departmental influence on education and schools continues, the ability to get children with special educational needs into good schools becomes more and more difficult?
Greg Clark: Yes, I have regular conversations with the Secretary of State. As with other areas of local government responsibility, sometimes its responsibilities cross the lines of departmental boundaries. We make sure, very particularly, that we join that up and reflect in the responsibilities and the funding of local government the full range of its commitments and needs.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Office for National Statistics figures state that 3.3 million extra people will come to our country in the next 15 years. How on earth are we to make sure that there is enough land and that output will be increased enough to support the number of buildings required for that number of immigrants?

Brandon Lewis: One of the biggest pressures on our housing stock is the fact that not enough has been built in the past three decades, primarily due to the failures under the last Labour Government. It is good news that we are all living longer and living in our own home longer, but ultimately it is local authorities’ key job to make sure that they assess the land needs in their local area to provide the housing their local residents need in their local plans.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We must move on.
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners

3.35 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) (Urgent Question): To ask the Home Secretary to explain how she will address her continued failure to remove 13,000 foreign national offenders remaining in UK prisons and communities, and specifically the removal of EU prisoners, who make up as much as 42% of all foreign national offenders in prison, back to their EU countries of origin.

Mr Speaker: That was a bit cheeky of the hon. Gentleman. He will have an opportunity to dilate in due course, but in the first instance, should stick to the terms of the question—and the puckish grin on his face shows that he knows he has gone a bit beyond the boundary.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Lock him up. [Laughter.]

Mr Speaker: He certainly should not be locked up!

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Since 2010, the Government have removed over 30,000 foreign national offenders, including 5,692 in 2015-16—the highest number since records began. The number of removals to other EU countries has more than tripled, from 1,019 in 2010-11 to 3,451 in 2015-16. We aim to deport all foreign national offenders, which is increasing removals, protecting the public and saving the taxpayer money.

Over 6,500 of the FNOs in the UK are still serving a custodial sentence. The Ministry of Justice has been working to remove EU prisoners under the EU prisoner transfer framework decision, which is a compulsory means of prisoner transfer that allows us to send foreign criminals back to their home country to serve their sentence. The record number of FNO deportations we have achieved has been due to changes made by the Government. We have reset the balance between article 8 of the European convention on human rights and the British public’s rights laws, including the European charter, and the Government’s intention to bring forward a Bill of Rights, and that was referred to in the Gracious Speech that the Government continue to uphold, as they say, “the sovereignty of Parliament and the primacy of the House of Commons”?

Mrs May: I accept that my hon. Friend has his own personal reasons for remembering very much the impact of the D-day landings. It is true that those who gave their lives on the beaches of Normandy did so to protect our freedoms. The Government, as I indicated in my response to his question, have put in place a strategy for removing those serious criminals—rapists and others—who may choose to come here from whichever country they come from. My hon. Friend referred to the Bill of Rights: it is the Government’s intention to bring forward a Bill of Rights, and that was referred to in the Gracious Speech that we heard a few weeks ago. I can assure him that the action that the Government have taken, for example in rebalancing the interests of the public and the interests of foreign national offenders, in the reference to article 8, show that we take seriously the need to ensure that the human rights of the British public are recognised when we deal with these issues.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): While I congratulate the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) on securing this question, I hope that he will not be too offended that I do not agree with every word of his opportunistic election broadcast on behalf of the leave campaign. Is it not plainly the case that this is not an EU question but a question of the competence, or lack of it, of his Government and his Home Secretary? As last week’s Select Committee report makes clear, while there has been progress on the deportation of foreign national offenders, it has been too slow.

Does the Home Secretary agree with what the Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee in May? He said that she and the Home Office “should have done better” on this issue. This is not the first time that the Home
Secretary has been warned about these failings. In the last Parliament, the National Audit Office found that more than a third of failed removals were the result of factors within the Home Office’s control. Despite that, we now learn that the problem is getting worse, not better, in some areas. The Select Committee said that it was deeply concerned that there were nearly 6,000 foreign national offenders living in the community—the highest figure since 2012. Can the Home Secretary explain why the figure is so high? How many of those people are still subject to active deportation proceedings, and what is she doing to bring the figure down? She urgently needs to get a grip on the issue.

Does the Home Secretary agree that it is much easier to do that while remaining part of the European Union, and that leaving would make it harder to deport people? Is it not the case that the prisoner transfer agreement at least provides a framework to speed up the process and that country-to-country deals are far harder to achieve? Is it not also true that our access to the Schengen information system and the European criminal records information system helps us to stop criminals arriving here, and the European arrest warrant means that they can be brought to justice?

Finally, would not the British people be better off listening to the two former Met commissioners and other senior police who, at the weekend, said that our membership of the EU helps us to fight crime, rather than to the unpleasant scaremongering of the leave campaign?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman’s early remarks do not sit well with the facts that I have presented to the Commons. Last year, we deported a record number of foreign national offenders. Of course, the Government should always do more and always seek to ensure that we can improve our ability to do so. He talked about the higher numbers of people in the community, but it is also the case that because of the number of criminal record checks that the police now undertake with other countries we have secured a higher level of identification of foreign national offenders, which has increased the number available for us to deal with, and for all of them we make every effort, and continue to make efforts, to deport.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s final point, I agree that it is easier for us to deal with these issues as a member of the European Union. He mentioned a number of tools and instruments available to us. On the figure I quoted in relation to foreign criminal checks, he mentioned ECRIS and SIS, which mean that information is available to us at the border which would otherwise not be available.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): When I was the Home Secretary’s colleague as Justice Secretary, it was my pleasure to bring to a conclusion in the Council of Ministers the negotiations begun by the previous Government to get the EU-wide agreement that prisoners could be compulsorily returned to the their own country. Progress of course depends on the efficiency and priority applied to that by the bureaucracies of every Government across Europe, but I congratulate her on the very good progress being made here. Will she point out to my hon.

Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) that if we were not members of the European Union, we would go back to a system where we had absolutely no ability to deport anybody to their country of origin unless we could persuade the Government of that country to accept them?

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for the work he did on the prisoner transfer framework decision, which was an important step forward. Crucially—this relates to the latter part of his question—that decision enables us to deport people compulsorily from the United Kingdom to serve their sentences elsewhere, whereas arrangements that may have been in place previously were about voluntary transfer, where the prisoner had to actually agree to move. The current arrangement gives us far greater scope in being able to remove people from the United Kingdom, and it is another reason why it is important to remain part of the European Union.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Removing foreign national offenders is important and rightly attracts public interest, but it does require sensible and measured debate. As the Home Affairs Committee report pointed out last week, and as the Home Secretary has said, the Government have been making some progress on this issue. Does she agree that being in the European Union gives us access to criminal records sharing and prison transfer agreements, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) has just said, and helps us better to identify people with criminal records, allowing us to send them back to their home countries to serve their sentences? Does she agree that there is really no evidence that leaving the European Union would help rather than hinder the removal of EU offenders? Finally, does she agree that it is a shame that some other good work and powerful recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee have been overshadowed by Brexiteers determined to twist any issue to their cause, even in the absence of logic?

Mrs May: I agree with the hon. and learned Lady that being a member of the EU does give us access to certain tools and certain instruments that help us to share information that otherwise would not be available to us, and that is very important in the sharing of criminal records information. There is more for us to do, and I am working with others to ensure that we can enhance our ability to share that information so that we have more information available to us. On her latter point, I have to say that the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee rarely allows himself to be overshadowed.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I congratulate the Home Secretary on her changes to UK law and her success with non-EU criminals, but is it not the case that freedom of movement and a series of court judgments and decisions by the European authorities have made it much more difficult to tackle the problem of EU criminals?

Mrs May: The important issue for us in being able to prevent people from entering the UK, should we consider that they are individuals whom we do not wish to have in the country, or in being able to deport people is retaining our borders, which we do. It is important that...
we have at our border controls information available to us to help us make those decisions. That is why membership of SIS II is an important part of the tools and the framework that we have to enable us to deal with criminality. Of course, in the deal that was negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in relation to our membership of the European Union, we have enhanced our ability to deport people with criminal records and to prevent people from coming here with criminal records. We will also be ensuring that certain decisions taken by the European Court of Justice are overturned.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee—Mr Nigel Keith Anthony Standish Vaz.

Keith Vaz: Time and again, the Home Affairs Committee has warned successive Governments—not just this Government, but way back to the last Labour Government—about the need to remove foreign national offenders. Credit should be given to the Home Secretary. She has relentlessly pursued people such as Abu Qatada out of the country; in fact, I was surprised that she did not pilot the plane that took him back to Jordan at the end of that saga. The fact remains, however, that eight of the top 10 countries are either Commonwealth or EU countries, and there is, frankly, no excuse for friendly countries and key allies not to take back citizens of theirs who have committed serious offences. Eighteen months ago we made a very sensible and simple suggestion, namely that the passports of foreign national offenders should be taken away from them at the time of sentencing. Has that now been implemented?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman and his Committee have been consistent in raising this issue, and I am sure that he welcomes the fact that we are now removing record numbers of foreign national offenders. We are taking a number of steps in relation to the identity and identification of foreign national offenders. In most cases, passports will be taken away, although some individuals will have destroyed their documentation. That is one of the difficulties involved in returning people to countries when they have no documentation; getting the correct identity is one of the challenges faced by the recipient country, regardless of where in the world it is.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Home Secretary will be as aware as anyone of how difficult it is to deport a foreign criminal to any country and that it is all but impossible to do so to some countries. Does she agree that the EU prisoner transfer framework directive gives us a much better chance with those countries than with any other country, including Commonwealth countries; that, if my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has his way in the referendum, that would make it more, not less, difficult to deport foreign prisoners and that our prisons’ problems would therefore continue; and that that would be, by any standards, a perverse outcome?

Mrs May: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, who has experience of these issues from his time as the Immigration Minister. Membership of the European Union gives us access to information sharing and instruments that help increase our ability to deal with foreign national offenders and criminals. Crucially, as I indicated earlier to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the prisoner transfer framework decision gives us the ability to return people on a compulsory basis, rather than requiring the prisoner themselves to agree to that return.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Does the Home Secretary recall that when her right hon. Friend the now Leader of the House served as the Secretary of State for Justice, he told the Home Affairs Committee that it was “very obvious to me that it is...in our national interest to be part of” the EU prison transfer agreement. Does she agree with that statement, as I do, and does she happen to know whether her right hon. Friend still holds that view?

Mrs May: I agree with the view about the transfer decision, and as for the views of my right hon. Friend, I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman asks him himself.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rather candidly admitted that it is more difficult to control immigration while we are a member of the EU. Does she agree that two of the reasons why we have 4,000 EU nationals in our jails are, first, that if we deport them and our EU partners do not choose to keep them in prison, they have the right to come straight back here and be free to roam our streets because they are EU citizens; and, secondly, that these people now have access to the EU charter of fundamental rights, which the Prime Minister said he wanted a complete opt-out from, but he did not get that in his renegotiation?

Mrs May: I am afraid that my hon. Friend has been misinformed about the impact of the deportation of a foreign national offender. It is not the case that a foreign national offender who is deported to another EU country would be able immediately to come back. The point of the deportation is that they are not able to return to the UK, unless they apply to have that deportation revoked. Of course, it would be for the Government to decide whether it would be revoked.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Some of my constituents who were born in this country, who are able to serve in the armed forces of this country, and who do not hold passports in many cases—they can even be MPs—find themselves facing deportation for historical reasons because they are citizens of the Republic of Ireland. There is statute for that special arrangement. Could the Home Secretary tell the House what her views are in respect of citizens of the Irish Republic currently in British prisons?

Mrs May: As I understand it, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the last Labour Government and the Republic of Ireland Government, which means that we are not currently transferring prisoners between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. That is an issue that others have raised, but my understanding is that that is the current situation.
Mrs May: I am not sure when my hon. Friend last came through Heathrow or Gatwick, or into St Pancras through the juxtaposed controls in Brussels or France, but he will have noticed that his passport was indeed checked as he came through, as are the passports of those who are not British citizens. As I have indicated in response to a number of queries, we now have more information available at the border through being a member of SIS II. That is one of the EU arrangements on justice and home affairs matters that the Government chose to rejoin and that this Parliament unanimously agreed to rejoin.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State aware of how thankful I am for the work that she and her Department have done to educate me over recent months, as I campaigned to bring back, through extradition, people accused of foul crimes against constituents of mine in Huddersfield and other people in the UK? She educated me about how complex that is, and about how, without the European Union and the help of our fellow EU members, we would never have got those people back to face justice in this country.

Mrs May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his reference to how complex some of these cases can be. That is the point. Very often there are barriers, such as lack of documentation, which need to be overcome before we are able to make these deportations. As a number of people have indicated, in the EU, the prisoner transfer framework decision gives us the framework under which we can deport foreign criminals from European member states.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that the problem, which is of some standing and goes way back to the early part of this century, when the Labour Government faced it, is not one of law or the interpretation of legal instruments, but one of proper administration? Is there not a second problem, in that there are far too many barrack-room lawyers who keep following their own advice?

Mrs May: I would hesitate to come between my right hon. and learned Friend and any other lawyer in this Chamber or elsewhere.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If we left the EU, the prisoner transfer agreement would no longer stand. How long does the Home Secretary think it would take to negotiate with each EU country a fresh agreement on returning EU prisoners?

Mrs May: The answer is that nobody knows how long it would take to negotiate those bilateral arrangements. Of course, under the arrangements of the treaty—under article 50—two years are set aside for negotiations for a member state leaving the European Union, but that does not necessarily cover the bilateral arrangements that would need to be in place if we were outside the co-operative arrangement of which we are members in the EU. It is very uncertain how long it would take to put any such arrangements in place.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): This is a shocking record to defend: 13,000 foreign national offenders—equivalent to the population of a small town—wandering the streets; I should be very clear with the House that they are not doing so. A significant number of them are serving custodial sentences and are therefore within our prison estate, and some of them, having been detained, are within our immigration detention estate, waiting for their deportation.

I am clear, as is my hon. Friend, that we need to do more in this area. That is why the Government have made a number of legislative changes to make it easier for us to deport people, and to rebalance the system in reference to article 8. We will continue to put forward changes that we think will improve our ability to deport foreign national offenders.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary mentioned the European arrest warrant. If we voted to leave the European Union, what would happen to the implementation of the European arrest warrant system, and would it make it more difficult or easier to get people back from other countries when we want to imprison them in this country for crimes committed here?

Mrs May: I think the European arrest warrant is a very useful tool for us to access as a member of the European Union. That is why, when we considered the justice and home affairs opt-in/opt-out decision, I proposed to the House that we should go back into the European arrest warrant system, and the House voted to do so unanimously. If we were not a member of the European Union, we would have to negotiate alternative arrangements, but that might not be possible with every country. For example, some member states of the European Union will not allow the extradition of their nationals to countries other than members of the European Union.
Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): These figures were given to me by the Secretary of State in answer to a question in May. I also received an answer saying that we actually refuse entry to 20 times more non-EU applicants than EU applicants. Border controls are therefore important. That shows that the bar is much higher for non-EU countries. If border controls are so important, will she explain why we have only six boats patrolling our waters, when Italy has 600 and France has 600? Surely we should have stronger border controls in all areas.

Mrs May: I do not believe that I have the exact figure to hand, but I will give it to my hon. Friend. Friend. We are seeing an increase in the number of people who have been deported under the prisoner transfer decision, because it is being put in place by other member states. As I am sure he will recall from his time in the Ministry of Justice, Poland had a derogation until December 2016, so at the end of this year Poland will become a part of the prisoner transfer decision. Two countries—I believe they are the Republic of Ireland and Bulgaria—are yet to implement it. There is movement, and there has been an increase in the numbers being transferred under that decision.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): My constituents’ pride in giving hospitality to and assimilating newcomers for the past 150 years was put under strain last year, when a foreign national offender who was deemed too dangerous to be located in London—his home—was placed in my constituency, where he committed crimes for which he is serving a four-year sentence. Would it not be far better for public acceptance of migrants if there was a fair and even distribution of asylum seekers and other migrants throughout the country? My constituency takes 500; will the Home Secretary tell me how many there are in her constituency, and whether there are still none in the constituencies of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor?

Mrs May: I have answered that question previously, and the hon. Gentleman knows the figure. He has carefully elided the issue of prisoners with the overall issue of the dispersal system for asylum seekers, which, as has been pointed out in the House before, is exactly the same as that operated by the last Labour Government.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): The Home Secretary referred to GPS tags in her first answer. What assessment has she made of the effectiveness of those tags for deporting foreign national offenders?

Mrs May: The reason for legislating to have the tags is to be able to identify where people are, so that when the circumstances allow for deporting them, it is easier for us to do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary for her answers so far. Does she recognise that the Government’s failure to deport more EU murderers and rapists undermines the case for remaining in the EU, particularly when housing EU convicts in UK jails costs the taxpayer some £150 million each year? What has been done to reduce that drain on our financial resources?

Mrs May: The number of European economic area foreign national offenders who have been deported has tripled since 2010-11, from just over 1,000 to well over 3,000. We are making progress in that field.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): At the beginning of this year, a Dutch resident entered through Gatwick airport, very swiftly assaulted a member of staff there, went before the local magistrate, and was released, without having any address, on to the streets of Crawley. Several days later, they hammer-attacked two female police officers. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the
difference between the rhetoric about sharing criminal records and the reality as experienced by all too many of our constituents?

Mrs May: I am aware of this case, as my hon. Friend came to see me to raise it. Given the circumstances that he has set out, I can fully understand why he chose to do so, and why he has raised the case again today. He referred to criminal records exchange. The tools are there, but operational decisions will be made by those involved at any point in time. As I have indicated, the police have significantly increased the number of criminal record checks that they make, but whether and at what point they make those checks are decisions for them.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Perhaps uniquely, I shall ask a question that does not involve Europe. Notwithstanding the progress that the Home Secretary has alluded to, does she acknowledge that the report shows that it still takes, on average, 149 days to deport a foreign national offender? Will she also acknowledge that the delay is exacerbated by the appalling record of the contracted transportation company Tascor, which regularly fails to show up to transport prisoners from immigration detention centres to the aeroplane, resulting in further detention and the cost of tickets for missed flights? What will she do about that?

Mrs May: I assure my hon. Friend that we look constantly at our contracts with those who provide services to the Government. There can be a complex range of reasons why in some cases it is difficult to deport people, or some last-minute problem with deportation, but if someone who expects to be deported does not attempt to be deported, we will make every effort to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Boston in my constituency has seen more than its fair share of serious crimes committed by foreign nationals, and people are rightly worried. Does the Home Secretary think that the process of negotiating 20-plus new bilateral agreements, or the outcome of that, could conceivably make those people safer?

Mrs May: Again, my hon. Friend has specifically raised the concerns of his constituents on that issue, and my answer is that being within the European Union, and having the single prisoner transfer framework decision and various other tools, makes us safer. There is uncertainty and delay in having to negotiate bilateral arrangements—indeed, nobody knows whether it will be possible to negotiate bilateral arrangements that are of equal benefit to the British public as those that we have as members of the EU.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Despite the Home Secretary’s tough talk, the figures are stark. Since 2002-03, the number of EU prisoners in our prisons has trebled. As an illustration, the number of Polish prisoners has gone up from 46 to 983, and the number of Romanian prisoners has increased from 50 to 635. Over the past three years, the Metropolitan police have arrested 100,000 EU nationals and charged more than 30,000 with an offence. The Home Secretary is clearly failing to stop EU criminals coming into the UK, and failing to deport them. Is the only conclusion to be drawn that the free movement of people means the free movement of criminals into the UK?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend may not be surprised to hear that I draw different conclusions. It is obviously important that we are able to deal with those who try to cross our borders and have a record of criminality, and we must have access to information that enables us to make decisions about such people. That is why access to SIS II, and other systems that allow us to check criminal records, is so important.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The cost of foreign criminals coming to the UK is just one of the many strains that the free movement of people puts on the British taxpayer. Does the Home Secretary agree with the National Audit Office that the best estimate for the costs of administering foreign national offenders is £850 million a year, and could be as much as £1 billion a year?

Mrs May: Of course there are costs involved with people who come to the country. Indeed, there are British citizens who commit crimes, and the criminal justice system obviously bears costs to ensure that they are brought to justice and given custodial sentences in our prisons. I urge caution, however, because questions this afternoon have focused on foreign national offenders from other EU member states, but many foreign national offenders in prisons in the United Kingdom come from countries outside the European Union. We make every effort to return those foreign national offenders and deport those people, as we do for those from the EU.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): As a former special constable with the police parliamentary scheme, I was involved at first hand in arresting eastern Europeans on the streets of London for crimes that they were in the process of committing. I saw at first hand the wave of crime from eastern Europe following the accession of those countries in 2004. Does the Home Secretary believe that the situation will get better or worse with the admission of Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Turkey? To ensure that she does not inadvertently mislead the House, given that she has attended today to answer a question on the removal of foreign national offenders and EU prisoners, does she seriously expect us to believe that she will not tell the House the number of prisoners transferred under this super-duper EU prisoner transfer agreement? She attends today with seven officials in the civil servants’ box and her entire ministerial team. Will she now disclose that number?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend did great service as a special constable with the police parliamentary scheme. I was involved at first hand in arresting eastern Europeans on the streets of London for crimes that they were in the process of committing. I saw at first hand the wave of crime from eastern Europe following the accession of those countries in 2004. Does the Home Secretary believe that the situation will get better or worse with the admission of Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Turkey? To ensure that she does not inadvertently mislead the House, given that she has attended today to answer a question on the removal of foreign national offenders and EU prisoners, does she seriously expect us to believe that she will not tell the House the number of prisoners transferred under this super-duper EU prisoner transfer agreement? She attends today with seven officials in the civil servants’ box and her entire ministerial team. Will she now disclose that number?

[Henry Smith]
I am sorry if my hon. Friend is disappointed that I do not happen to have the figure he asks for in front of me. I indicated to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) that I will write to him with it.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I should like to make a brief statement on British Home Stores. The House will remember that, on 25 April, I made a statement after BHS entered administration. The administrators, Duff & Phelps, tried to sell BHS as a going concern with a view to retaining all the stores and as many jobs as possible. I understand that it had talks with a number of interested parties. As reported last week, the administrators have now concluded that process. Although offers were received, none was sufficient to enable a deal to be completed, and they have had to take the decision to wind the business down. That will be devastating news for workers at BHS and their families, and for those businesses that supply BHS. Our thoughts are with all of them. That follows the sad news received by Austin Reed workers on 29 May that only a partial sale of that business was possible, with the remainder being wound down over the course of June.

A number of questions have properly been raised about how BHS found itself in that situation. The proper authorities—the administrators, the Insolvency Service and the pensions regulator—are already looking into these matters. I am clear that any wrongdoing will be taken very seriously and I will return to that later in my statement.

Our focus now is to support all those affected and to get people back into work as quickly as possible. While we await the administrators’ plans for winding down the business, I can inform the House that Jobcentre Plus has been in contact with them and is preparing a range of support to assist staff. Jobcentre Plus is on standby to go into BHS stores and directly advise affected staff of their various options. Already, teams are centrally tracking vacancies in the retail sector and will ensure that BHS branches are aware of any vacancies in the area.

Jobcentre Plus stands ready to deploy its rapid response service in acknowledgment of the scale of the job losses. The service has a strong record of helping people at very distressing times. It can offer workers support, including help with job searches, CV writing and interview skills. It can also help to identify transferable skills and skills gaps linked to the local labour market. It can help with training to update skills and learn new ones, and gaining industry-recognised certification will improve employability. It can give help to overcome barriers to attending training, and securing a job or self-employment, such as childcare costs, work clothes and travel costs.

I can inform the House that the Department for Work and Pensions has written to major retailers asking them to consider what opportunities they can offer the workers and local areas affected as the situation becomes clearer this week. DWP will also monitor the impact of redundancies locally on a continuing basis, and will provide additional targeted support to any areas that are particularly badly affected. I assure the House that we will do everything in our power to support workers and their families through this difficult time—not just BHS workers, but those made redundant by Austin Reed.

On the wider issues, on 3 May, the Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary instructed the Insolvency Service to begin its investigation into the extent to which the
conduct of the directors of BHS led to its insolvency and/or caused detriment to its creditors. The Insolvency Service cannot give a running commentary on its investigations, but I know its work is well under way. I am clear that if evidence is uncovered that indicates that any of the directors’ conduct fell below what is expected, action will be taken. This can include applying to the courts to disqualify the relevant parties from being a company director for a period of two to 15 years. If there are any indications of any criminal wrongdoing relating to BHS, we will ensure that the relevant investigatory body is informed.

Members will be aware of considerable concern about the BHS pension scheme. The BHS schemes are in a Pension Protection Fund assessment period. The test is whether the schemes’ funds are sufficient to allow each scheme to buy annuities that will pay members at least PPF-level benefits. If it cannot, the scheme will transfer to the PPF and compensation will be paid. The PPF aims to resolve these issues as quickly as possible.

PPF compensation is generally 100% of the pension in payment for anyone over the scheme’s normal pension age at the date of the insolvency, and, for everyone else, 90% of the accrued pension, subject to a maximum cap.

The Pensions Regulator is currently undertaking an investigation into the BHS pension scheme to determine whether it would be appropriate to use its anti-avoidance powers. This means that if the regulator believes an employer is deliberately attempting to avoid its pension obligations, leaving the PPF to pick up its pension liabilities, the regulator may intervene and seek redress from the employer—and, if I may say so, Mr Speaker, rightly so. There is a clear process that must be followed and this can sometimes take a considerable amount of time. When it becomes appropriate to do so, the regulator will consider issuing a report of its activities in this case.

We will examine its findings closely.

As I said on 25 April, retail is a vital sector for the United Kingdom economy and the Government are committed to it, which is one reason why I will be meeting key retailers this Thursday with ministerial colleagues from other Government Departments. The news of the BHS closure is a huge blow, but as a whole the retail sector is resilient. There are now 3.1 million retail jobs in the United Kingdom, up by 83,000 since 2010 and almost back to record pre-recession levels.

High streets remain a crucial part of our local and regional economies, creating jobs, nurturing small businesses and injecting billions of pounds into our economy. A recent report by the Association of Town Centre Management found that town centres contribute nearly £600 billion to the economy each year. That is why we continue to support the British high street. We reduced corporation tax and I am so pleased that we announced the biggest ever cut in business rates in England, worth £6.7 billion over the next five years, which will of course benefit small businesses in particular.

I know little of this will be of comfort to BHS workers facing an uncertain future, but I assure them and the House that the Government will do everything within their powers to get every affected worker back into a job as soon as possible. I commend the statement to the House.

4.22 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement.

The whole House will be concerned for the 11,000 staff who are losing their jobs as a result of the liquidation of BHS and Austin Reed. The closures also affect supply chains, local economies and communities. Can the Minister tell me whether the taxpayer will have to pay for redundancies, as happened at Comet where the previous owners, not staff, were preferred creditors? Given what she said about the Pensions Regulator, does she envisage an investigation into the actions and activities of Sir Philip Green? Will he be asked to make up the pension shortfall, so that pensioners are not short-changed by receiving only 90% of their pensions guaranteed under the PPF?

The Minister mentioned work done to support the high street. I agree that the high street is a crucial part of the UK economy, but I am afraid the evidence of the failure of BHS, Austin Reed and others suggests that the work done by the Government simply has not been enough. As Mary Portas said, the Government have so far made only token gestures to help our high streets.

The allegations about what happened at BHS are beyond belief. A BHS pension surplus became a deficit of £571 million. The business was sold to Retail Acquisitions, a firm whose head was a three-times bankrupt with no apparent experience of turning around struggling retailers and who appears to have taken significant sums out of the business while it was still trading. What investigation will the Minister's Department carry out into why Sir Philip Green sold the business when he did and what due diligence he carried out into the buyer?

Sir Philip Green's family were paid hundreds of millions of pounds in dividends, and all the while the business was lacking the investment in modernisation that might have allowed it to survive and indeed thrive, as others have done. While his former workers contemplate redundancies, as happened at Comet where the previous owners, not staff, were preferred creditors? Given what she said about the Pensions Regulator, does she envisage that, as with Comet before, is an example of wealth extraction, not wealth creation, and a system that favours a very small number of people, rather than the wider economy. The Minister and her colleagues need to intervene and investigate in full what happened at BHS and make sure that action is taken against the likes of Sir Philip Green; otherwise they will be complicit in a system of exploitation by a few owners at the expense of the many staff and pensioners.
Anna Soubry: As I have said, I will not refer to any individuals. The Pensions Regulator is—quite properly—conducting an investigation into the BHS pension scheme, and there are other investigations. I have made it clear that I and everyone in government take such misconduct, where there is such misconduct, extremely seriously, and if the investigations find the sort of misconduct that should lead to a police inquiry, so be it—it let the full process take place—and if anybody needs to be brought to criminal justice, that must be right. As the House knows, I am a one nation Conservative. I support capitalism but not unfettered capitalism without compassion and care, and that extends to anybody working for any business in our country.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I think the Minister said that any wrongdoing would be dealt with, but the problem is that much of this was, I suspect, legal. That places a moral responsibility on every Government over the last few decades who have allowed such action to be legal. The actions of Philip Green, his family and his companies, in taking out more than £500 million in dividends from a company that cost them £200 million, can be described as little else than asset stripping. What matters now, however, is that those employees dependent on the pension scheme are set to lose 10% of their pensions, if the scheme goes into the Pension Protection Fund. Many Government Members think that the minimum that needs to happen is for Philip Green to pay back enough to save them from that.

Anna Soubry: As I said, I will not name any individual. Investigations are being conducted—quite properly—so before we rush to judgment in this place or anywhere else, let us wait for those full investigations to conclude. Then we can see if we need to take matters forward.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I thank the Minister for early sight of the statement, and I particularly welcome her robust comments about pursuing any wrongdoers—that is entirely the right thing to do. If ever there was an unacceptable face of capitalism, it comes in the form of Sir Philip Green and his like.

The BHS store in Kirkcaldy, in my constituency, is one of 16 stores affected in Scotland, many of them in middle-sized towns such as Kirkcaldy, Livingston and Falkirk where the loss of employment will create considerable problems. These employees have contributed to their pensions at BHS over a lifetime and now find that, because of Green’s failure as a businessman and his naked greed, which may have been legal, they face redundancy and great anxiety about their pensions, even if they are guaranteed the 90% of accrued pensions, subject to a cap.

Furthermore, to have sold off BHS for personal convenience for £1 to Retail Acquisitions—led as we have heard by Dominic Chappell, who has been declared bankrupt three times as of the end of last week—is, to say the least, scandalous, even more so as we now know that Green rejected the opinion of Goldman Sachs, his own advisers. This raises profound questions about the due diligence process, which the Minister may wish to reflect on. Many will be thinking that Green is little better than a corporate crook. He cannot be allowed to sail off in his third yacht, a £100 million luxury “gin palace”, as one newspaper put it. The SNP stands with the communities, families and individuals affected by this dreadful situation. We believe there is a fundamental need to readdress the regulation of the pensions industry to ensure the protection of workers.

I end with three brief questions. First, in Scotland the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment initiative will respond to assist all those made redundant. What are the UK Government’s plans to mirror the breadth of action undertaken by PACE? Secondly, what action do the UK Government contemplate to address the ease with which unscrupulous chancers such as Green can denude businesses of their financial assets? Finally, does the Minister understand why many employees will feel that the Pensions Regulator should seek the entire £571 million actuarial deficit from Green himself?

Anna Soubry: May I thank the hon. Gentleman and say that it is a long time since I had the great pleasure of going to Kirkcaldy? It is a few years now, but I know it is a great town. As on many high streets, wherever they might be in the United Kingdom, the role of BHS has been critical. Unfortunately its fortunes have not been good for some considerable time. Perhaps that is the fault of us all for not paying a visit and buying in its shops—I suspect I am guilty of that from the time I used to go up to Kirkcaldy as a regular visitor.

The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about greed. It does not matter who it is, it is certainly not acceptable, whatever one’s faith may be—I am helpfully reminded by the Deputy Leader of the House that it is apparently a deadly sin. The hon. Gentleman makes a number of points. As I say, there are a number of investigations. We have to await the outcome and if we need to take further action, we will not flinch from doing that.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): The questions at the heart of British Home Stores are not necessarily ones of legality: they are ones about the judgments made by people in positions of authority at British Home Stores and Arcadia and about the ethics of those entrusted with such responsibilities for those companies. My right hon. Friend will be aware that over the last few weeks Sir Philip Green’s reputation has come under substantial fire. Of course it is up to him to decide how he wishes to respond, but is she also aware of the concern of others in business to the collateral damage being done to people’s trust in business across the United Kingdom by the actions of the people involved at Arcadia and British Home Stores?

Anna Soubry: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, and I thank him as ever for his valuable contribution. The reason I am choosing my words today with some care is not that I do not have my own views, based on what I have read, but it is important that we allow these investigations to take place before we rush to judgment. However, it is fair and right to say that, on the basis of what we have read in the newspapers, nobody could be in any way content with some of the allegations that have been made. They are very serious and my hon. Friend rightly makes the point that in effect that damages the reputation of all businesses, and that cannot be right either.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is clear from the woeful evidence given to our inquiry by Lord Grabiner, chairman of Arcadia, that effective corporate governance in BHS was almost entirely absent—something that
prompted the director general of the Institute of Directors to state in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and me on Friday that it “represents a blight on the reputation of British business,” adding that “if the Chairman of Arcadia is not properly looked at, it could set an appalling precedent for future sales of failing businesses.”

Has the Minister raised BHS with the Financial Reporting Council, which, six weeks after the business went into administration, has still not committed to investigating the matter? Will the Government consider altering the FRC’s remit to ensure that directors and their failings are brought under its jurisdiction?

Anna Soubry: I pay tribute to the great work that the hon. Gentleman and indeed his BIS Committee do. I know that he is already conducting—I think, successfully—an inquiry into the working practices of one business, and he has successfully acquired attendance at the Select Committee. He raises important points, and I will write to him on the specific questions he raises, because I will need to make further inquiries about them. I reiterate that we must await the outcome of full investigations, so that we know all the facts, but he can be absolutely sure that we take these matters extremely seriously and that we will not have the good name of British businesses besmirched by the wrongdoing of others.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): While managers and owners can and should be concerned about, and indeed be answerable for, solvency, viability, governance and employee wellbeing in their own companies, does the Minister agree that there are serious legal complexities involved in dictating that owners must assess the viability and character of purchasers or be responsible for purchasers’ business conduct post-sale?

Anna Soubry: I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s well-informed contribution, as his contributions always are. He makes some very good points. I am sorry to bang on about this, but it is very important to say that investigations have, quite properly, been started, will continue and will reach conclusions and that if there are any allegations of wrongdoing, we will be absolutely firm in our view that justice will be done.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): BHS was an anchor store in the Prince Bishops shopping centre in my constituency, and the staff who work there are really concerned about their future and that of their pensions. There are wider issues, too, about the impact of closure on our high street. Can the Minister tell us what she is going to do to address my constituents’ concerns and to call to account previous owners and directors for any part they have played in the downfall of BHS?

Anna Soubry: Let me make it clear to the hon. Lady that I would be more than happy to meet her. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who has responsibility for the high street and the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) are in their places, for which I am grateful. I think that shows the level of absolute determination we have to make sure that all those affected by this closure are found alternative work. I reiterate that a full investigation is going on and we expect it to be conducted properly. If there is a need to take further action, that will happen.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): While the investigators must be allowed to get on with their work, does my right hon. Friend agree that wider lessons might need to be drawn on the corporate governance of large private companies, both in respect of how decisions are made and the degree of transparency that applies? The Cadbury code looked into listed companies; perhaps large private companies should look to their own governance arrangements and the degree of transparency around them.

Anna Soubry: I completely agree. If the reports are right, this is obviously very deeply concerning, and many lessons might well have to be learned. We await the conclusions of these various inquiries before deciding what further action needs to be taken. We will not hesitate to do that.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement, and use my response to it to express the anger on both sides of the House at the threat to 11,000 jobs and 20,000 pensions. When the Minister goes back to her Department, will she consider blowing a whistle on the break-up of this great empire? Is she satisfied that the company that could be sold for a quid should now be broken up because somebody could not meet a timetable for £100 million-worth of working capital? Is she satisfied that the firm entrusted with dealing with the break-up will actually behave in the best interests of the whole network rather than perhaps sell off some assets rather cheaply to known figures in this terribly sorry saga?

Anna Soubry: I have faith in the workings of the administrators. They are under strict duties and I expect them to comply with those duties. I know of no reason why they would not do so. I also pay tribute to the good work being done by the Insolvency Service. It takes these matters seriously, as do all Members on both sides of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions, and I have no difficulty with that. I am more than happy to write to him with any answers that I can provide to all the questions he raised.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome the Minister’s statement on BHS, but it is not only BHS that has a problem. Companies in the supply chain could also have problems, including Courtaulds in my constituency, which has just been put into administration. There are companies that want to buy that business but cannot do so because it is a shed and the things inside have gone elsewhere. They have not gone elsewhere physically, but they have been put into another company. I would like to commend the Minister’s Department and the Department for Work and Pensions for their rapid reaction on the day BHS told people that they...
were to be made redundant, but will the Minister investigate
what is happening at Courtaulds, because I think that
there could be some wrongdoing there?

Anna Soubry: Courtaulds is very much part of that
supply chain and, as I mentioned in my statement, this
is not just about the workers at BHS. Of course, it is a
dreadful moment for those individuals and their families
when they lose their job, but there is also huge concern
right the way through the supply chain. As an east
midlands MP, I am of course familiar with Courtaulds.
It is a great company, and, like my hon. Friend, I am
concerned about its demise. I take this matter very
seriously. I do not know whether someone in my
Department has already offered to meet her to discuss
these matters, but I am more than happy to meet her to
ensure that the best is now done by Courtaulds.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): We must
never forget that pensions are deferred wages for people
who have worked hard all their lives. The Pension
Protection Fund was set up under a Labour Government,
and it plays a vital role in protecting workers and
pensioners when an employer goes out of business. Will
the Minister join me in sending a clear message from
this House that the pensions regulator has our full
support in being as robust as possible on this matter?
We must also look to the proposed pensions Bill to
close any loopholes and deal with any scapegoats that
exist as a result of the current regulations. We need to
make those regulations much firmer so that people can
no longer get away with any wrongdoing when it comes
to wages.

Anna Soubry: The hon. Lady makes a good point.
When people reach retirement, they look forward to
receiving the pension they have paid into. They have put
their money into their pension on trust, and they expect
a certain benefit to come back to them when they retire
because they have already paid into it. We all know that
there are a lot of problems with a lot of our big pension
schemes, but it is imperative that all employers do the
right thing by those schemes. I absolutely pay tribute to
the Labour Government for setting up the Pension
Protection Fund. We are not content, in that it cannot
always deliver what people would have had if their
schemes had been successful, but it is nevertheless an
extremely good lifeboat when pension schemes
unfortunately fail. As I have said, an investigation is
taking place and there are no doubt lessons to be
learned.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I welcome the
ongoing investigations, and I trust that regular updates
will be given to the House and to the employees as
appropriate. I am also pleased to hear that further
action is being taken for our high streets, and I would
encourage the Minister to focus not only on retail but
on commercial, leisure and residential activities to bring
new life back to the high street in a more balanced way,
given the current trends in online trading.

Anna Soubry: I could not agree with my hon. Friend
more, and the high street Minister, my hon. Friend the
Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), is nodding furiously
in agreement as well. The high street needs to diversify,
and I urge all hon. Members to look at the great report
written by Bill Grimsey. It was commissioned by the
Labour party, and it provides an outstanding forward
look into the future of the high street. It is packed full
of ideas, some of which are controversial, and it is full
of good, sound advice that many a high street and town
centre should put into action.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Kilmarnock
in my constituency has one of the 16 BHS stores in Scotland. My hon.
Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) referred
to the concerns for the workers and for the potential void
in our high streets that will need to be filled. In her
statement, the Minister said that Jobcentre Plus would
help to identify and fill skills gaps and vacancies. However,
local my jobcentre and the Department for Work and
Pensions have confirmed that jobcentres do not monitor
long-term vacancies as a matter of course and would
therefore not identify any skills gaps relating to those
vacancies. Does she not agree that such monitoring
should be a routine measure, in that it would help to
create opportunities and fill the gaps?

Anna Soubry: This is the sort of conversation that I
should have with the hon. Gentleman, because this
subject is not within my field expertise or ministerial
brief—I will be quite frank about that—but if he is
right, that is obviously of concern. I am more than
happy to speak to him about the matter, but he is quite
right to identify that the main thing for consideration
today should be all those who find themselves without a
job.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): It is becoming
increasingly clear that Philip Green, aided by weak
directors such as Lord Grabiner, washed his hands of
the business because it was doomed and had a doomed
pension scheme. There is a long-established principle in
English law that a seller should not have to vouch for
their successor—caveat emptor—but is it not time that
the Minister, perhaps aided by the inquiries of this
House and others, revisited that in instances where a
seller recklessly or knowingly sells their stake in a
business to somebody who is completely unsuited and
unable to meet creditors’ demands?

Anna Soubry: I really do thank my hon. Friend for
that important and incredibly profound point. We are
holding an investigation, and there will no doubt be
many questions at its conclusion and there may well be
some sort of action. He raises an incredibly important
point that will undoubtedly be considered seriously by
this House and by the Government at the end of the
investigations.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): It would have been
useful to have heard from the Minister how long the
investigations will take to conclude, because people will
be worried about their jobs and pensions in the meantime.
Referring back to the question of my right hon.
Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), when did
the Minister last meet the administrators? What discussions
has she had with them about what stores could be saved
as going businesses? For example, at the weekend I was
talking to an employee of the BHS store in my constituency,
who believed that the store was doing well, so there are
clearly businesses within the business that were faring
well. What discussions is the Minister having about keeping jobs rather than losing them and getting Jobcentre Plus to help?

Anna Soubry: I can completely answer the hon. Gentleman’s question face on: I have not had any discussions with the administrators, but I do not believe that that would be the norm. I have confidence in them, and I have confidence in the Insolvency Service, which does have regular contact with my Department. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to make further inquiries, I have no difficulty with that and am more than happy to do so, especially in relation to jobs for BHS workers in his constituency and in anybody else’s.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): Just as it is right that the circumstances that brought BHS to this point, which have been raised extensively today, are properly looked into, it is also important that everything possible is being done to help those employees affected by this devastating news. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that Jobcentre Plus’s rapid response service will receive all the support it needs from her and Government to do everything it can for the affected employees?

Anna Soubry: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), for attending today, because he is the relevant Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions. He has heard all that has been said. I have been assured about all the support that is available through the rapid response service. If there are any difficulties, we will take them seriously. We are going to do everything that we can to rectify any of that. It is important that people are given good support so that we can get them back into work.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Insolvency Service inquiries have always been restricted, but the Minister told the House on 25 April that the inquiry would be open and transparent. What did she mean by that? What are the Government doing differently with this inquiry to ensure that information is as open and transparent as possible, especially for affected staff and customers across the country, including at the Surrey Quays shopping centre in my constituency?

Anna Soubry: As I said, the Government have looked at the widespread reports about the goings-on that led to this unfortunate situation. We take those allegations extremely seriously, which is why we have said to the relevant organisations that there must be a full inquiry. We expect the inquiries to be concluded as quickly as possible, but they must be thorough. After that, we will take any action necessary to ensure that if there has been wrongdoing, people are brought to justice.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The staff at Jobcentre Plus provide a fantastic service in getting people who have lost their jobs back into employment. What can the Jobcentre Plus rapid response service do for BHS staff? Does the Minister agree that the retail sector, in which we hope these people can be found alternative jobs, will be far healthier over the next five years as a result of the business rates cut announced in the Budget?

Anna Soubry: I do not really want to go back through my statement, but I did identify in some detail the assistance that people are given, be it help with CV writing, or making sure they have access to training and reskilling. The Department for Work and Pensions—this is a good and admirable idea—is contacting other retailers to see what jobs might be available locally for people, so that they can, in effect, transfer over and apply for those jobs. And, yes, I do believe that our cuts to business rates for small businesses was an outstanding achievement of the Chancellor in the last Budget, and I am confident that as a result real assistance will be given to small businesses, notably those on the high street.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The first concern of everyone in this House are the people who have lost jobs and pensions, and there are many questions to which they and we still want to hear answers. Looking forward, however, will the Minister assure the House that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will look at the lessons from this and the failure of Austin Reed? Will she consider launching a retail strategy, working with business, so that we do not end up with high streets that are all just payday lenders and betting shops?

Anna Soubry: We started a great deal of work, as the last Government, on looking at the future of the high street, going to Mary Portas and others for ideas on how we could assist. That has mainly been done through not only BIS, but, notably, the Department for Communities and Local Government. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, local government can play a hugely important part in ensuring that high streets develop in the right way, thrive and grow, which is one reason why we changed the planning laws. Often this relies on local people thinking outside the box and being radical in how they think about the future of their high street. I think there was another question, but I cannot remember it, because there were quite a few. In any event, the usual rules will apply: I will write to him if there is anything I have forgotten.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Given that 11,000 direct jobs and many other indirect, supply chain jobs are at risk, I find it very difficult to understand why the Minister has not had a meeting with the administrator. Given that the Denton store, in my constituency, and the Stockport store, which also covers part of my constituency, tell me that they are profitable parts of the BHS business, the Minister has to have a discussion with the administrator about what parts of that business can be saved, in another guise or as part of BHS reinvented. The fact that she has not had any time to meet the administrator is shocking and a travesty, given those 11,000 jobs.

Anna Soubry: Just when I think it is going so well, the hon. Gentleman always disappoints. I did not say that I did not have the time—

Andrew Gwynne: Eleven thousand jobs—
Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman wants to talk about the 11,000 people, so let us do that and not score party political points. Of course we came to the situation where the administrators could not find a buyer only in the past few days. So we do not have government interfering in that process, but now we are where we are—[Interruption.] He shouts from a sedentary position, “Ditch them.”

Andrew Gwynne: Meet them!

Anna Soubry: Meet them. Well, I have just said to one of the hon. Gentleman’s comrades that I do not have a problem in contacting the administrators if that has and will have any benefit at all. But we must get a sense of proportion here: this unfortunate news has only just been announced.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): This really is not good enough. It is not good enough that the Minister has not met the administrators to talk about the people who are affected. It is not good enough that 11,000 people face redundancy and an uncertain pension while the millionaires cream tens of millions of pounds off the top to pay for brand-new yachts. The people in my constituency, where the store is likely to close, will not see justice in their view until somebody is in the dock, facing trial. Does the Minister agree with me that Sir Philip is not fit to lick the boots of those people, let alone be a knight of this realm? Will she support me in having that revoked?

Anna Soubry: There are a number of points there. Let me make it absolutely clear: the Government are not legally entitled to intervene and direct the administrator. The administrator has to act absolutely independently. We have already—quite unusually—announced a number of investigations into these matters. We will wait to see the outcome of the investigations rather than rush to judgment. As I have said repeatedly, if there is further action to be taken, we will not hesitate to take it.

Points of Order

4.55 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There are now some 30 hon. Members being investigated by 18 different police forces across England in relation to the very serious allegation that the Representation of the People Act 1983 may have been contravened in the declaration of candidate expenditure. Can you make a ruling on what may or may not be raised in this House in reference to those allegations, given the deep concern among the public and the fact that any successful prosecution may result in serious consequences for the hon. Member involved, and even call into question last year’s general election result?

Mr Speaker: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman, to whom I am grateful, is as follows. First, the matter is not sub judice—he was not suggesting that it is, but I understand that it is not. Secondly, however, I think it prudent and wise to leave the investigating authorities to conduct their investigations, and not to seek to do so ourselves in this Chamber with an imagined expertise and authority. Last, when the hon. Gentleman seeks my wider guidance, I think it best to avoid the hypothetical and to deal with these matters as and when—but only as and when—they arise. We will leave it there.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: On a different and unrelated matter, I am sure. The hon. Gentleman is nodding solemnly and sagely.

Greg Mulholland: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice for the second time in a matter of months. A ministerial visit has been organised to the excellent Makkah mosque in Headingley in my constituency. On this occasion, I had to drag it out of the office of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the visit was for. I was delighted he was doing it, but can you make it clear to Ministers that, while we welcome their visits, they should have the courtesy to tell us where they are going and what they are doing?

Mr Speaker: First, I think it best that Ministers who are going to visit colleagues’ constituencies are explicit and candid about these matters, subject only to security considerations. It is much better to tell colleagues what the visit is about than to deprive them of that information. Secondly, I must say that I have always found the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who visited my own constituency recently, the very embodiment of courtesy.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): To you.

Mr Speaker: That has been my experience of the Secretary of State—an extremely courteous individual. The right hon. and learned Lady says, “To you,” but generally I find the Secretary of State is courteous to most people. If there has been a lapse in this case, I regret that.
Thirdly, I just say that is not worth the hassle with the hon. Gentleman, who is a very persistent terrier. My advice to anybody who is going to wander into his constituency on anything that might be considered to be official business is: tell the bloke in advance.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It relates to the non-disclosure of Government-held information to the House. During the response to the urgent question on the deportation of foreign and EU prisoners, at 5 minutes past 4 this afternoon my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) asked the Home Secretary if she would tell the House how many EU prisoners had been transferred compulsorily from this country to their EU country of origin under the terms of the EU prisoner transfer agreement, which the Home Secretary prayed in aid in her response to the urgent question. The Home Secretary said in answer to him that she did not have that information readily available. I repeated the question 10 minutes later, at quarter past 4. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), was on the Front Bench, there were seven officials in the box, and there were other Home Office Ministers on the Front Bench. I find it inconceivable that the Home Secretary was not apprised of that information, and withheld it from the House. What can be done, Sir, to make sure that that information is released to the House before it rises later today?

Mr Speaker: I did not quite hear the tail end of the hon. Gentleman’s question, but I am sure that he would not suggest that a Minister would deliberately refuse to give information that she had at the time. As for exactly what was known by the Minister, or what was available to Minister, or what was proffered to the Minister, I do not know. If a Minister has not given a correct answer it is incumbent on them to correct it as quickly as possible. If the hon. Gentleman is dissatisfied, as he clearly is, he has the resources of the Table Office open to him to table a question, including a question for a named day. If he is dissatisfied with the answer to that named day question, or does not receive a substantive answer, there is an arsenal of parliamentary weapons available to him, especially if he judges the matter to be urgent. I will leave the hon. Gentleman, who is a wily and experienced parliamentarian, to his own devices.

Investigatory Powers Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

5.1 pm

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): I beg to move,

That the Order of 15 March 2016 (Investigatory Powers Bill (Programme)) in the last session of Parliament be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (5) and (6) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall be taken on the days and in the order shown in the first column of the following Table.

(3) The proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Proceedings</th>
<th>Time for conclusion of proceedings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 1; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 8</td>
<td>Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 2; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 5; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Chapter 1 of Part 9</td>
<td>Six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Proceedings</th>
<th>Time for conclusion of proceedings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 6; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 7</td>
<td>Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on Consideration on the second day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Part 3; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to, and amendments to, Chapter 2 of Part 9; remaining proceedings on Consideration</td>
<td>One hour before the moment of interruption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) Any proceedings in Legislative Grand Committee and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the second day.

I am immensely grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to move the programme motion. I do not want to delay the House unduly, because there are many significant matters to debate in this important legislation. It has been the Government’s habit, in respect of the Bill, to engage in the most careful—

Hon. Members: Formally!
Mr Hayes: I have already excited my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and I hope that I will continue to do so.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure whether “excited” is correct; I think “irritated” might be, but in my experience the right hon. Gentleman has never let that put him off in the past.

Mr Hayes: And will certainly not do so in the next two days, Mr Speaker.

The programme motion is relatively straightforward, because, as I was about to say, it is the Government’s habit, in respect of the Bill, to both listen and learn. Over the next two days, I hope to be able to show that we have done both. Scrutiny has been considerable, and the draft Bill that preceded the Bill that we are considering on Report was scrutinised closely by three parliamentary Committees, including a special Joint Committee, chaired and supported by Members of the Lords and the Commons, who gave the measure considerable attention. The Joint Committee produced a report with numerous recommendations, and members of the Public Bill Committee engaged in debate on those recommendations. There has therefore been a thorough process, and that will continue over the next two days.

Question put and agreed to.

Investigatory Powers Bill

[1ST ALLOCATED DAY]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 5

GENERAL DUTIES IN RELATION TO PRIVACY

“(1) Subsection (2) applies where a public authority is deciding whether—
(a) to issue, renew or cancel a warrant under Part 2, 5, 6 or 7,
(b) to modify such a warrant,
(c) to approve a decision to issue, renew or modify such a warrant,
(d) to grant, approve or cancel an authorisation under Part 3,
(e) to give a notice in pursuance of such an authorisation or under Part 4 or section 216, 217 or 220,
(f) to vary or revoke such a notice,
(g) to approve a decision to give a notice under section 216 or 217, or
(h) to apply for or otherwise seek any issue, grant, giving, modification, variation or renewal of a kind falling within paragraph (a), (b), (d), (e) or (f).

(2) The public authority must have regard to—
(a) whether what is sought to be achieved by the warrant, authorisation or notice could reasonably be achieved by other less intrusive means,
(b) the public interest in the integrity and security of telecommunication systems and postal services, and
(c) any other aspects of the public interest in the protection of privacy.

(3) The duties under subsection (2)—
(a) apply so far as they are relevant in the particular context, and
(b) are subject to the need to have regard to other considerations that are also relevant in that context.

(4) The other considerations may, in particular, include—
(a) the interests of national security or of the economic well-being of the United Kingdom,
(b) the public interest in preventing or detecting serious crime,
(c) other considerations which are relevant to—
(i) whether the conduct authorised or required by the warrant, authorisation or notice is proportionate, or
(ii) whether it is necessary to act for a purpose provided for by this Act,
(d) the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998, and
(e) other requirements of public law.

(5) In this section “public authority” includes the relevant judicial authority (within the meaning of section 66) where the relevant judicial authority is deciding whether to approve under that section an authorisation under Part 3.”

This new clause imposes certain duties in relation to privacy.

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.4 pm

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:
Government new clause 6—Civil liability for certain unlawful interceptions.

New clause 4—Offence of unlawful use of investigatory powers—

“(1) A relevant person is guilty of an offence if—
(a) by way of conduct described in this Act, he knowingly or recklessly obtains the communications, communications data, secondary data, equipment data or personal information of an individual, and
(b) the person does not have lawful authority to make use of the investigatory power concerned.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to a relevant person who shows that the person acted in the reasonable belief that the person had lawful authority to obtain the information referred to in subsection (1)(a).

(3) In this section “relevant person” means a person who holds an office, rank or position with a relevant public authority (within the meaning of Part 3).

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—
(a) on summary conviction in England and Wales—
(i) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months (or 6 months, if the offence was committed before the commencement of section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003), or
(ii) to a fine, or to both;
(b) on summary conviction in Scotland—
(i) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or
(ii) to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
(c) on summary conviction in Northern Ireland—
(i) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or
(ii) to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
(d) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years or to a fine, or to both.


On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to place privacy at the forefront of the legislation.

Government amendments 26 to 34.

New clause 21—General duties in relation to privacy—

“(1) Subsection (2) applies where a public authority is deciding whether—
(a) to issue, renew or cancel a warrant under Part 2, 5, 6 or 7,
(b) to modify such a warrant,
(c) to approve a decision to issue, renew or modify such a warrant,
(d) to grant, approve or cancel an authorisation under Part 3,
(e) to give a notice in pursuance of such an authorisation or under Part 4 or section 216, 217 or 220,
(f) to vary or revoke such a notice,
(g) to approve a decision to give a notice under section 216 or 217, or
(h) to apply for or otherwise seek any issue, grant, giving, modification, variation or renewal of a kind falling within paragraph (a), (b), (d), (e) or (f).

(2) The public authority must give effect to—
(a) the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998, and
(b) other requirements of public law.

(3) The public authority must also have regard to—
(a) whether what is sought to be achieved by the warrant, authorisation or notice could reasonably be achieved by other less intrusive means,
(b) the public interest in the integrity and security of telecommunication systems and postal services, and
(c) any other aspects of the public interest in the protection of privacy.

(4) The duties under subsection (3)—
(a) apply so far as they are relevant in the particular context, and
(b) are subject to the need to have regard to other considerations that are also relevant in that context.

(5) The other considerations may, in particular, include—
(a) the interests of national security or of the economic well-being of the United Kingdom,
(b) the public interest in preventing or detecting serious crime,
(c) other considerations which are relevant to—
(i) whether the conduct authorised or required by the warrant, authorisation or notice is proportionate, or
(ii) whether it is necessary to act for a purpose provided for by this Act.

(6) In this section “public authority” includes the relevant judicial authority (within the meaning of section 66) where the relevant judicial authority is deciding whether to approve under that section an authorisation under Part 3.”

This new clause sets out general duties in relation to privacy.

Amendment 14, in clause 1, page 1, line 4, at end insert—

“( ) This Act sets out the extent to which certain investigatory powers may be used to interfere with an individual’s privacy.”

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to place privacy at the forefront of the legislation.

New clause 1—Notification by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner—

“(1) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner is to notify the subject or subjects of investigatory powers relating to the statutory functions identified in section 196, subsections (1), (2) and (3), including—
(a) the interception or examination of communications,
(b) the retention, accessing or examination of communications data or secondary data,
(c) equipment interference,
(d) access or examination of data retrieved from a bulk personal dataset,
(e) covert human intelligence sources,
(f) entry or interference with property.

(2) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must only notify subjects of investigatory powers under subsection (1) upon completion of the relevant conduct or the cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(3) The notification under subsection (1) must be sent by writing within thirty days of the completion of the relevant conduct or cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(4) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must issue the notification under subsection (1) in writing, including details of—
(a) the conduct that has taken place, and
(b) the provisions under which the conduct has taken place, and
(c) any known errors that took place within the course of the conduct.
(5) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner may postpone the notification under subsection (1) beyond the time limit under subsection (3) if the Commissioner assesses that notification may defeat the purposes of an on-going serious crime or national security operation or investigation.

(6) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must consult with the person to whom the warrant is addressed in order to fulfil an assessment under subsection (5).

New clause 2—Referrals by the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament—

“(1) Subsection (2) applies if the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament refers a matter to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner.

(2) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must inform the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament of the outcome of any investigation, inspection or audit arising from such a referral.

To allow the Intelligence and Security Committee to refer matters, on behalf of Parliament, to the Commissioner and to provide a mechanism for the Committee to be informed of the outcome.

New clause 16—Investigatory Powers Commissioner: obligation to notify—

“(1) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner is to notify the subject or subjects of investigatory powers relating to the statutory functions identified in section 196, subsections (1), (2) and (3), including—

(a) the interception or examination of communications,
(b) the retention, accessing or examination of communications data or secondary data,
(c) equipment interference,
(d) access or examination of data retrieved from a bulk personal dataset.

(2) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must only notify subjects of investigatory powers under subsection (1) upon completion of the relevant conduct or the cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(3) The notification under subsection (1) must be sent by writing within ninety days of the completion of the relevant conduct or cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(4) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must issue the notification under subsection (1) in writing, including details of the provisions under which the conduct has taken place.

(5) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner may postpone the notification under subsection (1) beyond the time limit under subsection (3) if the Commissioner assesses that notification may defeat the purposes of the on-going serious crime or national security operation or investigation.

(6) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must consult with the person to whom the warrant is addressed in order to fulfil an assessment under subsection (5)."

This new Clause would ensure that individuals are informed after the event that they have been a subject of investigatory powers.

Amendment 465, in clause 194, page 149, line 7, at end insert—

“( ) There shall be a body corporate known as the Investigatory Powers Commission.

( ) The Investigatory Powers Commission shall have such powers and duties as shall be specified in this Act.”

See amendment 469.

Amendment 466, page 149, line 12, at end insert—

“(1A) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must appoint—

(a) the Chief Inspector, and
(b) such number of Inspectors as the Investigatory Powers Commissioner considers necessary for the carrying out of the functions of the Investigatory Powers Commission.

(1B) In appointing Investigators the Investigatory Powers Commissioner shall—

(a) appoint an individual only if the Investigatory Powers Commissioner thinks that the individual—

(i) has experience or knowledge relating to a relevant matter, and
(ii) is suitable for appointment,

(b) have regard to the desirability of the Investigators together having experience and knowledge relating to the relevant matters.

(1C) For the purposes of subsection (2)(a) the relevant matters are those matters in respect of which the Investigatory Powers Commission has functions including, in particular—

(a) national security;
(b) the prevention and detection of serious crime;
(c) the protection of privacy and the integrity of personal data;
(d) the security and integrity of computer systems and networks;
(e) the law, in particular, as it relates to the matters in subsections (1)(a) and (b);
(f) human rights as defined in Section 9(2) of the Equality Act 2006.”

See amendment 469.

Amendment 295, page 149, line 19, leave out paragraph (a).

A paving amendment for the proposed requirement on the Prime Minister to act on the recommendation of the relevant chief justice when appointing Judicial Commissioners.

Amendment 296, page 149, line 20, leave out paragraph (b).

A paving amendment for the proposed requirement on the Prime Minister to act on the recommendation of the relevant chief justice when appointing Judicial Commissioners.

Amendment 297, page 149, line 21, leave out paragraph (c).

A paving amendment for the proposed requirement on the Prime Minister to act on the recommendation of the relevant chief justice when appointing Judicial Commissioners.

Amendment 7, page 149, line 23, at end insert—

“(3A) The term of office of a person appointed under subsection (1)(a) as Investigatory Powers Commissioner must not begin before the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament has consented to the proposed appointee.”

This amendment would require the appointment of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to be agreed by the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament.

Amendment 298, page 149, line 28, at end insert—

“(5A) When appointing any person under subsection (1), the Prime Minister must act on the recommendation of—

(a) the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, in relation to Judicial Commissioners appointed from England and Wales,
(b) the Lord President of the Court of Session, in relation to Judicial Commissioners appointed from Scotland, and
(c) the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, in relation to Judicial Commissioners appointed from Northern Ireland.”

An amendment to require the Prime Minister to act on the recommendation of the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, the Lord President of the Court of Session, or the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, when appointing Judicial Commissioners.

Amendment 146, page 149, line 35, at end insert—

“(7A) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner shall ensure that all judicial authorisation functions under this Act are carried out by different Commissioners from those who carry out the
audit and inspection functions set out in this Part."

This amendment requires the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to ensure the separation of the judicial authorisation function from the ex post audit and inspection function.

Amendment 467, page 149, line 35, at end insert—

“(7A) The Prime Minister may make an appointment under subsection (1) only following a recommendation by—

(a) The Judicial Appointments Commission;
(b) The Judicial Appointments Board of Scotland; or
(c) The Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.”

See amendment 469.

Amendment 468, page 149, line 35, at end insert—

“(7A) The Chief Inspector is an Inspector and the Chief Inspector and the other Inspector are to be known, collectively, as the Inspectors.”

See amendment 469.

Amendment 469, page 150, line 2, at end insert—

“(c) to the Investigatory Powers Commission are to be read as appropriate to refer to the body corporate, the Investigatory Powers Commission, and in so far as it will refer to the conduct of powers, duties and functions, those shall be conducted by either the Judicial Commissioners or the Inspectors as determined by this Act or by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, consistent with the provisions of this Act.”

The purpose of these amendments is to replace the proposal to create an Investigatory Powers Commissioner with provisions to create a new Investigatory Powers Commission. They would provide that no appointment can be made except pursuant to a recommendation by the independent bodies in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland tasked with making judicial appointments in those jurisdictions.

Government amendment 35.

Amendment 8, in clause 196, page 152, line 9, at end insert—

“(4A) In keeping matters under review in accordance with this section, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner must, in particular, keep under review the operation of safeguards to protect privacy.”

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to make explicit that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner is required to scrutinise the underlying safeguards, procedures and processes relating to bulk powers, including the arrangements for the protection of, and control of access to, material obtained through their use.

Amendment 18, in clause 197, page 153, line 8, after “Commissioner”, insert

“or the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament.”

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to allow the Prime Minister to issue directions at the request of the ISC (in addition to the Commissioner).

Amendment 189, in clause 198, page 153, line 21, leave out

“if the Commissioner considers that—”. See amendment 195.

Amendment 472, page 153, line 21, leave out from “aware” to end of line 24.

See amendment 477.

Amendment 190, page 153, leave out line 23.

See amendment 195.

Amendment 191, page 153, leave out line 24.

See amendment 195.

Amendment 473, page 153, line 25, leave out subsections (2) to (5) and insert—

“(2) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner may decide not to inform a person of an error in exceptional circumstances.

(1) Exceptional circumstances under subsection (1) will arise if the public interest in disclosure is outweighed by a significant prejudice to—

(a) national security, or
(b) the prevention and detection of serious crime.”

See amendment 477.

Amendment 192, page 153, line 25, leave out subsection (2).

See amendment 195.

Amendment 193, page 153, line 29, leave out subsection (3).

See amendment 195.

Amendment 194, page 153, line 32, leave out subsection (4).

See amendment 195.

Amendment 195, page 154, line 6, leave out from “having” to end of line 9.

These amendments will remove excessive restrictions on the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to instruct and inform individuals who have been subject to surveillance and will ensure that they are always notified of that fact when unlawful errors occur.

Amendment 2, page 154, line 10, leave out subsection (7).

Amendment 476, page 154, line 16, leave out paragraph (b).

See amendment 477.

Amendment 477, page 154, line 23, leave out paragraph (b).

These amendments would amend the Bill to provide for the Commissioner to notify any relevant person of any error made pursuant to the activities in the Bill, in order to allow those individuals to consider whether a claim may lie to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal for redress. It makes provision for non-disclosure in circumstances where the public interest in disclosure would be outweighed by a significant risk of prejudice to national security or the prevention and detection of crime.


See amendment 481.

Amendment 478, page 154, line 34, at end insert—

“(1A) A Judicial Commissioner may refer to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal any matter the Commissioner considers may have involved the unlawful use of investigatory powers.”

See amendment 481.

Amendment 480, page 154, line 35, leave out “Judicial Commissioner” and insert “Investigatory Powers Commission”.

See amendment 481.

Amendment 481, page 154, line 38, leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

“(3) In any circumstances where the Commission has identified a relevant error pursuant to section 198, the Commission must give such documents, information or other material as may be relevant to the investigation of the error to the Tribunal.”
(4) The duty in subsection (3) shall be exercised without request from the Tribunal.

These amendments would remove the requirement to consult the Secretary of State and would make clear that in circumstances where a relevant error has been identified, material should be provided to the Tribunal by the Commission. It would make clear that any potentially unlawful use of the powers in this Act may be referred to the Tribunal by the Commissioners. These amendments would remove the requirement to consult the Secretary of State before giving assistance direct to other public authorities.

Amendment 482, in clause 203, page 159, line 2, at end insert—

“(1A) A disclosure pursuant to subsection (1) will not constitute a criminal offence for any purposes in this Act or in any other enactment.

(1B) In subsection (1), a disclosure for the purposes of any function of the Commissioner may be made at the initiative of the person making the disclosure and without need for request by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner.”

This amendment would make it clear that voluntary, unsolicited disclosures are protected, and that any whistle-blower is also protected from criminal prosecution.

Amendment 483, in clause 208, page 160, line 29, after “determination” insert—

“or ruling or decision, including relating to a procedural matter.”

See amendment 486.

Amendment 484, page 160, line 29, leave out from “Tribunal” to the end of line 30.

See amendment 486.

Amendment 485, page 161, line 8, leave out subsection (6).

See amendment 486.

Amendment 486, page 162, line 38, at end insert—


(1A) Any hearing conducted by the Tribunal must be conducted in public, except where a special proceeding is justified in the public interest.

(1B) Any determination by the Tribunal must be made public, except where a special proceeding may be justified in the public interest.

(1C) A special proceeding will be in the public interest only where there is no alternative means to protect sensitive material from disclosure.

(1D) Material will be sensitive material for the purposes of this Section if its disclosure would seriously prejudice (a) national security or (b) the prevention and detection of crime.

(1E) Publication for the purposes of this Section will be seriously prejudicial if it would lead to a significant threat to life or a serious physical injury to a person.

(1F) The Tribunal shall appoint a person to represent the interests of a party in any special proceedings from which the party (and any legal representative of the party) is excluded.

(1G) Such a person will be known as a Special Advocate.”

These amendments make clear that all decisions, determinations and rulings can be appealed on a point of law.

Amendment 487, page 162, line 38, at end insert—

“(6) After Section 4(5)(f) of the Human Rights Act 1998 insert—

“(g) the Investigatory Powers Tribunal.”

This amendment makes clear that all decisions, determinations and rulings can be appealed on a point of law.

Government amendments 36 to 43 and 48.

Mr Speaker: The Minister now has a second opportunity to practise his oratory.
and proportionate. The core principle—the necessity of proportionality—therefore applies to all such powers. It is underpinned by the changes that we seek to make in the Bill.

In essence, the provisions reflect the collective consideration of the three independent reviews I mentioned briefly in our short consideration of the programme motion. The Intelligence and Security Committee’s report on the draft Bill, which was published last year, called for the inclusion of an overarching clause dealing with privacy protections, and that call was echoed by the Opposition and the Scottish National party during the Committee stage.

The Government have been clear throughout the passage of the Bill that they would listen to recommendations that would improve this important proposed legislation, and that is just what we have done. We have tabled a number of amendments that demonstrate exactly that willingness to listen and that desire to strike the right balance.

Government amendment 34 relates to clause 10, an important safeguard in the Bill that prevents numerous powers in other legislation from being used to acquire communications data. There are a small number of exceptions to that restriction, and the purpose of the amendment is to ensure that they are clearly limited. The amendment therefore makes it absolutely clear that the use of regulatory powers to acquire communications data is limited to those that are exercisable in connection with telecommunications or postal regulation.

Government amendment 35 extends the oversight provided by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to all efforts made by prison governors to prevent the use of illegal mobile phones in custodial institutions. That is something that the Interception of Communications Commissioner has previously called for, so I am pleased to be able to amend the Bill to take account of his advice. The amendment will also ensure that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner has oversight of any interference with electronic communications.

That issue was raised in Committee by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and I said that we would give it further consideration. We have done so and come to the conclusion that her argument is right. Although this tort would apply only to very limited circumstances—indeed, we believe that it has never been used—I accept that in such cases a person should have the power to seek appropriate redress through the civil courts.

Probably the most important amendment tabled by the Government is new clause 5—the privacy clause to which I referred at the outset. It puts privacy at the heart of the Bill in precisely the overarching way that those who scrutinised it prior to and during Committee recommended. It responds, therefore, both to the recommendations of the Intelligence and Security Committee and to the extensive debates held since then. As we have indicated, the protection of privacy is woven throughout the Bill, but we recognise the merit in setting it out at the very start.

I do not want to indulge in hyperbole, but consideration of the Bill has been characterised by an unusual degree of co-operation to get it right across the House. All legislation benefits from that kind of considered scrutiny and co-operation. Legislation that is in the national interest, as this Bill certainly is, is far better for that kind of approach, and that is exactly the approach that the Government have adopted.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being ever so slightly modest in relation to new clause 5, which is aimed primarily at protecting personal privacy. Clearly he has been listening, since one of the concerns expressed by industry is that interference and hacking may cause a failure of business confidence in IT. Subsection (2)(b) will go some way to protect the interests of such companies and businesses, since it states explicitly that the public authority must have regard to the public interest in such matters, including the viability of those undertakings.

Mr Hayes: It is true that such concerns have been expressed. Indeed, as we debate the Bill in further detail, particularly with regard to internet communication records, we will see that the capability of organisations to meet the Bill’s requirements must be met in a way that is not excessively expensive or impossible to implement, and that does not have the sort of unintended consequences described by my hon. Friend. It is partly the response to those overtures that has stimulated the changes under discussion. So it was, as he said, partly about what the Opposition said in Committee, partly about what the three reports said in respect of privacy and the consequences he described, and partly about the extensive discussions we have had with the sector on how these things could best be implemented.

5.15 pm

My hon. Friend is right that the effective implementation of these provisions is critical to their success. Had we paid less attention to that, he would have been the first to criticise us. He has been a diligent Member of this House for a very long time and he was a member of the Joint Committee that I mentioned, which looked at this Bill in some detail. If I understated the virtues of the new clause, as he suggested, perhaps that is a reflection of my style. As I said earlier, I wish to avoid hyperbole. I am grateful to him for drawing attention to the additional virtues of the new clause.

The new clause was inspired by the ISC, and it is based on the amendment that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) tabled in Committee. I hope that on that basis, the whole House will be able to support it. It makes it clear that warrants or other authorisations should not be granted where information could reasonably be obtained by less intrusive means. It requires that persons, including Secretaries of State and judicial commissioners, who exercise functions under the Bill have regard to the public interest in respect of privacy, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) has described. It makes it clear that criminal offences that apply to misuse of powers under the Bill are sufficient to put beyond doubt the fact that should anyone misuse the powers, severe penalties would apply. There can be no truck with that kind of deliberate wrongdoing.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I realise that the Bill is complex, but could I ask my right hon. Friend—not during today’s debate, but before our
consideration of the matter is concluded—to write to me setting out each of the penalties for each of the misconducts identified in the Bill? The point that I will make to him in due course is that it remains extremely complex to follow, and, in some cases, the penalties appear to be little more than a rap over the knuckles under the Data Protection Act.

Mr Hayes: My right hon. and learned Friend has made the point about incomprehensibility previously. Indeed, when we debated the draft version of the Bill, one of the telling points he made was that new legislation was needed in part because it should be more comprehensible, easier to navigate and thus more understandable to more people. He is right that the fact that existing provisions are to be found in a number of places makes it hard to determine exactly what powers there are and how the abuse of those powers will be dealt with. I happily concede the point that he has made, because it is important that all Members of this House, particularly he and the Committee that he chairs, are fully aware of the kinds of penalties that might apply. I have described them as "severe", and I have made the point that wrongdoing cannot be tolerated. Therefore, the least I can do is agree with him that it would be helpful to set out those penalties as he has described. We will do so before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament, because it is only right for us to do so.

The purpose of the amendments and new clauses that we have tabled is to reflect the consideration of the Committee chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend, and to reflect the character and content of the debate that took place when the Bill enjoyed scrutiny in Committee. As we considered privacy to an increasing degree, it became clear that as well as the implicit emphasis on private interest, which runs through the Bill, there was a need to deal with. I happily concede the point that he has made, because it is important that all Members of this House, particularly he and the Committee that he chairs, are fully aware of the kinds of penalties that might apply. I have described them as "severe", and I have made the point that wrongdoing cannot be tolerated. Therefore, the least I can do is agree with him that it would be helpful to set out those penalties as he has described. We will do so before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament, because it is only right for us to do so.

The purpose of the amendments and new clauses that we have tabled is to reflect the consideration of the Committee chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend, and to reflect the character and content of the debate that took place when the Bill enjoyed scrutiny in Committee. As we considered privacy to an increasing degree, it became clear that as well as the implicit emphasis on private interest, which runs through the Bill, there was a compelling case for an explicit commitment to privacy in the form of a new clause. To that end, it is right to say that both the minor parties on the Committee—in this case, the Scottish National party—

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) indicated dissent.

Mr Hayes: The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) shakes his head, but given that the SNP had only two Members on the Committee, I cannot describe it as the major contributor. Before he started shaking his head, I was about to say that the SNP made an incredibly helpful contribution, because it tested the Government, held us to account and made a number of useful and thought-through proposals. The Opposition—by the way, I say to the hon. Gentleman that they are Her Majesty's Opposition—equally added immense value to our consideration by making the proposal for this new clause, among others. In my judgment, it was absolutely clear that the Opposition were determined to improve the legislation, rather than to weaken or dilute it. In that spirit, I am happy to propose the Government new clauses and amendments in this group.

To allow as many colleagues as possible to contribute to this important debate, I will now finish, except to say this: when Bills come before the House and are considered on Second Reading and debated in Committee and on Report, different circumstances apply and different shadow Ministers and Ministers approach the matter in their own style, but I take the view that although circumstances are beyond human control, our conduct, to quote Benjamin Disraeli, "is in our power", and our conduct in consideration of this Bill, which is in our power, should continue to be as measured, reasonable and moderate as it can be.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank all Members who have so far been involved in the scrutiny of the Bill, both in its early stages and in the Public Bill Committee. I particularly pay tribute to all members of the Committee from both sides of the House. That of course includes the SNP Members, who worked hard and constructively with us on the Bill. I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who leads for the SNP on this matter.

This group of amendments deals with the general provisions and the overarching privacy clause, so it is important for me to set out Labour's position before I move on to new clause 5. Safety and security matter. The current threat level for terrorism is severe, which, as we all know, means that an attack is highly likely. We all remember and are deeply conscious of the attacks in Paris and Brussels in the not too distant past, as well as other attacks. However, the Bill deals with not just terrorism, but other serious crimes, such as the threats from people traffickers, including those who traffic children, as well as those who indulge in sexual abuse and those who commit stalking and harassment. The starting position must therefore be that the security and intelligence services, GCHQ, the National Crime Agency and the police should have the powers to deal with these threats.

However, human rights matter, too. That includes the right to privacy, the right to be left alone, the right to have private data protected with security and integrity, and the right to redress when things go wrong, which are important rights. In relation to the issues covered by the Bill, I have seen things from at least two important perspectives. I was a defence human rights advocate for 20 years, taking many cases against some of the law enforcement agencies, and I then had the privilege to be the Director of Public Prosecutions for five years, working with the security and intelligence services and the other law enforcement agencies, so I have seen the threats and how they are dealt with, but also the importance of human rights considerations.

Safety and security and human rights are not mutually exclusive: they are not either/or and we can have both. That is why Labour has supported the principle of the Bill, but also why we are focused intensely on the necessity of the safeguards for the powers in the Bill. We have supported the principle of the new legislation not only because investigatory powers need updating in a fast-changing world, but, equally importantly, because, after Snowden, it is important that the powers exercised are avowed, that they are placed in statute and that everybody understands the safeguards around them.

In that respect there are two very important reasons why we need new legislation. But some of the proposed powers are very wide—the bulk powers are very wide indeed. That is why Labour's first and consistent demand of the Government has been for an independent review of...
the operational case for the bulk powers. The Government published a short operational case alongside the Bill, but we judged that inadequate and have been pressing for a full independent review since.

I am pleased to say that in a letter of 23 May the Home Secretary accepted the case for an independent review of the operational case for the powers. That is a significant and welcome step, and is the right step. I want to strike the right tone here. Labour made very significant demands when the Bill was in Committee. We sought to do so constructively, and there have been significant movement and concessions from the Government; again, that has been constructive. Important moves in the right direction, which will improve the Bill, have been achieved through that dialogue.

Having gone that far it is important now to focus on the task and terms of the review—having the review of bulk powers is one thing, but having the right terms is equally important.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I appreciate all that my Front-Bench team has done and is trying to do to minimise the harm, as I see it, to privacy and civil liberties. But my hon. and learned Friend said that Labour accepts the principle, so may I say that some of us—myself, certainly, as I stated on Second Reading—do not accept the principle of the measures, consider the bulk powers unnecessary and will vote against them at every opportunity?

Keir Starmer: That intervention gives me the chance to say that by and large—there are some exceptions—the bulk powers are available and being exercised at the moment, under the existing arrangements. The Bill puts them on a statutory footing with proper safeguards. Not to do so would leave the situation as it is now; that is unsatisfactory because the powers are not clear and safeguards are not in place. That is an important reason why, in principle, we support the legislation. From my own perspective, having worked with the security and intelligence services on real cases, in real time, I also appreciate why some of the powers are needed and how they are used. We must never forget that important consideration.

We know that David Anderson QC will conduct the review. We have great faith in him, as I think do most Members of this House. It is important that the task he is performing is clear. We have argued that he should look not at the utility of the bulk powers but at their necessity, that he should be able to choose a suitably qualified security cleared panel himself to help him, that he must have access to all the material necessary to carry out the review effectively, including, of course, the material made available to the Intelligence and Security Committee, and that he must have time to carry out his review; we envisage that he will report in time for the consideration in Committee in the House of Lords of parts 6 and 7 of the Bill, which should be in about three months.

I am pleased to say that as those terms of reference are of considerable importance to Labour I have had the opportunity to discuss them with the Minister, and can tell the House that today we exchanged letters setting out that important framework for the review, namely that it should be a review of the necessity of the powers, that there should be properly cleared panel members chosen by David Anderson, that he should have access to all material and that there should be a report within three months. All those are very important for the conduct of the review.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The whole House is glad to hear that there has been constructive engagement on this matter, as it is incredibly important to get it right. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that those letters are put in the Library today so that the rest of the House is aware of what is going on, as this is fundamental to the Bill?

Keir Starmer: I take that point, although obviously one of the letters is not mine.

Mr John Hayes: I am more than happy to make my letter to the hon. and learned Gentleman available to the House immediately, and I am sure he will do the same. One important point—I want to prevent the hon. and learned Gentleman from having to deal with this himself—is that the review must be conducted during the period in which the Bill is considered, because a review after the legislation has been passed would not be sufficient. I know that the hon. and learned Gentleman has asked for that, and other hon. Members will also take an interest in it, so I happily make that further commitment on the Floor of the House.

5.30 pm

Keir Starmer: I was about to say that I will happily publish my letter but that I did not have custody of that letter. I will make my letter available so that all Members can see the exchange and what I asked for in my letter, and the response I received. If we do that straightaway we will have it for the rest of the debate, and certainly tomorrow when we return to bulk powers.

Turning briefly to our other demands, we have consistently asked the Government for an overarching privacy clause, and I will return to that in a moment. As the Minister said, however, new clause 5 is an overarching privacy clause. We have tabled new clause 21, and in a moment I will discuss the differences between the two. We also stated that the Bill must include a provision to make it clear that legitimate trade union activities are not a sufficient reason for powers under the Bill to be exercised—that has been a long-standing concern of the Labour party and the SNP. We have tabled an amendment on that issue and held constructive discussions, and it was the third issue on which we have been constructively engaged. The fourth issue is that there should be a higher threshold for access to an internet connection.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): As someone who served on the Bill Committee with the hon. and learned Gentleman, I welcome the approach taken by the Labour Front Bench. May I remind him that the concern to ensure the legal entity and rights of trade unions and trade unionists was shared across the Committee and not just by Labour and the SNP? It was echoed by the Minister when he responded to the debate, and by many members of the Committee.

Keir Starmer: I actually said that that issue was being pressed for by Labour and the SNP—I think that is accurate—but of course I accept that in Committee, and outside, there has been constructive engagement by
the Government. The Minister was quick to indicate a willingness to consider this issue, and discussions have been ongoing. It is important to have clarity so that legitimate trade union activities are protected. Our new clause is now broader than the one we considered in Committee because it goes to national security as well as economic wellbeing. It therefore covers trade union activities in this country, and not just acts outside the British Isles, as would be the case if it was just about economic wellbeing. Such constructive engagement has pushed the Bill forward.

As I said a moment ago, we have made significant demands—I do not hide that—and the Government have moved significantly in response to those demands. This is not a list of victories, scalp, concessions or U-turns; our demands were significant and we stood by them, and in fairness the Government have responded in the right spirit—that is for those demands that we know about, although we will come to others during the debate.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I am listening with interest because the question of an overriding privacy clause has concerned a lot of people. I was not involved in the Committee, and I am not a member of any Select Committees. I am waiting to hear whether the hon. and learned Gentleman is satisfied by new clause 5, which he appears to be. The drafting of legislation is always somewhat obscure nowadays, but does he think that the new clause is satisfactory? It says that the public authority should have regard to “any other aspects of the public interest in the protection of privacy”. Would he have preferred some reference to the right of a citizen of the United Kingdom to privacy? Does he think that there is a significant difference, or am I simply making a minor drafting point?

Keir Starmer: If the House is content, I will deal with that in detail later. I have tabled an alternative in new clause 21 precisely to tighten up the reference to human rights and public law. It might be easier if I deal with that point in a few minutes when I get to that provision.

Labour has asked for a revised test for judicial commissioners. Currently in the Bill, the test is reviewed by reference to judicial review principles. The concern is that the judicial review exercise is a flexible test that, at one end, has close scrutiny, when judges look at the substance as well as the process of the decision. At the other end, there is a light-touch review, when judges look more at process. We have argued that the review should be towards the upper end of strict scrutiny. I am pleased that the Government this morning tabled a manuscript amendment setting out a test for the judicial commissioners that makes it clear that the review will be an upper-end, stricter one—the close scrutiny that we have argued for. That refers back to the privacy clause, and I will try to make good that link when I get to it.

The manuscript amendment is a constructive move by the Government to meet my concern that review will be at the upper-end, stricter one—the close scrutiny that we argued for. That refers back to the privacy clause. I was not well disposed to the proposed drafting of a manuscript amendment setting out a test for the judicial commissioners. It would be an easier task, but I do not believe the task of arguing that there is a significant difference, or am I simply making a minor drafting point?

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It has been a pleasure to work with the hon. and learned Gentleman on the Bill. Like me, as a lawyer, he will have advised clients frequently on judicial review. He will no doubt agree that judicial review looks to the reasons given for a decision. There is no duty on the Secretary of State to give reasons for her decision on whether or not to grant a warrant. How can there be judicial review when no reasons are given?

Keir Starmer: The hon. and learned Lady made that very important point in the Bill Committee. Normally when decisions are subject to judicial review, there are reasons for the decision. What is envisaged is that the decision itself, plus such material as has been looked at by the Secretary of State, will be put before the judicial commissioner. There will not be reasons, which makes the task more difficult, but what is important about the test set out in the manuscript amendment is that the review will be at the upper-end, stricter one—the close scrutiny that we have argued for. That refers back to the privacy clause, and I will try to make good that link when I get to it.

The manuscript amendment is a constructive move by the Government to meet my concern that review must be real and meaningful, not a long-arm, Wednesbury-unreasonableness review. The manuscript amendment is a significant change.

Mr Hayes: The hon. and learned Gentleman draws attention to the manuscript amendment the Government tabled this morning. We did so, as he describes, precisely to deal with the point raised in Committee and by others that the judicial review process might be interpreted in different ways by different commissioners. The amendment is a tighter definition of their role, strengthens the double lock and is very much in response to the Opposition critique and that of Government Members that the new process needs to be as well defined as possible.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to the Minister—that was what the Opposition pressed for.

There have been differences of approach to the test for judicial commissioners. On the one hand, colleagues on both sides of the House have made a powerful argument that the judicial commissioners should retake the decision. On the other hand, others have argued that the decision should be reviewed. The amendment strikes a third route, which is to apply a review test but to confine it to the stricter end of the judicial review principles.

As hon. Members know, I have been a lawyer for many years and have dealt with many public law cases, as other hon. Members have. The difference between strict scrutiny and long-arm judicial review is very real—it is a material difference. That is why the manuscript amendment is highly significant.

Keir Starmer: The hon. and learned Lady made that very important point in the Bill Committee. Normally when decisions are subject to judicial review, there are reasons for the decision. What is envisaged is that the decision itself, plus such material as has been looked at by the Secretary of State, will be put before the judicial commissioner. There will not be reasons, which makes the task more difficult, but what is important about the test set out in the manuscript amendment is that the judicial commissioner must ensure that the duties under the privacy clause are complied with, which means that he or she will have to look at that underlying material. It might well be a good point to say, “If there are reasons, it would be an easier task,” but I do not believe the task cannot be performed without reasons. In due course, the judicial commissioners may say, “We need further help on particular issues.”

Mr Hayes: The hon. and learned Gentleman drew attention to the manuscript amendment the Government tabled this morning. We did so, as he describes, precisely to deal with the point raised in Committee and by others that the judicial review process might be interpreted in different ways by different commissioners. The amendment is a tighter definition of their role, strengthens the double lock and is very much in response to the Opposition critique and that of Government Members that the new process needs to be as well defined as possible.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to the Minister—that was what the Opposition pressed for.

There have been differences of approach to the test for judicial commissioners. On the one hand, colleagues on both sides of the House have made a powerful argument that the judicial commissioners should retake the decision. On the other hand, others have argued that the decision should be reviewed. The amendment strikes a third route, which is to apply a review test but to confine it to the stricter end of the judicial review principles.

As hon. Members know, I have been a lawyer for many years and have dealt with many public law cases, as other hon. Members have. The difference between strict scrutiny and long-arm judicial review is very real—it is a material difference. That is why the manuscript amendment is highly significant.
Mr David Davis rose—

Keir Starmer: I am happy to give way again straight away.

Mr Davis: There were two reasons for concern. First, the House should seek certainty in the law, rather than any notion that the law would alter depending on the judge. The Minister is one of those who wants certainty in the law and less law-making by judges, so he should accept that point. Secondly, the Home Secretary reviews approximately 2,500 warrants a year—10 a day. The ability to do so is dependent on a very large extent on the data presented and the time available. The reason we wanted a reasons-based judgment was the feeling that an hour on any given warrant was simply not enough time. At this point, I do not know whether this provision will meet that requirement, but that is the test in my mind.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. The certainty point is really important. It is a point that Lord Judge made when he gave evidence to the Public Bill Committee. When I asked him about the reference to judicial review principles, he was concerned that that was not clear enough for the judges to know which particular test they were to apply. Now, with the new text in the manuscript amendment, it is crystal clear to the judges that they review the decision according to judicial review principles, but they must “consider the matters referred in subsection (1)—necessity and proportionality—“with a sufficient degree of care as to ensure that the Judicial Commissioner complies with the duties imposed by the section”.

That is the privacy clause. The test for the judges is now crystal clear: look at necessity and proportionality, and review the Home Secretary’s decision with a sufficient degree of care to make sure that the judicial commissioner complies with the duties imposed by the general provision in relation to privacy. That deals with the certainty point.

As far as the reasons are concerned, I cannot improve much on my previous answer. Why I think is envisaged is that there will be a number of judicial commissioners whose task will be to undertake this review, and to take such time as they need to look at the material and apply this test. They will not necessarily have the constraints that the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary have, but obviously a lot of this will happen in real time, so there will be the constraint of time in that sense. As I said, they will not be doing that alongside the other sorts of duties that a Secretary of State has to carry out during the course of a day.

I share the concerns that have been expressed on this matter, but I am clear in my mind that close scrutiny on judicial review principles is markedly different from in real cases, so long as there is access to all the material, and clarity that the privacy provisions must be complied with. That effectively means that there are factors that it is mandatory for the judicial commissioner to take into account. That makes a material difference. That is why we will support the amendment.

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The hon. and learned Gentleman and I debated this point closely in Committee, and I thank him for the way in which he has approached the matter. With regard to clarity, it is not now beyond any doubt that the test will depend not on the personality of commissioners, but the facts before them? They have a very clear basis on which to make their judgment, looking at the particular degree and seriousness of the case, and balancing the right to privacy with all the qualifications that he, I and others know exist in article 8.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. To illustrate why we are satisfied, under the general privacy clause—I have a tighter version of new clause 21, but for this purpose that does not matter—one of the general duties is to have regard to “whether what is sought to be achieved by the warrant, authorisation or notice could reasonably be achieved by other less intrusive means”.

Under this test, a judicial commissioner will have access to the material, will obviously know the Secretary of State’s decision, and will have to ask himself or herself that question. That is a long way from simply asking whether a decision was so unreasonable that no reasonable Secretary of State could have taken it, and that is why the new clause makes it clear that it is close-scrutiny review, rather than long-arm review, that is being dealt with.

5.45 pm

I will deal with two other issues on which Labour has made demands. The first is better protection for sensitive professions, which will come up under a different group of amendments. Amendments on that subject have been tabled by Members on both sides of the House, and by the Government, who have moved in relation to journalists and the protection of their sources, but not in relation to legal privilege. However, I will leave that until we get to those amendments. Secondly, Labour demanded a higher threshold for retaining health records and tabled an amendment in Committee that is now largely reflected in the Government’s new clause 14. Again, there was constructive dialogue on that important issue; because a number of Members were concerned about health and mental health records being made available via the bulk powers.

I will deal briefly with the privacy clause, passing over the bits I have already discussed. There are at least two versions of the clause before the House. The first is the Government’s new clause 5, and the second is Labour’s new clause 21. The essential difference between the two is that whereas the Government’s new clause simply states that the public authority, in carrying out its duties, “must have regard to” other matters that apply in the context, including “the requirements of the Human Rights Act… and… other requirements of public law”, our new clause 21 makes it clear that the Human Rights Act 1998 and the requirements of public law are of general application in all decisions. Our clause requires the public authority—the judicial commissioners—to “give effect to… the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998, and… other requirements of public law”. It might be stating the obvious, but the Bill contains a statement from the Home Secretary saying that it complies with section 19 of the Human Rights Act. It therefore must be right that the duty is to “give effect to” the Act and public law, not simply to “have regard to” it. That is the only material difference between the two new clauses. I ask Members to support new clause 21, rather than
Mr John Hayes: I note the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments about the difference between the two new clauses, and the Government are not blind to his argument about ensuring that the connection to human rights is secure. The Bill will clearly continue to enjoy scrutiny over the coming weeks and months, and he needs to know that, as he described earlier, we are always happy to listen and learn. I hope that tonight we can establish that an overarching privacy clause is essential, and can continue to have a discussion about the fine details.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that indication.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Section 6 of the Human Rights Act requires public authorities to have regard to the Act in any event, so I wonder what advantage the hon. and learned Gentleman thinks referring to the Act in the Bill will have.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, because it drives us back to the point of the privacy clause, which we debated in Committee and which has been debated elsewhere. It is important for three reasons. First, this is a statement of principle about the important interests and duties running through the Act, and it is important to have that statement in the Act. It avoids inconsistency and reminds decision makers of the importance of taking into account privacy, the integrity of data, human rights and so on in all cases, so this is a matter of principle.

The second reason why our new clause is important is that of practical considerations. I worked with the Police Service of Northern Ireland for five years in relation to its compliance with the Human Rights Act. Having structures and decision making written into everything it did helped it to reach better decisions, and I am sure it is the same for other police forces and for public authorities. Never underestimate the practical application that such a clause has in real time for people in public authorities trying to do their job. The third reason—I will come back to this in a minute—is that our new clause is intended also as a future-proofing exercise to ensure that, whatever human right is at issue and whichever individual or organisation is involved, there is a provision that requires decision makers to take into account the convention rights involved.

Mr Grieve: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have seen that the Intelligence and Security Committee has tabled a short amendment that says:

“This Act sets out the extent to which certain investigatory powers may be used to interfere with an individual’s privacy.”

We felt that that, linked to either his or the Government’s amendment, would send out a clear general statement about the state’s requirement to protect privacy. I wonder whether he has a view on that, because it seems to me that our amendment would add something without in any way undermining the ability thereafter in the Bill to undertake those necessary interferences that might be required.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, because what amendment 14 makes clear—the point is sometimes missed—is that these, or indeed any, investigatory powers affect an individual’s privacy. We have to be absolutely clear: the right to privacy is fundamental, but it is not absolute. The Bill gives the state a power to interfere with privacy—that is what it is about. The question then becomes: is there a case for the interference in the first place, and if there is, is that interference necessary and proportionate? Obviously it is for the Minister to respond to our amendment, but in a sense it is all of our duties to remind ourselves that this is all about an interference with privacy, and that is why the safeguards are so important.

The third reason the overarching privacy clause is important is that it is now linked to the test for judicial review of the Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary’s decision, so it has real application every day when one of the warrants is applied for.

Finally, let me say a few words about the appointment of judicial commissioners, an issue that has cropped up a number of times. Under clause 194, it is for the Prime Minister to appoint the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and

“such number of other Judicial Commissioners as the Prime Minister considers necessary for the carrying out of the functions of the Judicial Commissioners.”

Before doing that, he must consult the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, the Lord President of the Court of Session, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, the Scottish Ministers and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland. Our amendment 298 would ensure that the Prime Minister acted on the recommendation of

“the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, in relation to Judicial Commissioners appointed from England and Wales,”

and likewise the recommendation of the Lord President of the Court of Session and the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland in relation to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The reason is that it is envisaged that judicial commissioners will be appointed from among those who are already very experienced judges—High Court and above—either serving or retired. They will obviously...
have gained the qualifications to be judges and will be appropriately skilled and qualified to take these decisions, so in truth the exercise of appointing a judicial commissioner will be an exercise in deploying, from the pool of available judges, those who will sit as judicial commissioners.

That is an important consideration. Our amendment is tabled on the basis that it is not appropriate for the Prime Minister to decide that sort of deployment—he does not have the skills and experience to do it—not, in a sense, should it be a political deployment. This is something routinely done by the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales. Our amendment would ensure that the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, the Lord President in Scotland and the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland make a recommendation that binds the Prime Minister. The appointment is, of course, the Prime Minister’s, but that is the right way to carry out the appointment to this important judicial role, rather than the version in the Bill.

Keir Starmer: The answer to that is twofold, although I should say that if the decision was on the recommendation of the Lord Chief Justice and so on, it would not be open to the Prime Minister not to follow that recommendation. We need a slight reality check. At the moment under clause 194, if the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales—or, I am sure, the equivalent in Scotland—was consulted and made his or her views clear, it would be highly unlikely that any Prime Minister would act in a way that was contrary to the advice they were receiving from the senior judge in those jurisdictions, but our amendment would bind the Prime Minister. The question is: what is the point of involving the Prime Minister? The answer to that—to some extent this is to the Minister—is that there is the question of accountability for making the appointment.

There is also the point, as the Lord Chief Justice has pointed out, that he—or she, as the case may be—is not in the business of making judicial appointments as such, and will therefore be reluctant to have that power. The Minister might want to confirm that, because he has been having those discussions, not me. I think the Lord Chief Justice and others are reasonably happy to help with the deployment exercise, but not with the business of appointing judges.

Mr John Hayes: I have no doubt that the Solicitor General will deal with this later, but the point is that the Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for the protection of national security. As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said, when Lord Judge gave evidence to the Joint Committee, he made exactly the point that the hon. and learned Gentleman has made. Just to affirm the other argument that he advanced, the Prime Minister will of course seek advice on these matters in the way that the hon. and learned Gentleman has described, and I share his view that it is highly unlikely that the Prime Minister would then take a perverse decision.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that indication.

I have taken longer than I had anticipated. I think I have taken every intervention, because important points were being made—that is in mitigation rather than an excuse, I suppose—but the House will be pleased to know that I have finished, at least on these amendments.

Mr Grieve: It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. As will be noted, the Intelligence and Security Committee has tabled a number of amendments to this part of the Bill for the House’s consideration. I want briefly to run through them and explain the Committee’s collective position.

I want to start, however, by commenting on the debate we have just been having about privacy. It seems to me that it is absolutely central to the duty on this House that we should ensure that the principle of the right to privacy against the state is maintained except if there is a good and sufficient reason why that should not happen. In that context, it is extremely important that the Bill should be clear about the right to privacy. I very much welcome new clause 5; indeed, the difference between that and the new clause tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) is, in reality, very slender indeed, as I see he acknowledges.

Keir Starmer: indicated assent.

Mr Grieve: That said, words sometimes matter, and the clearer the statement, the better. I hope that my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will take that into account.

6 pm

We ourselves had originally suggested, before this Bill was introduced, that privacy protection should form the backbone, around which the exceptional powers of intrusion should then be built. We rather regretted the fact that that was not present when the Bill was first introduced, but we have now made a great deal of progress. Yet we still think it could do with improvement, and that was the context in which we tabled amendment 14.

As I said a few moments ago in my intervention, it simply “sets out the extent to which certain investigatory powers may be used to interfere with…privacy.”

If I may say so, it is entirely complementary and compatible with both the Government new clause and the amendment proposed by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras. I hope that the Government will consider whether building such a statement into the Bill, along with the other changes, into value in providing public reassurance about what the House intends and particularly the powers we intend to give to the Government and the agencies as a result.

I tabled clause 4 as a probing amendment, but I very much hope that the Government will take it carefully into consideration. I intervened on the Minister because I wanted to highlight the extent to which penalties for
misuse of the powers that we are providing under this legislation remain entirely scattered within the legislation itself or even in some cases have to be found elsewhere. Here are powers that we are providing for, which are capable of revealing the most sensitive and detailed information about a person's private life, so if misuse were to occur, it must be viewed as a very serious matter.

In my role as Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, I have great confidence in the ethical standards of the agencies, but that is not to say that we can disregard this issue. Neither is it entirely adequate to say that in many cases, particularly if of a rather venal character, it should be a matter simply of dismissal, even though that would of course be a substantial sanction for the individual concerned. I think Parliament is entitled to expect that the powers will not be misused and that there is adequate punishment if they are.

In those circumstances, it is worth bearing it in mind that although some of the misuses might fall under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, the offences are not comprehensive, not clear and in some cases appear to be rather inadequate—punishable only under the Data Protection Act 1998 or under the current common law offence of misconduct in public office. As many Members who are lawyers will know, it is very hard to prosecute for that offence and in any event it is inadequate to meet much of the mischief at which it is aimed.

I would be grateful—I repeat my request to the Minister—if he provided as quickly as possible through his officials, a run-down of all the offences that could be committed under the misuse provisions of the Bill, so that the House can have a clear understanding of what is covered by what offence, which offences appear in the Bill and which are covered only by misconduct in public office or the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Mr John Hayes:** My right hon. and learned Friend makes a good additional point. He first, perfectly properly and sensibly, asked for clarity about the character of the penalties, and now makes a telling second point about how this Bill relates to other existing legislation that deals with these or related matters. A further note to the House, during the passage of this legislation, dealing with that second point is necessary, and I commit to providing it. Let me draw Members’ attention, as my right hon. and learned Friend will do, to the first part of the Bill, which deals with offences. I accept that that does not wholly answer the question—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Let me help the Minister a little. He has asked for more time at the end in which to deal with various points, but what we are bothered about is eating into that time when so many Members wish to speak. Being quicker in responses would help.

**Mr Grieve:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to the Minister for his response, and I look forward to such a review happening. It would be good if it could take place in plenty of time before the Bill is passed, because we must have this issue in mind if we want to take different steps in respect of this matter.

Let me move on to new clause 2 and the associated amendment 18, which reflect some of the important concerns of the Intelligence and Security Committee. The Bill contains some welcome reforms to the commissioners who are currently responsible for the audit of authorisations and warrants that govern the use of intrusive powers. I am sure that all Members will agree that the new judicial commissioners will be critical in providing the assurance we need that the intrusive powers are being used appropriately.

What is currently missing, however, is a power to refer cases to the commissioners by the Intelligence and Security Committee. The ISC considers strategic issues and overall policies, including operations of significant national interest, but that is quite a different role from the commissioners who audit specific authorisations and warrants. The Committee sees our roles as complementary and, at times, our own work will throw up concerns about issues that we ourselves are not in a position to investigate. It is entirely appropriate that matters arising from a strategic or high-level inquiry conducted on behalf of Parliament by the ISC be capable of being referred to the commissioners for more detailed audit.

To date, however, I have to say that the informal process has not been working well. I mentioned previously that the ISC discovered that the Interception of Communications Commissioner did not know how many selection rules GCHQ applied to its bulk intercept materials. In such circumstances, the ISC should be able to refer that matter to the commissioner to ensure that he investigates the selection rules and provides thorough oversight.

To provide a further example, in its report on the killing of Fusilier Lee Rigby, the ISC identified a number of concerns about the involvement of the intelligence services prior to events and particularly in respect of one of the killers. Despite numerous invitations to discuss the matter, the Prime Minister referred it to the commissioner, yet despite numerous representations to the commissioner for an opportunity for the ISC to raise its concerns directly with him, that opportunity has never been taken up. Neither has there been any response of any kind to the ISC’s representations.

I want to emphasise that the commissioner is independent. There is no suggestion on the part of the Committee that we should be telling the commissioner what to do, but if informal channels of communication do not seem to be working very well, it seems to us that greater co-operation is required to make this and every other aspect of our scrutiny and the commissioner’s scrutiny work better. It would therefore be helpful if there were a clear mechanism by which the commissioner could receive a reference and be required to acknowledge it. That is why we tabled new clause 2. It has been suggested that this might be in some way improper because the commissioner has a judicial function. I have to say that although the commissioner is a person who must have held judicial office, being a commissioner is not a judicial function, so I cannot see for the life of me why this requirement cannot be placed on him.

**The Solicitor General:** I have listened very carefully to what my right hon. and learned Friend has said about amendment 18, which the Government are prepared to accept. On the first part of new clause 2, the Government are prepared to accept referral in principle, but I would like to deal in greater detail in my closing remarks with my concerns about reporting. I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend will listen carefully to what I have to say in due course.
Mr Grieve: I will certainly listen very carefully to what my hon. and learned Friend has to say. It was on that basis, I should make it clear, that I tabled new clause 2 as a probing amendment. If he can provide me with some reassurance, we will leave it there. This is an important issue, and the wording is crucial. We did not intend to put any constraint whatever on the commissioner in respect of the conclusions he reached, and I could even envisage the commissioner writing back and saying, “I have taken a preliminary look, but I’m afraid I disagree with you, and I do not think this is worthy of my investigation.” That is the lowest level of response that the Committee would hope to get from the commissioner. On that basis, I find it difficult to see that that would be putting improper pressure on the commissioner to provide a response.

I gratefully accept what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security, has said about amendment 18. This means that we shall be able to go to the Prime Minister and ask him to give a direction in certain circumstances. Indeed, if the leading member of the Executive will be able to give a direction to the commissioner to carry out an investigation, it could hardly be improper for us merely to ask the commissioner to consider and acknowledge a request to investigate something.

I shall turn briefly to amendment 8, which deals with the oversight of safeguards relating to bulk powers. When we reported on the draft Bill, we recommended that bulk equipment interference warrants be removed from the Bill entirely. We said that we had “not been provided with sufficiently compelling evidence as to why the Agencies require Bulk Equipment Interference warrants, given how broadly Targeted Equipment Interference warrants can be drawn”.

In response to that recommendation, the Government helpfully provided the Committee with further extensive classified evidence, which we scrutinised in great detail. After carefully considering it, we concluded that there were circumstances—target discovery was an example—that would require a bulk equipment interference warrant and could not simply be covered by a thematic warrant. However, central to our willingness to accept that change is the need for underlying safeguards, policies, procedures and access controls to be in place.

In the last Parliament, the Committee’s inquiry on privacy and security examined at great length the underlying safeguards for bulk interception, and it was those that convinced the Committee that bulk interception was properly controlled. We are told that the same principle is going to apply to bulk equipment interference. We have sought assurances from the Government that the same safeguards, policies, procedures and access controls that apply to bulk interception will also be applied to interference, and we have received those assurances.

Nevertheless, given how critical those underlying safeguards are, we regard it as essential that the Bill place an obligation on the commissioner to have particular regard to the privacy safeguards when reviewing all matters under the Bill. The reason that this must be clearly stated on the face of the Bill is that the Committee discovered in its previous inquiry that the current Interception of Communications Commissioner did not know the detail of the underlying safeguards for bulk interception. This cannot therefore be taken for granted; there must be a specific obligation in statute.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): New clause 5 relates to privacy and states that the public authority must have regard to “whether what is sought to be achieved by the warrant, authorisation or notice could reasonably be achieved by other less intrusive means”.

If the new clause is accepted, could that affect the point that my right hon. and learned Friend is making? Would not the least intrusive method possible have to be used?

Mr Grieve: I think my hon. Friend makes a good point. I have an underlying confidence that the amendment we are discussing might commend itself to those on the Government Front Bench. On that basis, I do not intend to labour this point any further. I felt it was important to set it out, however, because it marked a significant shift in the Committee’s approach to this legislation. I wanted the House to understand why that change had come about after we had been given the extra classified briefing and why we came to the conclusion that we should accept this principle, alongside essential safeguards.

Mr David Davis: I have not read the individual amendments, so I am flying blind here. However, there is no doubt that this power is the most intrusive power in the Government’s armoury. One of the problems historically has been that the sheer volume of work being conducted means that scrutiny and oversight can sometimes slip. Would my right hon. and learned Friend’s amendment actually require the investigation of every single bulk intervention?

Mr Grieve: The amendment would require that “the Investigatory Powers Commissioner must, in particular, keep under review the operation of safeguards to protect privacy.”

In our view, it is crystal clear that such a provision would meet the needs that we have expressed. As I have said, the Committee has been satisfied that the rules relating to bulk interception are adequate to provide the necessary safeguards. So, as long as we apply identical standards to equipment interference, the Intelligence and Security Committee believes that this process could be made to operate properly.

6.15 pm

Mr John Hayes: I hear what my right hon. and learned Friend has said. He will be aware that, because of the arguments put forward by him and others—including Opposition Members—on bulk powers, we have agreed to a further independent review. The point of clarity here is that the review will look at the range of bulk powers and apply its assessment of necessity across that range. I just wanted to give him that additional assurance.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister. Clearly, the more targeted a power can be, the better. Indeed, that was one of the reasons that the Committee expressed concern about whether the bulk power was required in the case of equipment interference. However, in classified evidence to us, the Government made the compelling case that simply relying on thematic powers or targeted powers would be likely to be insufficient and unsatisfactory. In changing our position, we have acknowledged that. However, that makes it all the more important that the safeguards should be properly in place. Those are the
key amendments in this group that I wanted to bring before the House. I simply reiterate my earlier comment that the Government have really co-operated and moved a great deal in relation to the legislation. They have responded positively, as I shall be able to illustrate as we come to the further amendments.

Joanna Cherry: I have unashamedly tabled a lot of amendments to the Bill, including to part 8, and the Scottish National party will also support amendments tabled by others.

I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), with whom I worked closely in Committee. There are areas of divergence between the SNP and Labour on the Bill, but it was a pleasure to work with him and I hope that there will be other occasions on which Labour and the SNP can work together harmoniously.

I recognise that the Government have made significant concessions on part 1 of the Bill. I welcome their attempt in new clause 5 to introduce an overarching privacy requirement. Their belated conversion to the central recommendation of the Intelligence and Security Committee is a tribute to the arguments advanced by Opposition Members in Committee. I have to say, however, that I prefer new clause 21, tabled by the Labour party, which trenchantly states that regard must be given to the Human Rights Act 1998. For reasons that other hon. Members have already given, that is important. It is encouraging to see the Government making reference in their own amendments to the Human Rights Act. That gives me hope that they might have retreated from their plan to repeal the Act even further than we had hoped. That could be one of the little bits of good news to come out of this exercise.

I am also happy to welcome Government new clause 6, and I thank the Minister for Security for acknowledging that it reflects an amendment that was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and me. It is quite an historic occasion when the Government accept an amendment tabled by the SNP, and I should like to mark it. I just wish that they would look at more of my amendments, but I fear that they will not do so. We are, however, pleased that the Government have seen fit to respond to a number of the concerns raised in Committee. That said, I want to be clear that they will have to go an awful lot further before the Scottish National Party can contemplate giving the Bill our support.

As I said on Second Reading, we would like to be able to support some aspects of the Bill, because they are necessary for law enforcement across these islands and reflect some powers that are already in force in Scotland. It is also a good idea to consolidate the powers and to have a modern, comprehensive law. However, we remain concerned about the legality of some of the powers that are still on the face of the Bill and the fact that they significantly exceed, such as with the retention of internet connection records, what is authorised in other western democracies. We continue to have severe concerns about the bulk powers enabled by parts 6 and 7 of the Bill. We are pleased that the Government have conceded that there should be a properly independent review of the bulk powers, which was argued for by both Labour and SNP Members in Committee, but we are yet to see confirmation of the review’s remit. I want to associate myself with what the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras said about the review needing to look at whether the bulk powers are useful, but at whether they are necessary. We look forward to the publication of the correspondence between the Government and the Labour party, so that we can see what is being proposed. My hon. Friends the Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North and for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) will address bulk powers and internet connection records in more detail tomorrow.

I led for the SNP in Committee, where we tabled numerous amendments to try to get the principle of suspicion-based surveillance to run throughout the Bill. We support the idea that warrants should be focused and specific and that oversight should be robust and meaningful. Nearly all our amendments were opposed or ignored by the Government, which is why we cannot give the Bill our support at this stage.

On Second Reading, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) sought to mock me for making what he described as “combative and partisan speeches in support of an abstention”.—[Official Report, 15 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 847.]

He expressed a degree of confidence in a shared consensus across this House about the principles that we should be adopting. I am afraid that my experience in Committee has shown his confidence to be misplaced. The amendments tabled by the Government for debate today are only a partial response to our legitimate concerns. The Government need to pay more than lip service to the importance of privacy and to the principles of necessity and proportionality.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for giving way, because I agree with what she is saying. May I suggest that there is one means by which the Government could demonstrate good faith? In order to get to a vote on new clause 21, we will first have to vote down new clause 5. If the Government are serious about listening to the House, could they not withdraw new clause 5 to allow us to have a vote on new clause 21?

Joanna Cherry: That is an excellent suggestion that the Government should consider carefully.

I also mentioned on Second Reading that the United Nations special rapporteur had expressed concern about the Bill’s provisions, especially the bulk powers. That is why it remains the SNP’s position that until such time as a case has been made for the necessity of bulk powers, they should be removed from the Bill.

I make no apology for tabling numerous amendments, because this is a constitutionally important Bill. Their purpose is to try to bring the Bill into line with international human rights norms and to make it properly lawful. If the Bill is passed in its current form, there is a real risk that it will be the subject of challenge. Many of the threads running through it, such as the retention of data and bulk powers, have already been the subject of successful challenges or are awaiting the outcome of decisions. We need to be careful about passing powers into law when their legality has already been questioned
by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, and a court in England.

In reality, I know that our amendments will not be accepted because we are already running out of time. We simply have not had enough time to consider the Bill. We have two days for Report, which I know is unusual, but we have short periods of time to speak about important parts of the Bill. I am only at the stage of making some introductory remarks and will have to curtail what I say about part 8 in the interest of other Members getting the right to speak. That will happen as we go through each part of programme motion.

Mr George Howarth: I share the hon. and learned Lady’s concern that maybe there is not enough time to consider the Bill as fully as she or I would like, but I am a bit confused. If that is the case, why did she not oppose the programme motion?

Joanna Cherry: I knew that that was a pointless exercise that would have eaten into the time that we have, so not opposing it was a practical decision.

Mr John Hayes: More pointedly, the Committee stage finished a day early, so why did she not debate the Bill for another day in Committee?

Joanna Cherry: If anyone reads the records of that Committee, they will see that I made more than my fair share of contributions. I do not have any problem with that. My issue is that other Members—the people sitting behind me, the Labour Members and Government Members—will not get a chance to speak and that we will not get a chance to vote on more than a handful of amendments. Given the degree of concern expressed about the Bill, it is frankly ridiculous that we will get to vote only on maybe eight or nine amendments over the next couple of days out of the hundreds of amendments that have been tabled. I am not ashamed to say that that is no way to legislate. We need to look at the way we go about things.

I am going to have to cut my cloth according to how much time is left, and I want to try to address some of the key SNP amendments to part 8 of the Bill, dealing first with amendment 465 and 466 to clause 194. Part 8 deals with oversight. At an earlier stage in the process, the Government said that they wanted to create a world-leading oversight body, but they have failed to do that. Our amendments seek to say that in addition to the investigatory powers and judicial commissioners there should be a separate body, known as the investigatory powers commission. It is not just some little notion of mine or of the SNP; it is what was recommended by the Royal United Services Institute’s independent surveillance review, the Joint Committee on the Draft investigatory powers bill, and by David Anderson QC’s investigatory powers review. David Anderson said that there should be a new independent surveillance and intelligence commission. It is a matter not only of what it is called; it is matter of what it actually does. Other hon. Members have tabled amendments relating to separating out the judicial and audit functions, and in the unlikely event that we get a chance to vote on them, the SNP will support them.

In written and oral evidence to the Bill Committee, we heard from Joanna Cavan, the head of the Interception of Communications Commissioner’s office. She reminded us that the judicial commissioners will deal only with some 2% of the applications falling within the remit of the oversight body. The remaining 98% will be subject to post-facto oversight only, so it is vital that that oversight is independent and robust. Creating a separate commission, as recommended by the three bodies I mentioned, would help to form a distinction between the approval and post-facto audit elements of the oversight body and would avoid the idea that judicial commissioners might be marking their own homework. That is what Labour’s amendment 146 seeks to address and the SNP will support it if we get a chance to do so. Joanna Cavan also told us that she had spoken to a number of the UK’s international oversight counterparts and that some had expressed surprised that the UK was going down the route of putting both the approval and the post-facto audit elements into the same body. Those amendments are crucial and I will be pressing them to a vote if I possibly can.

I turn now to the SNP’s amendments 467 and 469 and the question of the appointment of the judicial commissioners. I listened to what the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras said in his speech, but the SNP does not think that Labour’s amendment goes far enough. The Government have made much of the main safeguard in the Bill being the role of judicial commissioners and the double lock, so it is vital that we get the judicial commissioner appointment process right. I suggest that, like the Justices of the United Kingdom Supreme Court, the commissioners should come from the jurisdictions and the judicial pool across the United Kingdom, not just the English Bench, and that the public must be confident that they are selected on merit, rather than because they can be trusted by government to be conservative or pro the state in their decision making. The SNP amendments therefore propose that, as well as having consultation with the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and the Lord President, in Scotland, these appointments should be subject to recommendations made by the independent Judicial Appointments Board of Scotland, the independent Judicial Appointments Commission in England and Wales, or the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

6.30 pm

It is now recognised across the UK as a crucial constitutional principle that there should be the independent appointment of judges. I accept that these judicial commissioners are going to come from a pool that has already been through that independent process, but the point is that if they are simply selected by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the Lord Chief Justice or the Lord President, there could be a suspicion that they have been selected because they are a “safe pair of hands” or somebody who will not rock the boat, rather than because they are the right person for the job. The way to have the proper independent appointment of persons performing a judicial function is to put this through the independent board.
Pete Wishart: As usual, my hon. and learned Friend is making a powerful case. Does she agree that the judicial commissioners are the big flaw in the Government’s proposals today? This idea that somehow the Prime Minister could simply just agree with what has been suggested by judicial commissioners is concerning, because he could also disagree with what has been proposed and suggested. Does she have any concerns about that?

Joanna Cherry: I do, but let us suppose the judicial commissioners have been selected by an independent board. The Judicial Appointments Board of Scotland, the Judicial Appointments Commission—in England and Wales—and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission are not made up just of lawyers; there are lay people and people from other walks of life on these bodies. That is to give the public confidence in the independent appointment process of the judiciary, and it is very important that the public—our constituents, who have concerns about how far the powers in this Bill are going—have confidence that the judicial commissioners who will be performing the oversight functions and enforcing the safeguards on this Bill are appointed independently, rather than being the right chap for the job being chosen. I choose my words advisedly there.

I am very conscious of not eating up too much time, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have discussed two crucial amendments that I would like to put to a vote on part 8. I have tabled other amendments that others will perhaps be able to speak about, such as the measures on post-notification following surveillance and the notification of errors. I briefly wish to turn to amendment 482, which is designed to put it beyond doubt that voluntary, unsolicited disclosures are protected and that a whistleblower is protected from criminal prosecution. The amendment reflects our concern that provisions in the Bill may inadvertently risk discouraging or preventing individuals within public authorities or agencies, or in communication services providers, from approaching the Investigatory Powers Commissioner with concerns or communicating with the commission frankly. Throughout the Committee process, we attempted to amend the Bill by inserting a public interest defence for whistleblowers. Regrettably, the Government were not prepared to accept it, but I was happy that when I proposed an amendment similar to this one to part 8, the Solicitor General said in Committee that he recognised the sentiment behind the amendment and was of a mind to give it further consideration. I urge the Government now to make a gesture by supporting this amendment, which I may push to a vote if I get the chance to do so.

The Solicitor General: The hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right in her recollection, and I am giving this matter anxious consideration. I would, however, point out that clause 203, dealing with the information gateway, underpins the important principles that she outlines about the rights of whistleblowers. I hope that is of some assistance.

Joanna Cherry: I hear what the Solicitor General says, but we took clause 203 into account when framing this amendment, and we remain of the view that it needs to be put beyond doubt in the Bill that whistleblowers will be protected from criminal prosecution and that there will be a public interest defence. I will mention that again when discussing other parts of the Bill.

Time prevents me from talking about the fact that the right of appeal in respect of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal is, regrettably, curtailed, but I do not think we are going to get to deal with that today. What I really want to say in conclusion is that this Bill seeks to put on a statutory footing very extensive powers, and it is vital that there is proper oversight of the way in which they are exercised. Part 8, as it stands, is pretty mealy-mouthed. It does not even implement the central recommendation of RUSI, the Joint Committee and David Anderson that there should be a separate investigatory powers commission. Without these amendments proposed by the SNP on key recommendations about oversight, we cannot support the Bill in its current form.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I am pleased to take part in this debate, although I shall only speak briefly because I know that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and Opposition Members, wish to participate. What we are debating in this group of amendments is crucial, because we are dealing with investigatory powers and, specifically, the role of technology in policing the modern age. Although I represent a constituency in Essex, which sometimes seems a world away from Westminster, I can tell hon. Members that my constituents and I worry about the same things: how we protect our country’s visible and invisible borders; how we keep our local community safe; and how we spot young people at risk of abuse or of going off the rails, so that we can do something about it before it is too late.

I certainly want to ensure that our liberties are fully understood and protected. That is why I welcomed the fact that during the Committee stage, which I took part in towards the end, the Government, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the Solicitor General and the Minister for Security were prepared to listen to arguments—particularly those made by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—that sought to strengthen the protections without compromising the aims of the legislation. It was refreshing, in many ways, not to have the normal Punch and Judy politics, whereby everything the Opposition proposed must be wrong because the Government had not thought of it first. That give and take, which is shown in Government new clauses 5 and 6, and in some of the amendments, particularly amendments 33 to 38 and 45 to 48, is important in meeting concerns about protecting civil liberties without compromising the main aims of the Bill. Those amendments have been tabled to make it clear that warrants or other authorisations should not be granted where information could be reasonably obtained by less intrusive means.

More than anything, however, we have to ensure the liberty of my constituents to live quietly and peacefully, free from attack—that is, of course, the most fundamental liberty of all—and it must be protected from those who wish them harm. Today such people live everywhere, and they have the powers, through the internet and modern communication techniques, to be everywhere, plotting, planning and executing their evil deeds. That is why I was pleased to see the supporting provisions that this group of amendments addresses in ensuring that we have not only those protections for my constituents and others, but a sympathetic and reasonable approach to protecting people’s civil liberties.
This Bill goes further than ever before in terms of transparency, making clear the most sensitive powers available to the security and intelligence agencies and the strict safeguards that apply to them. The controls on bulk powers and the double lock protection, which requires a sign-off for action by not just the Home Secretary but independent commissioners, are extremely important in winning public confidence in the measures being proposed. That will be discussed in greater detail when those Committee provisions come before us later in our proceedings on this Report stage.

I ask those who worry about interception powers to remember the following simple facts relating to technical capability. Since 2010, the majority of MI5’s top priority British counter-terrorism investigations have used intercepted material in some form to identify, understand or disrupt plots to harm Britain and its citizens. In 2013, this material was estimated to form between 15% and 20% of the total intelligence picture in counter-terrorism investigations. Data obtained by the National Crime Agency suggested that in 2013-14, interception played a critical role in investigations that resulted in more than 2,200 arrests and the seizure of more than 750 kg of heroin and 2,000 kg of cocaine, more than 140 firearms, and more than £20 million.

I believe that the power to intercept communications from potentially very dangerous people has helped to keep my constituents and those of other right hon. and hon. Members much safer and much more secure in their homes, in their jobs and on the streets they walk every day; but I also recognise the calls from some that we must be careful not to risk the fundamental liberties of our democracy as we do battle with potential terrorists. The Government have clearly been mindful of the Wilson doctrine and have tabled amendments, which I welcome, to require that the Prime Minister approve, rather than just be consulted on, all equipment interference warrants relating to parliamentarians.

We must ensure that the powers that we give to our police and security agencies, while they are sufficiently transparent, are also fit for purpose. Terrorists and other threats to our safety and security are constantly evolving and adapting their techniques to trump the safety system. They do not want to get caught; they want to catch us out, and that is why we must be prepared to adapt our rules to keep pace with technology. We cannot use an analogue approach to tackling criminals in a digital age. Such an attitude just is not safe, and I am not prepared to go back to Chelmsford and explain to my constituents there and in Great Baddow, Chelmer Village, Beaulieu Park and Old Moulsham that I was not prepared to support measures designed to make them all more secure.

I support the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has outlined to strengthen judicial commissioners’ oversight and give commissioners a role authorising national security notices and technical capability notices, but we must not lose sight of the essence of why we need these proposals: we need them to help our police and security agencies to better identify the internet activity of potential threats, and indeed victims of crime, so they can do their jobs more quickly and effectively.

The people outside Westminster who think this is about stopping people being rude on Twitter, or cleaning up the Facebook jungle, are wrong. The Bill is about protecting those rights—the right to be irreverent or to disagree; the right to surf the net without being at risk from those who would do us harm. The Government have acted properly by being prepared to listen and to think again to a degree that I have not often encountered in the past. They have considered carefully, and we should be careful not to assume that our police and security agencies do not need these powers as amended, with the new safeguards that have been promised today. For those reasons, I shall support my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby tonight.

Mr John Hayes: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Reference was made earlier to an exchange of correspondence that I enjoyed with the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). I wanted you and the House to know that that correspondence is now available in the Vote Office for the information of Members.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): That is certainly a good point of clarification. I call Harriet Harman.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of amendment 146, which stands in my name and those of fellow members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. The Committee conducted legislative scrutiny of the Bill and published our report—a unanimous report—on 2 June. Like previous speakers in this debate and everyone in their right mind, we wanted to make sure that the Government and, acting on behalf of the Government, the security services have the right to intercept powers to keep us safe, while at the same time respecting privacy and not invading it abusively. I thank the members of the Committee who worked on that scrutiny, the legal adviser to the Committee, Professor Murray Hunt, the Committee staff and those who gave evidence.

Because I hope to catch your eye when we debate the next group of amendments, Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall speak briefly to amendment 146, echoing the points made by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who speaks on behalf of the Scottish National party. The amendment is about the role of the judicial commissioners. In essence, the commissioners are doing two things. First, they approve warrants issued by those who have the power to issue warrants—a very important role. A warrant that is not approved is a dead duck; it has to be stopped there and then. The role played by the commissioners in the approval process is set out in clause 21 and subsequent clauses. Secondly, the commissioners have an oversight and reporting function, which is set out in clause 194. They review and oversee the authorisation of warrants; they report to the Prime Minister and that report has to be published to Parliament.

It is a problem to have the same person both carrying out approval of a warrant and overseeing their approval of the warrant. The purpose of having all these measures in the Bill is to get them right. I pay tribute to the Home Secretary for her determination to understand and respond to the concerns. I hope that she will respond to the concern I am setting out now. I am not sure it is necessary to have two separate
organisations, as the SNP proposes in its amendment; but I am absolutely sure that there has to be some separation of functions. Oversight of oneself is not realistic oversight.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: Will the right hon. and learned Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will give way first to the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) and then to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)

Victoria Atkins: The Joint Committee on the draft Bill debated this matter in some detail. We concluded that it is better for judicial commissioners to have experience on both sides of the fence, as it were, just as at the criminal Bar barristers tend to prosecute and defend, so that they have knowledge of both sides. Secondly, the Committee was optimistic that it would help to attract judges of the right calibre to apply to be auditors.

Ms Harman: It might well be useful for commissioners to have experience of both functions, but not at the same time and not using the same team of staff. I think ours is a relatively modest but important proposal. I am sure the hon. Lady can see that the arrangement could be clarified to create some sort of Chinese wall between the two functions. We are not suggesting that the functions be performed by separate organisations, but the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West may be about to persuade us all that separate organisations are needed.

Joanna Cherry: I agree with the right hon. and learned Lady to an extent. Does her argument not boil down to the basic principle of Scots law and English law that no one should be a judge in their own cause? If one person grants a warrant then puts a different hat on and looks over whether that warrant was granted properly, they are being a judge in their own cause and there simply is not the proper transparency or oversight needed for public confidence.

Ms Harman: That is precisely my point. The Joint Committee on Human Rights and the independent reviewer have been helpful to the Government and bent over backwards in saying that separate organisations are not necessary—prima facie, one would say separate organisations are needed—but there should at the very least be Chinese walls. I therefore introduced the proposal in an amendment, and I hope to receive a response from the Government before the Bill goes to the Lords so that the matter can be looked at again, because we are a Joint Committee, and there are Members in the Lords who are eager to look at this. In the meantime, the Government’s responsibility, if they table amendments, is to submit a European convention on human rights memorandum with them. They have failed to do so. We regard those things as important. They are important for the House, so I urge them to do that. They should not table shedloads of amendments without producing an ECHR memorandum.

Lucy Frazer: Privacy is the right to be left alone. It was once proclaimed to be the most comprehensive of rights, and the right most valued by civilised men, which is why the privacy provisions in the Bill are important. There are many such provisions interwoven in the Bill. To give three important examples, targeted and bulk inception can take place only in the interests of national security, of tackling serious crime and of the economic wellbeing of the UK. It can take place only with judicial authorisation, and communications data—who, where, when—obtained from service providers have to be justified on the basis of a necessary and proportionate test. The relevant clauses all ensure that any interference with privacy is kept to a minimum.

I am pleased to have served on the Bill Committee, where the issue of privacy was raised with some force by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). I am pleased that as a result of the points that he and other Members made the Bill will be amended with an overarching clause on privacy to further protect and ensure the privacy of individuals. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) said, new clause 5 provides for the public authority to have regard to the question of whether the action can be reasonably achieved by “less intrusive means”. It also provides a new requirement for the consideration of the public interest in the protection of privacy. New clause 6 provides for an overarching civil liability, adding to the extensive criminal penalties in the Bill.

Those safeguards strike the right balance between privacy and scrutiny. As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras said, safety, security and privacy are not an either/or. That balance has been recognised in Europe, where the ECHR provides under article 8 respect for private and family life and also states that interference by a public authority is legitimate in some circumstances—in fact, the very circumstances outlined in the Bill, including the interests of national security, public safety, the economic wellbeing of the country and the prevention of crime and disorder.

The same balance has been recognised by the UN. In 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated:

“Where there is a legitimate aim and appropriate safeguards are in place, a State might be allowed to engage in quite intrusive surveillance”

if “it is both necessary and proportionate”. That balance is recognised by the public. A TNS BMRB poll in 2014 stated that 71% of respondents prioritised the reduction of the threat posed by terrorists, even if that eroded people’s right to privacy. The Bill seeks to ensure that the balance is right, and in enacting it we ought to remember that interference with privacy is often too much until it is too little.

Mr George Howarth: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). She took the opportunity to highlight the big principles, and showed how they are included in UN documents and the ECHR. It is useful to be reminded of that.

I speak as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and support the amendments and new clauses tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) and other members of the
Committee, including me. I will not read them all out, because he dealt with them comprehensively. However, I wish to make some points about a couple of our proposals. Before doing so, however, I want to refer to the report that the ISC produced in the last Parliament after taking evidence on the provisions in the draft Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and I both served on that Committee. I want to highlight two things in that report. First—and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield covered this—the overriding principle of privacy, which the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire discussed, had to be made clearer in the Bill, and set out as unambiguously as possible.

Secondly, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield raised the issue of penalties. The measure does not exactly conform to what we wanted. We were concerned that the legislation was not consolidated into one measure. I shall deal with that more fully in a moment. Thirdly—if I do not take too much time dealing with the first and second concerns—I shall come on to the debate about judicial involvement in oversight. I hope to say a brief word about that.

I welcome new clause 5, which is helpful and goes much, if not all, of the way in meeting many concerns expressed by our Committee and by other parliamentary Committees, including Select Committees that have looked at the issue. However, in amendment 14—I know the Minister is going to refer to this, so I am not going to make a hard and fast principle out of it—we attempt to put privacy at the forefront of the Bill, and set it out clearly. I do not think that there are sufficient safeguards to make it clear that that is the case.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield referred to new clause 4, and was rightly exercised by the issue of penalties. I want to approach that issue from a slightly different direction. The Bill relies on existing legislation, including the Data Protection Act 1998 for which, if memory serves, I had ministerial responsibility. No apologies there—I think that the measure has served us quite well, although there might be other legislation for which I would apologise, but I am not going to say what it is. The Bill also relies on the Wireless and Telegraphy Act 2006, the Computer Misuse Act 1990, common law, as the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, who chairs our Intelligence and Security Committee for the last 10 years, my experience is that there is a sense in which—this is not a specific criticism of the commissioner himself—a long and distinguished legal career has certain consequences, one of which is that people are not used to having to explain themselves. Judges judge and give their verdict, but they do that without any explanation. There is a serious problem in that commissioners who were previously members of the judiciary are reluctant to explain issues that have been raised with them or issues of concern because that is not the habit they have evolved over a lifetime’s experience in the judiciary.

Mr Howarth: Having mentioned lawyers, I guess I have to say a brief word about that.

Stephen McPartland: I will keep my remarks short, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I appreciate that you want them to be short. I want to speak to new clause 16 and to amendments 189 to 195, but I will group them together.

Tom Tugendhat: I am no lawyer, but having sat at the table of a judge for many years, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that judges are well used to explaining their judgments. Indeed, if one reads their judgments, one will normally find an explanation so detailed that it would torture the mind, so I would not be at all surprised to hear that the commissioners will be very ready to give an explanation.

Mr Howarth: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that that is not my experience. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, who chairs our Committee, gave a specific example of where someone was unwilling not only to explain themselves but even to engage with the Committee. That is why I support new clause 2, which gives the Intelligence and Security Committee the ability to refer a matter to the commissioner and to at least give them a nudge in the right direction in terms of concerns that need to be looked at.

I do not share the complete pessimism of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West. The Bill has moved an incredibly long distance since the original draft Bill. There is some way to go, but we may hear further concessions today or tomorrow. However, I would be grateful if the issues I have raised could be addressed by the Minister when he replies.
I welcome new clause 5 because it puts privacy at the heart of the Bill. Although I found the draft Investigatory Powers Bill to be some kind of absolutely Orwellian nightmare that I would never have been able to support, this Bill goes some way towards being something that I would be able to support. It is horrible that we live in a society where this House, as a cross-party organisation, will have to legalise mass surveillance of every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom who has an electronic device, but sadly that is the society we live in, and we have to have a trade-off between what keeps us free from terrorism and what keeps us free in terms of privacy. I appreciate the Government’s efforts in trying to put privacy at the heart of the Bill.

On my new clause and my amendments, I want to look at possibly introducing into the Bill notification of surveillance against innocent people. I have tabled 63 amendments because I know there will be a review before the Bill gets to the upper House. The Government have been incredibly conciliatory and have provided concessions all the way through. I consider both the Ministers on the Front Bench friends, and I have been speaking to them about the Bill for many months—for well over a year, in fact. I have tried to be constructive in my disagreements with them; my amendments are probing amendments—they are there not to cause difficulty but to try to tease out more information.

The Bill fails to provide a viable system of notification of surveillance, particularly for those who have been wrongly surveilled. The current drafting covers only error reporting, and it places a higher importance on public interest—I understand that that is the source of the dispute about whether we should have new clause 5 or new clause 21, in terms of privacy and what is in the public interest. The concepts of public interest and serious error are difficult to define, and that leads to the problem of the judicial commissioners and others having to decide what those concepts are, and whether there are varying degrees of them. I want the Bill to state very clearly what we want them to be, so that we do not have that mission creep.

Adding notification to the Bill through a new clause would go some way towards ensuring that privacy is further enhanced as the backbone of the Bill. To put the issue into context, the countries that permit notification of surveillance include America, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, Switzerland, Slovenia, Montenegro and Hungary, so this is not something that will be specific to the United Kingdom, and we will never have been able to support trying to catch up with our partners. I appreciate that each of those countries offers a different threshold in terms of how people will be surveilled, but there is no possibility of notification in the Bill at the moment. The Ministers have been very conciliatory, and if they want to intervene on me to say that they will accept my new clause 16, I will happily sit down. No, I didn’t think so. Never mind—we will keep trying.

Mr John Hayes: I am not going to surprise my hon. Friend or the House, but he will have noted that the changes we have brought forward to the Bill mean that if a serious error has been identified by the commissioner, the individual concerned will be given a significant and new provision, which goes some way towards satisfying his desire. Perhaps he can meet me halfway.

Stephen McPartland: I will certainly meet the Minister halfway, because I will not call a vote on my provisions, or vote against him on this aspect of the Bill. Obviously, I would like to get my own way, but I appreciate that this is about compromise, and both Ministers have been very good at compromising over the course of the Bill.

On error reporting and notification, it is worth noting the views expressed in sections 613 to 622 of the report by the Joint Committee on the draft Investigatory Powers Bill. I will not read them all out—you would not like that, Mr Deputy Speaker—but I would like to pull a few highlights out. The report states:

“Clause 171 provides that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner must inform a person about any ‘serious error’ when the Investigatory Powers Tribunal agrees the error is ‘serious’, and when that is in the public interest. But why would it ever be in the public interest to inform somebody that the error was serious? I cannot imagine that it would ever be in the public interest to do so, so they would never be informed.

The report also noted that the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law felt that the approach in the draft Bill to error reporting was a matter of profound concern. Similarly, the Interception of Communications Commissioner’s Office believed the provisions in the clause were weaker than the current well-established powers. The requirement that an error should cause significant prejudice or harm was also criticised for setting a very high bar. In addition, the test was criticised by the Law Society of Scotland, Privacy International, the Interception of Communications Commissioner’s Office and Amnesty International UK for being poorly defined.

Victoria Atkins: I will be grateful to my hon. Friend if he can answer this question; it may negate the need for me to make a speech on this point. I have looked very carefully at new clause 16 and, indeed, new clause 1, and I cannot find any reference to “error” in them. New clause 16 seems to be a general clause of notification to anyone who is subject to a warrant. Is that correct?

Stephen McPartland: I certainly do not take any credit for being good at drafting new clauses. New clause 16 may not mention “error”, but I think it is mentioned in amendments 189 to 195, with which it should be considered. In “A Question of Trust”, David Anderson, QC, recommended that the judicial commissioners be given the power to report errors to individuals. I appreciate that the Minister has moved towards my point of view.

In conclusion, the Joint Committee made two recommendations. The first was that referral to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal was unnecessary and cumbersome and created a brake on the notification of errors. The second was that the error-reporting threshold should be reviewed so that it was more specific and defined.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: New clause 1 stands in my name and is supported by Scottish National party Members. It is remarkably similar to new clause 16, to which the hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) has just spoken. He says that his is a probing amendment; I regard mine as more than that, but I shall wait to hear what the Minister has to say when he replies to the debate.
I will preface my remarks on new clause 1 by highlighting some more general concerns. I absolutely agree with the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) that the way in which today’s proceedings are being conducted is highly unsatisfactory. The time allowed is clearly insufficient. The Government have done themselves no favours, because all they do by insisting on conducting proceedings in this way is throw a bone to those in the other place and allow them to justify the greater degree of scrutiny that they will inevitably give to the Bill. It has already been referred to as a constitutional Bill that countenances the most egregious interference with individual liberty by the state. Such scrutiny ought to be done by this elected Chamber.

The fact that the Government are still taking on board amendments after the draft Bill, the report by David Anderson, QC, and the debate in Committee indicates an unsatisfactory attitude on their part. It shows that they are not yet putting privacy at the heart of the Bill, and that they are being dragged kicking and screaming to that position. On new clauses 5 and 21, it is unsatisfactory that the best provision has been proposed by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who speaks for the Opposition, and that we will not get to that unless we first vote down an inferior proposal that, while adequate and an improvement, is not as good as that proposed by the official Opposition. I reiterate a point that I made in an intervention on the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West; the Government will still have the opportunity, if they are minded to take it, to insist on their version in the other place at a later stage, but this House should be empowered to express a view on new clause 21, which for reasons of procedure it is not able to do at present.

The thinking behind new clause 1 is that sunlight is the best disinfectant. The question of whether the Government will accept the approach suggested by us and the hon. Member for Stevenage relates to the question of whether privacy is at the heart of the Bill. As things stand, an individual will be able to find out whether they have been the subject of intrusion under the Bill’s powers only through a whistleblower or public-interest litigation. It is a question of happenstance. If the Government are sincere and prepared meaningfully to protect our liberties and individual rights, they should not object to a process with all the necessary safeguards, as outlined in new clause 1. There should be no objection to notifying those who have been the subject of surveillance once the surveillance has concluded. As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, that idea is not novel. It happens in a number of jurisdictions and has already been the subject of judicial approval and, indeed, instruction from the European Court of Human Rights in two cases, namely Klass v. Germany in 1978, and Weber and Saravia v. Germany in 2006.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I understand that you would like Members to be brief, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am not a lawyer and I was not a member of the Bill Committee, so I will be brief.

On Second Reading, I spoke about an issue that has not yet been discussed today: economic cybercrime, which I have spoken about frequently in this House. The Government’s amendments enhance our ability to attack it. Constituents write to us as Members of Parliament; my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) has mentioned the huge number of privacy-related issues that have been raised, including the need to ensure that, if the Government were to interfere with the right to privacy, there would be proper oversight, safeguards and transparency. I do not need to re-rehearse her arguments, but I say to the Government and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security that while new clause 5 may not be as perfect as those lawyers present would like it to be, it goes a long way towards satisfying the public.

I want to address two aspects of new clause 5. First, our constituents are interested in the issues covered by subsections (2)(a) and (4)(c). The onus is now on the need to consider less intrusive means and proportionality. That is an obligation. Notwithstanding my hon. and learned Friend’s comments about the need to understand the exact penalties for misuse, those two particular subsections go a long way to putting in place some protection.

Secondly, on economic cybercrime, we often talk about huge attacks on bank systems. New clause 5(2)(b) and (4)(b) relate to not just the public interest in detecting serious crimes, but the integrity and security of telecommunication systems and postal services. The reality is that there is a huge amount of low-level cybercrime that then moves into more serious economic cybercrime. By addressing the issue in the Bill, we are making a statement of intent. Given that there are so many e-commerce transactions today, it is hugely important that we protect and maintain the integrity of telecommunication systems, in the widest sense of the term, and postal services.

Whatever else may be, those of us who are not lawyers—we are not entirely sure what the difference is between new clause 21(2)(a) and (b), and new clause 5(4)(d) and (e), but I am looking forward to my right hon. and learned Friend explaining it—say “Well done” to the Government. New clause 5(2)(b) and 5(4)(b) protect all e-commerce, and putting the emphasis on maintaining the integrity of services, particularly telecoms services, will take away some of the public’s criticisms about the snoopers’ charter. The key points about subsections (2)(b) and (4)(b) are extraordinarily important, and I am pleased to see them in the Bill.

Tom Tugendhat: It is a great pleasure to speak on Report, particularly as the heirs of Walsingham and Egerton are on the Treasury Bench sitting in judgment on the protection of privacy, but as others have said, there is still a great deal of distance to go. We are testing the bona fides of the Government in their statements of general application on meaningful protections—protections such as those proposed in new clause 1. I wait to hear with interest what the Minister has to say.
over a Bill that will shape our civil liberties. In their day, Walsingham broke the code, and Egerton tried Mary, Queen of Scots. The techniques that they used are still in active use today, but they have been updated. It is a question no longer of codes on paper, smuggled out in brandy bottles, but of codes hidden in computer messages, apps and other forms of communication. That is why I welcome the Bill, which updates historical practice for the present day. It is essential that we put this into statute, because for the first time we are putting into a Bill what we actually mean. For years, the state has used interpretations of legal practice rather than setting out, and debating properly, what it should do. That is why I particularly welcome the joint approach to the Bill. The hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has been instrumental in bringing a co-operative mood to the House, and I am grateful to him for doing so.

The Bill balances privacy against other considerations. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) pointed out, privacy is a fundamental right of all British citizens, and one that we have enjoyed for many years. But that privacy is only worth anything if we can live in safety, not just from the obvious risk of terrorism but from the risks of child abuse, drug smuggling and other forms of violence against the people of this country. I am grateful for the fact that the Government have balanced that privacy against those threats.

I will leave it there, because there are many more amendments to come. I could address some of them in detail, and perhaps I will be called to speak again.

Victoria Atkins: I had the privilege of being a member of the Joint Committee and of the Bill Committee, so I feel as though I have lived with this Bill for many months. I will be happy to see it become law when that happens. This Bill is vital in the modern age, and it is above party politics. It is about doing the right thing for our country and for our constituents.

The Joint Committee and the Bill Committee scrutinised the Bill intensively, and I think we considered something like 1,000 amendments in the Bill Committee. I am happy to say that we managed, nevertheless, to find some areas of agreement, namely that it was necessary to introduce a Bill to set out the investigatory powers of the security services and law enforcement agencies, and to update the scrutiny and transparency of those powers and the people who use them. It is a credit to everyone, on both sides of the House, who supports the principle of the Bill.

I welcome, as others have done, new clause 5 and Government amendment 30, which will put all related criminal offences in the Bill. That will create transparency by making the misuse of these powers absolutely obvious. I want to look at two proposed new clauses that have not received the same level of scrutiny as the Bill has enjoyed; I shall endeavour to change that in the next couple of minutes. New clause 1—the notifying criminals clause, as someone remarked to me—raises grave concerns about our impact on fighting crime and terror. I am conscious that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), who tabled the new clause, is not his place. For anyone who has not read it, it would require the police and security services to notify, within 30 days of a warrant ending, anyone who has been investigated. There is no requirement for an error to have occurred, or anything of that nature. The only requirement is that some one’s data have been investigated.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): On the point about a time limit of three months, is my hon. Friend aware that in 58% of requests for communications data in child abuse investigations, the data are more than six months old?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. That shows the time sensitivity of many investigations, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing it up. We know from evidence sessions in both Committees that 100% of counter-terrorism cases and 90% of serious organised crime cases involve communications data evidence. We are talking about very serious cases indeed. My concern about new clause 1 is that in no way removes the risk that high level criminals and terror suspects will be told that they have been investigated by law enforcement and the security services. Such people are more likely to be the subject of warrants because of their criminality, so we would be handing the investigations to those criminals on a plate.

Tom Tugendhat: The level of encryption available in public today is such that new clause 1 would allow criminals to hide the deeds that they had formerly left unhidden, and therefore it would expose the country to even greater threat.

Victoria Atkins: That is exactly right. My hon. Friend makes the point that I was about to make, in fact.

Tom Tugendhat: Oh, sorry.

Victoria Atkins: Not at all. [Interruption.] It has never stopped me before. The new clause will help criminals to evade investigation, arrest and prosecution. Serious organised crime gangs and terrorists talk to each other. They compare notes on investigative activities, whether ongoing or not. It will not necessarily be the first, second or third notification that starts to hint at the methodology of the police; it may be the 20th, but none the less those hints about patterns of behaviour will begin to emerge in the criminal world. Why on earth would this House pass legislation that would give serious organised crime gangs and terrorist gangs such an advantage?

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The hon. Lady is making a powerful point, but she is talking about a fear of what may be to come. Is she aware that already in Northern Ireland, a chief dissident republican has had the case against him dropped because the judge ordered that the security service had to unveil its surveillance techniques? If that is the case already, imagine what would happen if every dissident republican and every terrorist in the country got notification.

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful for that intervention, which shows powerfully just how important this is. I am conscious of the time, so I will make just one more point about new clause 1. Subsection (1)(e) sets out that people are to be told if they have been informed on by covert human intelligence sources. That means informants, in everyday language. The new clause,
[Victoria Atkins]

if passed, would help criminal gangs to find out who is informing on them—and, presumably, to do great harm to those informants, because no criminal likes a grass.

I am conscious that new clause 16 mirrors much of new clause 1. It does not, in fairness, contain the reference to CHISs, but the fact is that it will have a similarly devastating effect on law enforcement and security service operations in this country.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Victoria Atkins: I am literally on my last page.

Fiona Mactaggart: It seems to me that the reason for these amendments is the sense that there is not sufficient accountability in the secret services and other bodies. To that end, would the hon. Lady support new clause 2, proposed by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which would ensure that there could be proper investigation by a commissioner of anything that we felt required it?

Victoria Atkins: I hesitate to do the job of my Front-Bench colleagues, and I know that the Solicitor General will respond to that point.

I will finish by saying that the amendments and new clauses on privacy proposed by the Government reflect the fact that the scrutiny of the Bill has worked thus far and has been a worthwhile exercise. I hope that new clauses 1 and 16 will not trouble this House, because the Bill as it stands is much stronger for the many months of scrutiny it has received.

7.30 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins). This Bill runs to the absolute heart of Government—the duty to keep us safe. I will keep my very brief remarks to the issue of privacy, which was raised in Committee and remains a point of debate.

Nobody wishes to legislate to protect the public while at the same time unfairly and unreasonably restricting the rights of the individual. None of us wishes to give the state unnecessary powers. It was against such arbitrary authority that our first charter of rights, Magna Carta, was established, and why we can to this day find written authority that our first charter of rights, Magna Carta, was law, and let the king beware.

Privacy is the ability of an individual or a group to seclude themselves or information about themselves and thereby to express themselves selectively. The boundaries and content of what is considered private differ among cultures and individuals, but they share common themes. Everyone has three lives: public, private and secret.

However, we all know there are some in our society whose secrecy cannot be allowed to prevail and whose privacy cannot be a shield that allows crimes to be committed, whether those crimes are terrorism, child abuse, people trafficking or cybercrime.

There are people who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) mentioned, attempt to hide from the rest of society behind passwords, encryptions and codes known only among themselves. Because of the speed of technological change, they are operating not just outside the law, but ahead of it. That is why the law must catch up, and the Bill, with the Government new clauses, will achieve such a goal.

If we are to enhance the law and to codify the powers that our security services need to keep us safe, we must ensure that the oversight regime is robust and satisfies the other watchdogs of our liberty—Parliament and the press. The Bill creates a world-leading oversight regime that brings together three existing commissioners and provides new powers and resources for a new independent accountability in the secret services and other bodies.
Investigatory Powers Commissioner. Under the Bill, warrants must be subject to a new double lock in that they must be approved by the judicial commissioner before they can be issued by the Secretary of State.

Privacy is the mirror image of oversight, and the Bill and its amendments go very far in protecting individual rights. In particular, the Bill sets out the very specific circumstances in which the powers it provides for can be used. It makes clear the purposes for which those powers can be used, the overarching human rights obligation that constrains the use of those powers and whether each of the powers in the Bill is to be used in a targeted way or in bulk. The Bill goes on in that vein.

I believe that the Government have listened, acted and got the balance right between the powers necessary to keep us safe, the right to privacy of the individual and the oversight necessary to ensure that neither privacy nor safety is compromised. In conclusion, the Bill represents the pragmatic pursuit of safety in the modern age and an effective renewal of the law in the digital age. I urge the House to support its passage tonight and in the coming days.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): We know that, since 2010, the majority of security services’ counter-terrorism investigations have used intercepted material in some form to prevent those seeking to harm the UK and its citizens from doing so. It is vital that our security services are able to do their jobs well to maintain the operational capabilities of our law enforcement agencies and to prevent terrorism and other serious crimes. Living in the modern world with modern methods of communication, we must ensure our security services have the powers they need to keep us safe, while at the same time addressing privacy concerns and not inadvertently damaging the competitiveness of the UK’s rapidly expanding technology sector or communications businesses more widely.

I will not dwell on the privacy and oversight matters that so many right hon. and hon. Members have dealt with, but go straight on to the impact on the technological sector, which was covered by the Science and Technology Committee’s short inquiry on the Bill. One of the main concerns I heard from the technology sector in evidence sessions was the view that there needs to be more clarity about the extraterritorial application of the Bill and more consideration of its compatibility with the legislation of other nations. Failure to provide clarity will make it harder for the Government to achieve their own aim of delivering world-leading legislation. I am pleased that the Government have listened to the Committee’s concerns about industry, and that they intend to develop implementation plans for retaining internet connection records in response to the Committee’s recommendations.

In responding to the revised Bill, TechUK has praised the fact that the Government have responded to the criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs. However, it has raised concerns that, despite that, no single set of data will constitute an criticism about ICRs.

This highlights the difficulties that industry will face if required to generate and retain ICRs.

Although the Bill does not go as far as the Science and Technology Committee would have liked, by putting 100% of cost recovery into the Bill, the supporting documents reaffirm the Government’s long-standing position of reimbursing 100% of the costs. I am pleased that the Government have listened to the pre-legislative scrutiny that it and the Committees have provided.

In conclusion, although finding the balance between privacy and security is not an easy task, I believe that Britain needs to put in place this legislation to bring together powers, which are already available to law enforcement agencies and the security and intelligence agencies, to protect the British people and to ensure our security services have the tools to keep us safe in modern Britain.

Simon Hoare: It was my pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee for most of its sittings. I put on the record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) for taking my place when I had to leave the Committee.

It is always with some reluctance, if not trepidation, that I raise a question on a point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), not only because I am not right honourable, but because I am not learned, as I am not a lawyer. When my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General sums up, I invite him to try to address a concern that is exercising my mind, about a possible unforeseen consequence of new clause 2, namely the conflation and conflation of judicial and Executive oversight. My view is that those two things are best kept entirely separate. I fear that it may be an intended, or, as I would hope, an unintended consequence of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield has suggested that the two might merge in a rather unsatisfactory and possibly even anti-democratic way.

Mr Grieve: I certainly would not wish to see the two conflated, but—to reassure my hon. Friend—I really do not think that that is the case. The point at issue is that the commissioner has a specific power of investigation of particular things, whereas the Committee looks at the generality. It seems to me very much in the public interest that the Committee should be able to refer to the commissioner something that it thinks the commissioner might look at. All we ask of the commissioner is that he should acknowledge that and indicate to us whether he is minded to look at it. Beyond that, it is entirely a matter for him. There needs to be some formal structure, but because otherwise there is the risk that that communication will not be there.

Simon Hoare: I am grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend’s clarification. That might be the intention of the structure but I still have that reservation and look to the Solicitor General either to confirm what our right hon. and learned Friend has said or to confirm or address my suspicion.

This is probably the most important Bill that we will deal with. I support new clause 5, and think that it amplifies incredibly well the approach that Members on the Treasury Bench and the Opposition Front Bench took in Committee. The words, tone, tenor and approach of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) are to be welcomed. I always contended that the rights and the importance of the privacy of our constituents were an unsung golden thread running through the Bill. Through new clause 5,
the Government have decided—I therefore support them in doing this—that as those rights are not always implicit they should be made explicit.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), I will oppose new clauses 1 and 16. It seems to me utterly and totally counterproductive and counter-intuitive to give those who have been investigated, either correctly or incorrectly, notice of the fact that they have been. I take slight issue with the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)—she will not be surprised at that. In Committee, I was never convinced that her party got the fact that we were talking about delivering security and safety for our constituents. This Bill does so. This is not an abstract theoretical debate in a law faculty; it is about providing security and safety for our citizens—the first duty of all of us.

I am pleased with the Government’s approach and the way in which they have responded. I am grateful for the tone of the Front Bench team and look forward to supporting the Bill as it progresses through the House.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Much of the Bill as it currently stands is about drawing together many strands of existing legislation, much of which has been criticised previously for being written in an arcane and inaccessible manner, and about providing more protection of and ensuring compliance with our fundamental human rights. I therefore welcome the Bill, as it makes matters much clearer, and preserves powers and the rights that we hold so dear while protecting our constituents from more modern forms of terrorism, which we must all be so wary of and do everything we can to protect against. In assessing the oversight regime I will focus on the roles of two bodies that in my view provide sufficient oversight and checks and balances on the use of investigatory powers, in the light of the Government provisions that we are debating today.

7.45 pm

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal was set up to provide the right of redress for those who believe that they have been unlawfully subjected to investigatory powers or have had their human rights breached by a Government agency. I note that the rules and procedures of the IPT have been found lawful by the European Court of Human Rights. The IPT sits and reports in public where to do so does not compromise privacy or security. The Bill will strengthen the tribunal process and give individuals recourse to take a tribunal decision to the Court of Appeal.

With respect to the proper oversight of the investigatory powers exercised by public authorities, it must surely be a source of great strength to consolidate the existing three separate commissioners into a more powerful single oversight body headed by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. The office of the commissioner will be supported by a number of other judicial commissioners, all of whom must hold or have held high judicial office. The judicial commissioners will be appointed by the Prime Minister, who must consult the most senior member of the judiciary in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, a point I reflected on when hearing from the SNP on whether judges would be suitably impartial in determining their powers. The fact that they must have held the highest judicial office gives me the comfort that they will.

I welcome new clause 5, which should bolster privacy while providing our public agencies with the powers they need to keep us safe. Under the new clause there will be an assumption that a warrant or authorisation should not be granted where the information could be obtained by “less intrusive means”, the Secretary of State and judicial commissioners must have regard to “the public interest in the protection of privacy” and criminal sanctions are specified for those who abuse the powers in the Bill. Those sanctions should act as a deterrent, alongside the recourse to the tribunal should the powers be abused.

I look at the Bill very much with regard to whether it balances the needs of human rights with our need to protect our constituents. I believe it does. We should recall that the bulk of the Bill brings together numerous items of legislation that have not been as transparent as the Bill is, and have fallen foul of fundamental EU rights. In doing so, the Bill captures the work of three important reports of 2015, all of which concluded that the law in this area was unfit for purpose and needed reform, and pre-legislative scrutiny by three parliamentary Committees. Ultimately, we live in dangerous times, and it is vital to ensure that our Government agencies have the powers to protect without the ability to harm the individual liberties of law-abiding constituents. The Bill and the amendments that the Government have tabled deliver that balance.

The Solicitor General: I am sure hon. Members on both sides will forgive me if I have to canter through all the issues that have been raised at the pace of a Derby thoroughbred and so do not name them in turn. I am grateful for the thrust of the debate, which dealt very much with the historic but continuingly important balance between the need to protect the individual’s right to privacy—a right against intrusion—and the clear national interest in making sure that the agencies responsible for the detection and prevention of crime and terrorism have the tools to do the job.

I will deal first with new clause 21, which has taken up much of the debate. In an intervention on the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security indicated that we will consider the position with regard to new clause 5 very carefully. That is indeed the case. It seems to me that we are very close indeed on the provision on privacy. There is one issue, namely the effect of the Human Rights Act. I would say that it is axiomatic that all public bodies are subject to that Act, so an amendment to make that even clearer is not axiomatic. However, we are going to consider the matter very carefully, and I invite further deliberation in another place. In that spirit, I invite hon. Members on all sides to support Government new clause 5. As someone who has consistently advocated action on privacy by this place, as opposed to leaving it to the courts, I am delighted to see that new clause being placed in a major piece of legislation that I hope will stand the test of time.

I shall now deal with amendments tabled on behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee. I am grateful to its members for their careful consideration of the Bill.
In an intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the Committee Chair, I indicated the Government’s position on amendment 18. Amendment 8 relates to the underlying internal safeguards. The Government are happy to accept this amendment so that greater clarity and reassurance to Parliament and the public can be provided. Let me make it crystal clear that the remit of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner will include oversight of the internal handling arrangements and processes that enable compliance with the Bill’s safeguards.

I have already indicated that in principle the Government accept the first part of new clause 2, which concerns the referral of issues to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, and we will table an amendment in the other place to give effect to that intention. As I said, however, I have rather more hesitation with regard to reporting. In agreeing the principle of reference and referral, we are already creating that line of communication that, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, was not working in one respect.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) for directly outlining some of the tensions that still exist with regard to the judicial status and independence of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, and a role that could lead to an overlap or—dare I say it?—confusion, given how important it is to have clear lines of authority and reporting.

Mr Grieve: I realise that time is short. The Minister has gone a long way towards reassuring me, and I certainly do not wish to press this issue to a vote unnecessarily. However, if there is a reference mechanism, an obligation of acknowledgement and at least an indication of what is happening and a report back seem eminently reasonable—after all, the Intelligence and Security Committee exists on Parliament’s behalf to provide scrutiny. I simply do not see how it undermines any element of judicial independence whatsoever.

The Solicitor General: I am not saying that the new clause is unreasonable; I am simply being cautious about the need for those involved—namely the commissioner—to be part of the process, and to be consulted if there is to be such a change. With regret, I cannot at this stage support that part of the new clause, but I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for the clear, careful and considered way that he and the Committee have put that point.

New clause 4 relates to clarity on criminal offences. The Minister for Security has properly said that the Government will undertake to prepare a schedule of existing criminal law, and I think he will find that whatever our arguments about the level of penalty in the Data Protection Act, every bit of potential misconduct or criminality that could be carried out under the Bill will be covered by existing criminal law. As practitioners in the field for many years, my right hon. and learned Friend and I are always anxious about the creation of unnecessary new criminal offences. My simple argument is that I am not persuaded that new clause 4 would add anything to criminal law or achieve the sort of clarity that he and others seek, and I am therefore not persuaded and able to accept the new clause.

Let me move swiftly to the amendments on judicial commissioners which were tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras. I listened carefully to the arguments, and I agree that there is real merit and value in providing expertise from the heads of the judiciary in the appointment process. I also believe that there is a role for the Lord Chancellor in making appointments. He has responsibility for ensuring that the Courts and Tribunals Service has enough judges to operate effectively. Given the limited number of High Court judges, these appointments could affect that. Involving the Lord Chancellor in making a recommendation on appointment would help to avoid any accusations of judicial patronage. On the basis that we will table an amendment in the other place to fulfil that aim, I invite the hon. and learned Gentleman to withdraw his amendments.

Let me deal quickly with the judicial appointments commission and the amendment tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). I am persuaded by the argument of Lord Judge who, when asked in the Bill Committee about that matter, said: “there is no point whatever in involving the Judicial Appointments Commission”.

Why? Because judges will have been through the process themselves, and the measure is therefore completely otiose.

On the hon. and learned Lady’s other amendments, I am still not persuaded that the creation of an independent non-departmental public body—namely the investigatory powers commission—would add anything to the thrust of reforms that we are already undertaking, other than cost to the taxpayer. I therefore do not think that creating a new statutory body will add anything to the public interest, which is what we are trying to serve.

The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) chairs the Joint Committee on Human Rights, on which I served in the previous Parliament. She is not currently in her place, but I wish to deal with the question of the Chinese wall. She was right to make the concession about David Anderson, who himself said there should be a relationship between the judicial authorisation function and the inspectorate. Indeed, there needs to be a distance, but creating the sort of division envisaged in the amendment would break the important link that exists to allow those who review fully to understand how the process works in practice. For that reason, the Government will seek to resist that amendment if it is pushed to a vote.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) clearly and eloquently set out her objections to the amendments tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and others on notification. I cannot improve on her argument, except to say that comparisons with other jurisdictions are somewhat invidious, bearing in mind the differing natures of, for example, an inquisitorial process as opposed to the adversarial process that we use in the United Kingdom. My worry is simply that those who are continuing in the criminal process will change their behaviour as a result of notification. For that reason, the Government cannot accept the amendment.

On amendment 482, I am happy to consider how to make it absolutely clear that whistleblowers can make disclosures to the IPC without fear of prosecution. I agree that that should be the case, and I will consider how to amend the Bill to bring even greater clarity to that issue. Amendments can also be tabled in the other
place, which I hope the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West will take on board when considering her party's position.

On the wider amendments to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, let us not forget that the Bill already represents a significant step forward. The only route of appeal available to complainants from decisions of that tribunal is currently a direct reference to the European Court of Human Rights. We are now establishing a domestic right of appeal that allows parties to seek redress in the United Kingdom, and that will also lead to greater speed. My concern is that if every decision of the IPT could be made subject to appeal, the operation of that body would grind to a halt, which I know is very much the view of its president. Currently, only 4% of claims questioning the tribunal's work have any merit to them, so I am worried about the increasing expense and loss of efficiency that would result.

Similarly, the amendment that would force public hearings would, I am afraid, remove the tribunal's discretion in deciding how best to operate in the public interest. It currently regularly holds public hearings and publishes copies of its judgments when appropriate.

The requirement to appoint special advocates is unnecessary—I argued that case forcefully in Committee. I can see no reason for departing from the position on declarations of incompatibility with the Human Rights Act, because only a small number of courts currently have that reservation.

I will close with this remark: privacy is now very clearly at the heart of the Bill. I am very proud of that, and Members on both sides of the House will agree that this is a job well done.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 5 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

8.1 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the programme motion, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 6

CIVIL LIABILITY FOR CERTAIN UNLAWFUL INTERCEPTIONS

“(1) An interception of a communication is actionable at the suit or instance of—

(a) the sender of the communication, or

(b) the recipient, or intended recipient, of the communication,

if conditions A to D are met.

(2) Condition A is that the interception is carried out in the United Kingdom.

(3) Condition B is that the communication is intercepted—

(a) in the course of its transmission by means of a private telecommunication system, or

(b) in the course of its transmission, by means of a public telecommunication system, to or from apparatus that is part of a private telecommunication system.

(4) Condition C is that the interception is carried out by, or with the express or implied consent of, a person who has the right to control the operation or use of the private telecommunication system.

(5) Condition D is that the interception is carried out without lawful authority.

(6) For the meaning of 'interception' and other key expressions used in this section, see sections 3 to 5.”—[Sol. Gen.]

This amendment replicates the effect of section 1(3) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. It provides for civil liability in certain cases where there has been unlawful interception of communications transmitted by means of private telecommunication systems, or to or from apparatus forming part of such a system.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

Clause 1

OVERVIEW OF ACT

Amendments made: 26, page 1, line 5, leave out “sets out” and insert—

“imposes certain duties in relation to privacy and contains other protections for privacy.

(1A) These other protections include”.—[Sol. Gen.]

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Amendment 27, page 1, line 8, leave out “It” and insert “This Part”.

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Amendment 28, page 1, line 12, leave out “Other” and insert “Further”.

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Amendment 29, page 2, line 1, after “exist” insert “—

(i)”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 30.

Amendment 30, page 2, line 1, after “1998” insert—

“,

(ii) in section 55 of the Data Protection Act 1998 (unlawful obtaining etc. of personal data),

(iii) in section 48 of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006 (offence of interception or disclosure of messages),

(iv) in sections 1 to 3A of the Computer Misuse Act 1990 (computer misuse offences),

(v) in the common law offence of misfeasance in public office.”

This amendment lists certain existing offences which protect privacy.

Amendment 31, page 2, line 4, after “circumstances” insert “(including under a warrant)”.

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Amendment 32, page 2, line 9, after “lawful” insert—

“in pursuance of an authorisation or under a warrant”.

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Amendment 33, page 2, line 12, after “data” insert—

“in pursuance of a notice”.—[Sol. Gen.]

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Clause 10

ABOLITION OR RESTRICTION OF CERTAIN POWERS TO OBTAIN COMMUNICATIONS DATA

Amendment made: 34, page 8, line 20, leave out—

“for the purpose of regulatory functions” and insert—

“in connection with the regulation of—
(i) telecommunications operators, telecommunications services or telecommunications systems, or
(ii) postal operators or postal services”.—(Solicitor General.)

This amendment ensures that the powers and duties excluded from clause 10(2) (and dealt with in clause 10(3)) by virtue of being regulatory powers are limited to those exercisable in connection with telecommunications or postal regulation.

New Clause 1

NOTIFICATION BY THE INVESTIGATORY POWERS COMMISSIONER

“(1) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner is to notify the person to whom the warrant is addressed in order to fulfil an security operation or investigation.

(2) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must only notify subjects of investigatory powers under subsection (1) upon completion of the relevant conduct or the cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(3) The notification under subsection (1) must be sent by writing within thirty days of the completion of the relevant conduct or the cancellation of the authorisation or warrant.

(4) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must issue the notification under subsection (1) in writing, including details of—

(a) the interception or examination of communications,
(b) the retention, accessing or examination of communications data or secondary data,
(c) equipment interference,
(d) access or examination of data retrieved from a bulk personal dataset,
(e) covert human intelligence sources,
(f) entry or interference with property.

(5) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner may postpone the notification under subsection (1) beyond the time limit under (3) if the Commissioner assesses that notification may defeat the purposes of an on-going serious crime or national security operation or investigation.

(6) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner must consult with the person to whom the warrant is addressed in order to fulfil an assessment under subsection (5).”—(Mr Alistair Carmichael.)

Brought up.

Question put. That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 64, Noes 278.

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Boswell, Philip
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna

Cowan, Ronnie
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hoey, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Thewlis, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Elisidh
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Brake and
Owen Thompson

NOES

Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Carole
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Downen, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Fox, rh Dr Liane
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James

[8.1 pm]
The House divided: Ayes 64, Noes 281.

**Clause 194**

**INVESTIGATORY POWERS COMMISSIONER AND OTHER JUDICIAL COMMISSIONERS**

Amendment proposed: 465, page 149, line 7, at end insert—

’( ) There shall be a body corporate known as the Investigatory Powers Commission.

’( ) The Investigatory Powers Commission shall have such powers and duties as shall be specified in this Act.”—(Joanna Cherry.)

**The House divided**

**Division No. 6**

[8.13 pm]

**AYES**

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasma
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Boles, Philip
Brake, Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cheung, Joanna
Cowen, Rosie
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferreir, Margaret
Gething, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew

Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Margot James

**Tellers for the Noes:**

George Hollingbery and

**Question accordingly negatived.**

**AYES**

Maynard, Paul
McCannery, Jason
McCannery, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriam, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Roberson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Allok
Sheelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Rhys
Soomes, rh Sir Nicholas
Sollow, Amanda
Soupby, rh Anna
Spencer, Mark
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain

Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCain, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Ryan
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Thewliss, Alison

**NOES**

Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hallon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, rh Mr James
Jones, rh Mr Michael
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kinnahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, Julian
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Stewart, Rory
Streete, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Symes, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**

George Hollingbery and
Margot James

**Question accordingly negatived.**
Tellers for the Ayes:

Mike Weir and
Owen Thompson

NOES

Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kaczynski, Daniel
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCarron, Jason
McCarty, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Merrion, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil

Paternoster, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Sculby, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Rosyton
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spencer, Mark
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tohurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trussel, Mrs Anne-Marie
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
This amendment gives oversight to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner in relation to authorisations to interfere with wireless telegraphy under the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012.

Amendment made: 35, page 151, line 18, at end insert—

"(the exercise of functions by virtue of sections 1 to 4 of the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012.)".—[Solicitor General.]

This amendment gives oversight to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner in relation to authorisations to interfere with wireless telegraphy under the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012.

Amendment made: 8, page 152, line 9, at end insert—

'(4A) In keeping matters under review in accordance with this section, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner must, in particular, keep under review the operation of safeguards to protect privacy.'—(Mr Grieve.)

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to make explicit that the Investigatory Powers Commissioner is required to scrutinise the underlying safeguards, processes and procedures relating to bulk powers, including the arrangements for the protection of and control of access to material obtained through their use.

Clause 197

ADDITIONAL DIRECTED OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS

Amendment made: 18, page 153, line 8, after "Commissioner" insert—

"or the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament"—(Mr Grieve.)

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to allow the Prime Minister to issue directions at the request of the ISC (in addition to the Commissioner).

Clause 203

INFORMATION GATEWAY

Amendment proposed: 482, page 159, line 2, at end insert—

'(1A) A disclosure pursuant to subsection (1) will not constitute a criminal offence for any purposes in this Act or in any other enactment.

(1B) In subsection (1), a disclosure for the purposes of any function of the Commissioner may be made at the initiative of the person making the disclosure and without need for request by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner.'—(Joanna Cherry.)

This amendment would make it clear that voluntary, unsolicited disclosures are protected, and that any whistle-blower is also protected from criminal prosecution.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 67, Noes 281.

Division No. 7

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Cowan, Ronnie
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Tom
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinahan, Danny
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John

Begers, David
Brake, rh Tom
Brake, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil

McCaughey, Callum
McDonald, Steward Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes: Mike Weir and Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afrifie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil

Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Dowden, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Justice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel

Tellers for the Noes: Margot James and George Hollingbery

Question accordingly negatived.
(5) For the purposes of subsection (2)(e) a person holds a senior position in a public authority if—

(a) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(b) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(c) a senior official acting on behalf of the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Scottish Ministers.

(2) A minor modification may be made by—

(a) the Secretary of State, in the case of a warrant issued by the Secretary of State,

(b) a member of the Scottish Government, in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers, or

(c) a senior official acting on behalf of the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Scottish Ministers.

(3) But if a person within subsection (2)(d) or (e) considers that there is an urgent need to make a major modification, that person (as well as a person within subsection (1) may do so.

Section 31 contains provision about the approval of major modifications made in urgent cases.

(4) Subsections (1) and (3) are subject to section (Further provision about modifications) (5) and (6) (special rules where section 24 or 25 applies in relation to the making of a major modification).

(5) For the purposes of subsection (2)(e) a person holds a senior position in a public authority if—

(a) in the case of any of the intelligence services—

(i) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(ii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(iii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(iv) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(v) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(vi) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(vii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(viii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(ix) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(x) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xi) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xiii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xiv) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xv) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xvi) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xvii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xviii) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xix) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(xx) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(2A) The Secretary of State may make regulations—

(a) to provide for modifications to be made by a person other than a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service,

(b) which may provide for the modification of anything in an Act or instrument which is not in force,

(c) which may provide for the modification of anything in an Act or instrument which is not in force,
(ii) the person holds a position in the intelligence service of equivalent seniority to such a person;
(b) in the case of the National Crime Agency, the person is a National Crime Agency officer of grade 2 or above;
(c) in the case of the metropolitan police force, the Police Service of Northern Ireland or the Police Service of Scotland, a person is of or above the rank of superintendent;
(d) in the case of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service;
(e) in the case of the Ministry of Defence—
(i) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service, or
(ii) the person is of or above the rank of brigadier, commodore or air commodore.

(6) In this section “senior official” means—
(a) in the case of a warrant issued by the Secretary of State, a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service;
(b) in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers, a member of the staff of the Scottish Administration who is a member of the Senior Civil Service. —[Mrs May.]

The new clause reproduces clause 30(5) to (8) and includes provision consequential on NC8.

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Solicitor General: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 8—Further provision about modifications.

Government new clause 9—Notification of major modifications.

New clause 20—Power of Secretary of State to certify warrants—

“(1) The Secretary of State may certify an application for a warrant in those cases where the Secretary of State has reasonable grounds to believe that an application is necessary pursuant to section 18(2)(a) (national security) and involves—
(a) the defence of the United Kingdom by Armed Forces; or
(b) the foreign policy of the United Kingdom.

(2) A warrant may be certified by the Secretary of State if—
(a) the Secretary of State considers that the warrant is necessary on grounds falling within section 18; and
(b) the Secretary of State considers that the conduct authorised by the warrant is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct.

(3) Any warrant certified by the Secretary of State subject to subsection (1) is subject to approval by a Judicial Commissioner.

(4) In deciding to approve a warrant pursuant to this section, the Judicial Commissioner must determine whether—
(a) the warrant is capable of certification by the Secretary of State subject to subsection (1);
(b) the warrant is necessary on relevant grounds subject to section 18(2)(a) and subsection (1)(a) or (b); and
(c) the conduct authorised by the warrant is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct.

(5) Where a Judicial Commissioner refuses to approve the person’s decision to approve a warrant under this section, the Judicial Commissioner must produce written reasons for the refusal.

(6) Where a Judicial Commissioner, other than the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, approves or refuses to approve a warrant under this Section, the person, or any Special Advocate appointed, may ask the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to decide whether to approve the decision to issue the warrant.”

Amendment 267, in clause 15, page 12, line 3, leave out “or organisation”.

These amendments would retain the capacity of a single warrant to permit the interception of multiple individuals but would require an identifiable subject matter or premises to be provided. This narrows the current provisions which would effectively permit a limitless number of unidentified individuals to have their communications intercepted.

Amendment 25, page 12, line 7, leave out “or” and insert “and”.

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to limit the potentially broad scale of thematic warrants involving people who “share a common purpose” by ensuring that they also must be engaged in a particular activity.

Amendment 131, page 12, line 8, after “activity” insert

“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.

These amendments seek to make more specific the currently very broadly worded thematic warrants in the Bill, to make it more likely that such thematic warrants will be compatible with the requirements of Article 8 ECHR as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights.

Amendment 268, page 12, line 9, leave out “or organisation”.

See amendment 267.

Amendment 132, page 12, line 11, after “operation” insert

“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.

See amendment 131.

Amendment 272, page 12, line 12, leave out paragraph (c).

See amendment 267.

Amendment 306, page 12, line 13, leave out subsection (3).

See amendment 267.

Amendment 218, in clause 17, page 13, line 8, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 219, page 13, line 10, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 220, page 13, line 13, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 221, page 13, line 16, leave out subsection (1)(d).

Amendment 222, page 13, line 20, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 223, page 13, line 22, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 224, page 13, line 24, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 225, page 13, line 27, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 226, page 13, line 3, leave out subsection (2)(d).

Amendment 227, page 13, line 35, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 228, page 13, line 37, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 229, page 13, line 39, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 272, page 12, line 12, leave out paragraph (c).
Amendment 230, page 13, line 42, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 231, page 13, line 45, leave out subsection (3)(d).

Amendment 232, page 14, line 5, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 233, page 14, line 8, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 234, page 14, leave out lines 11 and 12.

Amendment 235, page 14, line 13, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 312, in clause 18, page 14, line 22, leave out paragraph (c).

See amendment 313.

Amendment 313, page 14, line 24, at end insert—

“(2A) A warrant may be considered necessary as mentioned in subsection (2)(b) and (3) only where there is a reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been or is likely to be committed.”

These amendments would require that there is reasonable suspicion of serious crime for a warrant authorising interception and delete the separate subsection relating to economic well-being of the UK.

Amendment 236, page 14, line 30, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 237, page 14, line 31, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 262, page 14, line 38, at end insert—

“(6) The fact that the information which would be obtained under a warrant relates to the activities in the British Islands of a trade union is not, of itself, sufficient to establish that the warrant is necessary on grounds falling within this section.”

This amendment restricts the application of warrants in relation to trade union activity.

Amendment 238, page 14, line 39, leave out clause 19.

Amendment 208, in clause 21, page 17, line 4, leave out “review the person’s conclusions as to the following matters” and insert “determine”.

Amendment 209, page 17, line 10, leave out subsection (2).

Government manuscript amendment 497.

Amendment 265, page 17, line 10, leave out from “must” to end of line 11, and insert

“subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right”.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners. This amendment is an alternative to amendments 208 and 209 (which are a package).

Government manuscript amendment 498.

Amendment 314, in clause 24, page 18, line 39, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 316.

Amendment 315, page 18, line 41, leave out subsection (b) and insert—

“(b) the warrant involves a member of a relevant legislature.”

See amendment 316.

Government amendment 53.

Amendment 316, page 19, line 7, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) Further to the requirements set out elsewhere in this Part, the Judicial Commissioner may only issue a warrant if—

(a) there are reasonable grounds for believing that an indictable offence has been committed,

(b) there are reasonable grounds for believing that the material is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation in connection to the offence at (a),

(c) other proportionate methods of obtaining the material have been tried without success or have not been tried because it appeared that they were bound to fail,

(d) it is in the public interest having regard to the democratic interest in the confidentiality of correspondence with members of a relevant legislature.”

These amendments would ensure that applications for warrants to intercept the communications of elected politicians would be made to the Judicial Commissioner rather than to the Secretary of State via the Prime Minister. They would also set out additional requirements that the Judicial Commissioner must take into account before granting a warrant.

Amendment 1, page 19, line 8, at end insert

“and where the member is a member of the House of Commons he must also consult the Speaker of the House of Commons.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to consult the Speaker before deciding to issue a warrant that applied to an MP’s communications.

Amendment 137, page 19, line 8, after “Minister” insert

“and give sufficient notice to the relevant Presiding Officer of the relevant legislature to enable the relevant Presiding Officer to be heard at the hearing before the Judicial Commissioner.”

Amendment 138, page 19, line 14, at end insert—

“(4) In this section “the relevant Presiding Officer” means—

(a) the Speaker of the House of Commons,

(b) the Lord Speaker of the House of Lords,

(c) the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament,

(d) the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales,

(e) the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly,

(f) the President of the European Parliament.”

This amendment adds the safeguard of giving the Speaker, or other Presiding Officer, of the relevant legislature, sufficient notice before the Secretary of State decides whether to issue a warrant for targeted interception or examination of members' communications, to enable the Speaker or Presiding Officer to be heard at the hearing before the Judicial Commissioner.

Amendment 139, in clause 25, page 19, line 16, leave out subsections (1) to (3).

This amendment removes the power to apply for a warrant the purpose of which is to authorise the interception, or selection for examination, of items subject to legal privilege.

Amendment 140, page 19, line 44, leave out subsection (4)(c).

See amendment 141.

Amendment 141, page 20, line 7, after “considers” insert—

“(a) that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the interception, or (in the case of a targeted examination warrant) the selection for examination, of items subject to legal privilege, and

(b) ”.

These amendments introduce a threshold test for the interception or examination of communications likely to include items subject to legal privilege, reflecting the strong presumption against interference with lawyer-client confidentiality.

Amendment 307, in clause 27, page 21, line 7, leave out “or organisation”.

See amendment 267.
Amendment 308, page 21, line 8, leave out “or organisation”.
See amendment 267.
Amendment 309, page 21, line 13, leave out “or describe as many of those persons as is reasonably practicable to name or describe” and insert “or specifically identify all of those persons using unique identifiers.”
See amendment 267.
Amendment 310, page 21, line 15, leave out “or organisation”.
See amendment 267.
Amendment 311, page 21, line 19, leave out “or describe as many of those persons or organisations or as many of those sets of premises, as it is reasonably practicable to name or describe” and insert “all of those persons or sets of premises.”
See amendment 267.
Amendment 19, in clause 29, page 22, line 25, leave out “before the end of the relevant” and insert “during the renewal”.
See amendment 20.
Amendment 20, page 23, line 4, at end insert—
“(4A) The renewal period means—
(a) in the case of an urgent warrant which has not been renewed, the relevant period;
(b) in any other case, the period of 30 days ending with the relevant period.”
On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to prohibit the possibility of a warrant being renewed immediately. Clauses 28 and 29 would currently theoretically allow for warrants of 12 months duration rather than the intended six.
Amendment 21, page 23, line 16, at end insert—
“(8A) In this section ‘urgent warrant’ has the same meaning as in section 28.”
See amendment 20.
Amendment 147, page 23, line 19, leave out clause 30.
Government amendments 54 to 57.
Amendment 142, in clause 30, page 24, line 45, at end insert—
“(10A) Section 21 (Approval of warrants by Judicial Commissioners) applies in relation to a decision to make a major modification of a warrant by adding a name or description as mentioned in subsection (2)(a) as it applies in relation to a decision to issue a warrant; and accordingly where section 21 applies a Judicial Commissioner must approve the modification.”
This amendment seeks to ensure that major modifications of warrants require judicial approval.
Government amendment 58.
Government amendments 59 to 73.
Amendment 317, page 34, line 21, leave out clause 44.
This amendment would delete a Clause which permits the creation of additional interception powers immigration detention facilities.
Amendment 15, in clause 45, page 34, line 42, leave out “C” and insert “D”.
Consequential upon amendment 16.
Amendment 16, page 35, line 7, at end insert—
“(3A) Condition C is that the interception is carried out for the purpose of obtaining information about the communications of an individual who, both the interceptor and the person making the request have reasonable grounds for believing, is outside the United Kingdom.”
On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to reinstate the current safeguard in RIPA that the person being intercepted must be outside the UK.
Amendment 17, page 35, line 8, leave out “C” and insert “D”.
Consequential upon amendment 16.
Government amendments 75 to 77.
Amendment 299, in clause 51, page 41, line 18, at end insert—
“(4) In proceedings against any person for an offence under this section in respect of any disclosure, it is a defence for the person to show that the disclosure was in the public interest.”
An amendment to introduce a public interest defence for interception disclosures.
Government amendment 74.
Government new clause 11—Persons who may make modifications under section 104.
Government new clause 12—Further provision about modifications under section 104.
Government new clause 13—Notification of modifications.
New clause 23—Members of Parliament—
“(1) This section applies where—
(a) an application is made to the Judicial Commissioner for a targeted equipment interference warrant, and
(b) the warrant relates to a member of a relevant legislature.
(2) This section also applies where—
(a) an application is made to the Judicial Commissioner for a targeted examination warrant, and
(b) the warrant relates to a member of a relevant legislature.
(3) Where any conduct under this Part is likely to cover material described above, the application must contain—
(a) a statement that the conduct will cover or is likely to cover such material,
(b) An assessment of how likely it is that the material is likely to cover such material.
(4) Further to the requirements set out elsewhere in this part, the Judicial Commissioner may only issue a warrant if—
(a) there are reasonable grounds for believing that an indictable offence has been committed, and
(b) there are reasonable grounds for believing that the material is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation in connection to the offence at (a), and
(c) other proportionate methods of obtaining the material have been tried without success or have not been tried because they were assessed to be bound to fail, and
(d) it is in the public interest having regard to:
(i) the public interest in the protection of privacy and the integrity of personal data,
(ii) the public interest in the integrity of communications systems and computer networks, and,
(iii) the democratic interest in the confidentiality of correspondence with members of a relevant legislature.”
This new clause would ensure that applications for a targeted equipment interference warrant or targeted examination warrant in relation to Parliamentarians are granted on application only to a Judicial Commissioner, removing the role of Secretary of State and applies additional safeguards to the correspondence of parliamentarians when a warrant for hacking is sought.
New clause 24—Audit trail of equipment interference—
“Any conduct authorised under a warrant issued under this Part must be conducted in a verifiable manner, so as to produce a chronological record of documentary evidence detailing the sequence of activities (referred to hereafter as ‘the audit trail’).”
See amendment 387.
Amendment 178, in clause 90, page 68, line 24, leave out subsection (1)(b).
See amendment 186.
Amendment 133, page 68, line 26, after “activity” insert
“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.
See amendment 131.
Amendment 134, page 68, line 29, after “operation” insert
“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.
See amendment 131.
Amendment 179, page 68, line 31, leave out subsection (1)(e).
See amendment 186.
Amendment 180, page 68, line 33, leave out subsection (1)(f).
See amendment 186.
Amendment 181, page 68, line 35, leave out subsection (1)(g).
See amendment 186.
Amendment 182, page 68, line 38, leave out subsection (1)(h).
See amendment 186.
Amendment 187, page 68, line 40, at end insert—
“(1A) A targeted equipment interference warrant may only be issued in relation to any of the matters that fall under subsection (1) if the persons, equipment, or location to which the warrant relates are named or specifically identified using a unique identifier.”

This amendment would ensure that all targets of hacking are properly named or otherwise identified.

Amendment 352, page 68, line 44, leave out paragraph (b).
See amendment 357.
Amendment 135, page 68, line 45, after “activity” insert
“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.
See amendment 131.
Amendment 136, page 68, line 47, after “operation” insert
“where each person is named or otherwise identified”.
See amendment 131.
Amendment 353, page 69, line 1, leave out paragraph (d).
See amendment 357.
Amendment 354, page 69, line 3, leave out paragraph (e).
See amendment 357.
Amendment 188, page 69, line 4, at end insert—
“(2A) A targeted examination warrant may only be issued in relation to any of the matters that fall under subsection (2) if the persons, equipment, or location to which the warrant relates are named or specifically identified using a unique identifier.”

This amendment would ensure that all targets of hacking are properly named or specifically identified.

Amendment 239, in clause 91, page 69, line 9, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 240, page 69, line 11, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 241, page 69, line 14, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 242, page 69, line 17, leave out subsection (3)(d).
Amendment 358, page 69, line 17, leave out paragraph (d) and insert—
“(d) the Judicial Commissioner has reasonable grounds for believing that the material sought is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation or operation to which the warrant relates.”
See amendment 361.
Amendment 243, page 69, line 20, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 244, page 69, line 22, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 245, page 69, line 24, leave out “and”.
Amendment 246, page 69, line 25, leave out subsection (2)(b).
Amendment 247, page 69, line 31, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 248, page 69, line 33, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 249, page 69, line 35, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 250, page 69, line 38, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 251, page 69, line 43, leave out subsection (3)(d).
Amendment 252, page 69, line 46, leave out subsection (4).
Amendment 359, page 70, line 8, after “crime” insert
“where there is reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been or is likely to be committed”.
See amendment 361.
Amendment 360, page 70, line 11, at end insert—
“(5A) A warrant may be considered necessary only where there is a reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been or is likely to be committed in relation to the grounds falling within this section.”
See amendment 361.
Amendment 361, page 70, line 25, at end insert—
“(10) A warrant may only authorise targeted equipment interference or targeted examination as far as the conduct authorised relates—
(a) to the offence as specified under (5)(b), or
(b) to some other indictable offence which is connected with or similar to the offence as specified under (5)(b).”

These amendments would require that there is reasonable suspicion of serious crime for a warrant authorising equipment interference to be issued. These amendments would introduce a requirement that warrants are only granted where there are reasonable grounds for believing material to be obtained will be of substantial value to the investigation or operation; the requirement of a threshold of reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been committed in order for a warrant to be granted; and the requirement that warrant applications contain this information.
This amendment would require that a warrant only authorises conduct in relation to the offence for which the warrant was sought, or other similar offences.

Amendment 258, page 70, line 26, leave out Clause 92.
Amendment 253, in clause 93, page 71, line 21, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.

Amendment 254, page 71, line 23, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 255, page 71, line 25, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 256, page 71, line 28, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioners”.
Amendment 257, page 71, line 31, leave out subsection (1)(d).
Amendment 382, page 71, line 31, leave out subsection (d) and insert—
“(d) the Judicial Commissioner has reasonable grounds for believing that the material sought is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation or operation to which the warrant relates.”

See amendment 362.

Amendment 362, page 71, line 35, leave out from “include” to the end of line 36 and insert—
“(a) the requirement that other proportionate methods of obtaining the material have been tried without success or have not been tried because they were assessed to be bound to fail, and
(b) the requirement that a “Cyber-Security Impact Assessment” has been conducted by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s technical advisors with regard to the specific equipment interference proposed, accounting for—
(i) the risk of collateral interference and intrusion, and
(ii) the risk to the integrity of communications systems and computer networks, and
the risk to public cybersecurity.”

These amendments require a technical assessment of proportionality accounting for the risks of the conduct proposed. These requirements would apply when applications from the intelligence services, the Chief of Defence Intelligence and law enforcement are considered. These amendments would introduce a requirement that warrants are only granted where there are reasonable grounds for believing material to be obtained will be of substantial value to the investigation or operation; the requirement of a threshold of reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been committed in order for a warrant to be granted; and the requirement that warrant applications contain this information.

Amendment 363, page 71, line 40, leave out Clause 94.
Government amendments 88 to 91.
Amendment 259, page 72, line 18, leave out Clause 95.
Amendment 364, in clause 96, page 72, line 37, leave out “law enforcement chief described in Part 1 or 2 of the table in Schedule 6” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.

Amendment 365, page 72, line 38, leave out “person who is an appropriate law enforcement officer in relation to the chief” and insert—
“law enforcement chief described in Part 1 of the table in Schedule 6”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 366, page 72, line 41, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 367, page 73, line 1, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 368, page 73, line 4, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 369, page 73, line 7, leave out paragraph (d).

See amendment 383.
Amendment 370, page 73, line 10, leave out “law enforcement chief described in Part 1 of the table in Schedule 6” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 371, page 73, line 11, leave out “person who is an appropriate law enforcement officer in relation to the chief” and insert—
“law enforcement chief described in Part 1 of the table in Schedule 6”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 372, page 73, line 13, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 373, page 73, line 17, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 374, page 73, line 20, leave out “law enforcement chief” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 375, page 73, line 23, leave out paragraph (d).

See amendment 383.
Amendment 376, page 73, line 26, leave out subsection (3).

See amendment 383.
Amendment 377, page 73, line 32, leave out paragraphs (b) and (c).
Amendment 378, page 73, line 38, after “Where” insert—
“an application for an equipment interference warrant is made by a law enforcement chief and”.

See amendment 383.
Amendment 379, page 73, line 42, leave out subsections (6) to (10).

See amendment 383.
Government amendment 92.
Amendment 380, page 74, line 15, leave out “whether what is sought to be achieved by the warrant could reasonably be achieved by other means” and insert—
“(a) the requirement that other proportionate methods of obtaining the material have been tried without success or have not been tried because they were assessed to be bound to fail, and
(b) the requirement that a “Cyber-Security Impact Assessment” has been conducted by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s technical advisors with regard to the
See amendment 383.

Amendment 381, in clause 96, page 74, line 18, leave out subsections (12) and (13)

See amendment 382.

Amendment 210, in clause 97, page 74, line 40, leave out “review the person’s conclusions as to the following matters” and insert “determine”.

Amendment 211, page 75, line 1, leave out subsection (2).

Amendment 270, page 75, line 1, leave out from “must” to end of line 2, and insert “subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right”.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners. This amendment is an alternative to amendments 210 and 211 (which are a package).

Amendment 183, in clause 101, page 78, leave out lines 21 to 27.

See amendment 186.

Amendment 184, page 79, leave out lines 3 to 7.

See amendment 186.

Amendment 185, page 79, leave out lines 8 to 12.

See amendment 186.

Amendment 186, page 79, leave out lines 13 to 18.

These amendments refine the matters to which targeted equipment interference warrants may relate by removing vague and overly broad categories including equipment interference for training purposes.

Amendment 386, page 79, line 21, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

“(b) precisely and explicitly the method and extent of the proposed intrusion and measures taken to minimise access to irrelevant and immaterial information, and

(c) in a separate “Cyber-Security Impact Assessment”,

(i) the risk of collateral interference and intrusion, and

(ii) the risk to the integrity of communications systems and computer networks, and

(iii) the risk to public cybersecurity, and how those risks and damage will be eliminated or corrected.”

See amendment 387.

Amendment 387, page 79, line 23, at end insert—

“(c) the basis for the suspicion that the target is connected to a serious crime or a specific threat to national security, and

(d) in declaration with supporting evidence,

(i) the high probability that evidence of the serious crime or specific threat to national security will be obtained by the operation authorised, and

(ii) how all less intrusive methods of obtaining the information sought have been exhausted or would be futile.”

These amendments require a technical assessment of proportionality accounting for the risks of the conduct proposed. These requirements would apply when applications from the intelligence services, the Chief of Defence Intelligence and law enforcement are considered. They would introduce a requirement that all equipment interference produces a verifiable audit trail.

These amendments would introduce a requirement that warrants are only granted where there are reasonable grounds for believing material to be obtained will be of substantial value to the investigation or operation; the requirement of a threshold of reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been committed in order for a warrant to be granted; and the requirement that warrant applications contain this information.

Amendment 355, page 79, leave out lines 31 to 36.

See amendment 357.

Amendment 356, page 79, leave out lines 37 to 44.

See amendment 357.

Amendment 357, page 80, leave out lines 8 to 12.

These amendments would ensure that all targets of hacking are properly named or specifically identified. Warrants may still be granted where the equipment in question belongs to or is in the possession of an individual or more than one person where the warrant is for the purpose of a single investigation or operation; or for equipment in a particular location or equipment in more than one location where for the purpose of a single investigation or operation.

Amendment 388, in clause 102, page 80, line 23, leave out “6” and insert “1”.

This specifies that hacking warrants may only last for one month.

Government amendments 93 to 96.

Amendment 149, page 82, line 1, leave out clause 104.

Government amendments 97 to 100.

Amendment 150, page 83, line 36, leave out clause 105.

Government amendments 101 to 113.

Amendment 151, page 84, line 34, leave out clause 106.

Government amendments 114 to 120.

Amendment 152, page 85, line 40, leave out clause 107.

Amendment 173, page 87, line 26, leave out clause 109.

Amendment 174, page 88, line 7, leave out clause 110.

Government amendments 121 and 122.

Amendment 175, page 88, line 35, leave out clause 111.

Amendment 176, in clause 114, page 92, line 6, leave out subsection (3)(e).

Amendment 177, page 92, line 8, leave out subsection (3)(f).

Government amendment 123.

Amendment 302, in clause 116, page 93, line 39, at end insert—

‘(4) In proceedings against any person for an offence under this section in respect of any disclosure, it is a defence for the person to show that the disclosure was in the public interest.”

An amendment to introduce a public interest defence for equipment interference disclosures.

Government amendment 124.

Amendment 383, in schedule 6, page 214, line 7, leave out part 2.

These amendments remove the power for law enforcement chiefs to issue equipment interference warrants on application from law enforcement officers and replace it with the power for Judicial Commissioners to issue equipment interference warrants on application from law enforcement chiefs. They also remove the power to issue equipment interference warrants from other officers listed in Part 2, Schedule 6. These amendments require a technical assessment of proportionality accounting for the risks of the conduct proposed. These requirements would apply when applications from the intelligence services, the Chief of Defence Intelligence and law enforcement are considered.

Government amendments 125 and 126.

Government new clause 10.
Amendment 488, page 167, line 9, leave out clause 216.

This amendment would remove the provision for national security notices.

Government amendment 78.

Amendment 196, in clause 216, page 167, line 14, after “State”, insert
“and Investigatory Powers Commissioner consider”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 197, page 167, line 32, after “State”, insert
“and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 198, page 168, line 9 [Clause 217], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner consider”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 199, page 168, line 27 [Clause 217], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 200, page 168, line 36 [Clause 217], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 201, page 168, line 40 [Clause 217], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 202, page 169, line 6 [Clause 218], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 203, page 169, line 8 [Clause 218], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Government amendments 84 and 85.

Amendment 490, page 169, line 2, leave out clause 218.

Consequential amendment following deletion of national security and technical capability notices.

Amendment 204, page 169, line 20 [Clause 218], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

See amendment 205.

Amendment 205, page 169, line 34 [Clause 218], after “State”, insert “and Investigatory Powers Commissioner”.

National Security and Technical Capability Notices should be subject to a double lock authorisation by the Secretary of State and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner.

Government amendment 87.

Amendment 491, page 170, line 10, leave out clause 219.

Consequential amendment following deletion of national security and technical capability notices.

Amendment 492, page 170, line 38, leave out clause 220.

Consequential amendment following deletion of national security and technical capability notices.

The Solicitor General: It is a pleasure to deal with the second group of amendments. It is a large group, which some hon. Members have described to me as “unprecedented”. I would not be so bold as to say that, having served a mere six years in this place, I concede, however, that the group is considerable. That perhaps reflects the huge and legitimate interest of Members of all parties in these particular parts of the Bill.

Parts 2 and 5 of the Bill were debated at length in Public Bill Committee. The Government have listened to what was said in those debates and we have brought back a number of amendments in response. These changes will strengthen protections for parliamentarians; enhance the safeguards for targeted thematic warrants; and provide greater assurances in respect of the obligations that might be placed on communications service providers.

Before I come on to the detail of the Government amendments, let me say a few words about one of the most important issues that we will discuss in this group: the authorisation of warrants.

When the Government published the draft Bill in November last year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the intention that warrants for the most sensitive powers available to the security and intelligence agencies would be authorised by the Secretary of State and approved by a senior independent judge. This would maintain democratic accountability and introduce a new element of judicial independence into the warrant authorising process. This double lock represents the most significant change in our lifetimes to the way in which the security and intelligence agencies exercise their vital powers. This is ground-breaking, innovative and important in striking a balance between the public interest in protecting our citizens and the interests of privacy. There is a range of views in the House on the question of authorisations, and I am sure that we will have a productive and weighty debate on these matters this evening.

The amendments tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) seek to remove the reference to judicial review principles. The House will be aware that the Joint Committee that considered the draft Bill said that it was “satisfied” with the wording of the Bill and that judicial review principles would “afford the Judicial Commissioner a degree of flexibility.” That flexibility is important. It provides that judicial commissioners can undertake detailed scrutiny of decisions where appropriate, but it does not oblige judges to undertake forensic scrutiny of even the most straightforward warrants, because to do so would be unnecessary and would threaten the operational agility of the security and intelligence agencies.

In our debate on the first group of amendments, we had a mini-debate—we might have strayed slightly off piste—on the language that should be used in relation to the scrutiny that we want the judicial commissioners to deploy when considering their part in the double-lock mechanism. However, I believe that the manuscript amendment provides precisely the assurance that Opposition Members were seeking in Committee and in subsequent correspondence, and I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras and other Opposition Members for agreeing to it. I am also grateful to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham)
for his involvement in these important matters. I believe that we now have an amendment that will satisfy the concerns of all hon. Members and provide the robust safeguard that we were all looking for. The wording that the parliamentary draftsmen have come up with ties in the privacy provision that we debated in the last group of amendments and puts this matter right at the heart of the Bill. We now have a robust double lock that will maintain the important distinction between the Executive and the judiciary. As I have said, this is truly groundbreaking.

I shall speak to the other Government amendments as quickly as I can, to ensure that other hon. Members can be accommodated in the debate. New clauses 9 and 13 will deliver on our commitment to strengthen the safeguards around so-called thematic warrants—that is, those targeted warrants that apply to a group of suspects rather than to an individual. They will introduce a new requirement that major modifications to warrants—adding the name of a gang member, for example—must be notified to a judicial commissioner as well as to the Secretary of State.

Amendments 97 and 54 will strictly limit the operation of modifications, making it clear that a warrant targeted at a single suspect cannot be modified to expand its scope to target several suspects. This builds on the assurances that I gave in Committee, and the provision will now be on the face of the Bill, should the amendments be accepted. New clauses 8 and 12 make it clear that modifications that engage the Wilson doctrine or legal professional privilege should be subject to the full double-lock authorisation.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am grateful to the Solicitor General for recognising the importance not only of the Wilson doctrine but of legal professional privilege. Would he accept that Government new clause 5 ought to be capable of embracing legal professional privilege within the overarching public interest in protecting privacy? Will he also continue to work with the Bar Council and the Law Society to ensure that we monitor the practical application of the protection of legal privilege in these matters?

The Solicitor General: My right hon. Friend speaks with passion and sincere conviction on such matters. He will be glad to know that, unlike in RIPA 2000, legal professional privilege is on the face of the Bill, which is a significant improvement over previous legislation. I reassure him that the provisions in the Bill that already embrace the importance of legal professional privilege have in large measure been warmly welcomed. The question is one of getting the detail right with particular regard to those occurrences, albeit rare, when the iniquity exemption—when people are pursuing a crime, which is not covered by legal professional privilege—applies and which might come under the purview of any warranty that is sought under the Bill’s provisions.

However, I am certainly not leaving the proposals to other agencies. I am working as hard as I can with expert bodies that have great interest and knowledge and, like my right hon. Friend, recognise the overwhelming public importance of the preservation of legal professional privilege. I am glad to say that that dialogue will continue and will allow for meaningful scrutiny and debate in the other place.

Turning to the Wilson doctrine, clause 24 of the Bill currently requires the Prime Minister to be consulted before a targeted interception or targeted examination warrant can be issued in respect of such communications. Amendments 53 and 90 will strengthen that by making it clear that the Prime Minister must agree to the interception of the parliamentarian’s communications, rather than simply be consulted.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Has my hon. and learned Friend noticed my amendment 1, in which I introduce the extra safeguard that the Speaker should be consulted?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend has tabled that amendment in the spirit of his speech on Second Reading, which referred to the role of the Speaker. I look forward to hearing any argument that he pursues on this matter. While I can see the merit in seeking to protect the privileges of parliamentarians through the office of the Speaker, my concern is that involving the Speaker in approving a particular warranty process or not puts us at risk of confusing Executive action with the roles of this place and of the Speaker in terms of the legislature.

The Prime Minister will be accountable to hon. Members for any decision that he or she may take on warranty through the normal process of questions, statements or being summoned to this House following an urgent question. The procedure in relation to any decision that the Speaker might make is more difficult—the mechanism might be a point of order. However, I am unsure whether that sort of challenge to the Chair would sit well with the role of the Speaker and the position of parliamentarians. There are difficulties in involving the Speaker.

Mr David Davis: Bluntly, I ask my hon. and learned Friend to ensure that proposals come forward whether or not the Law Society comes up with any. The erosion of legal professional privilege without any recourse to this House is the single biggest erosion of liberty in this country over the past decade and a half. If the Bill is to meet its requirements, it is vital that such reforms are found.

The Solicitor General: Unfortunately, I am afraid that I can give my hon. and learned Friend evidence of his account of accountability not working. When the case of the hon. Member for Brightton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who is a past, and no doubt future, leader of the Green party, went to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, the Government lawyer’s stance was that it was not a legally binding constraint on the agencies. When I put that
point to the Prime Minister, he was unable to answer. It is normally the case with the Wilson doctrine that the answer comes many years later, so an argument about accountability does not stand up here.

**The Solicitor General:** With respect to my right hon. Friend, I think it does, because we are putting in the Bill the Prime Minister’s role in approving the warrant; what we have for the first time is a very important statutory protection. Again, let us not forget the progress we have made in getting to the position we are in today. A few years ago, some of these conventions and operations were not even avowed, although that is not the case with the Wilson doctrine. Let us pause for a moment to remember what that doctrine is all about, which is making sure that hon. Members can carry out their public functions as office holders in a free and proper way, subject to the same laws as everybody else in this country—equality before the law applies to Members of this place as much as it does to other members of the public. I am sure that debate will be developed as we hear from speakers on this group.

On technical capability notices and national security notices, we have been very clear throughout this process that we will work closely with industry to ensure that the Bill provides the strongest protections to those who may be subject to obligations under this legislation. In Committee, we heard concerns that these notices were not subject to the same strict safeguards as the authorisations of warrants. We have listened to those concerns and responded with new clause 10, which applies the full double lock to the issue of notices under part 9 of the Bill. Following further engagement with industry, we have taken steps to address further concerns, and so amendment 86 will make it clear that national security notices cannot require companies to remove encryption; amendment 87 makes it clear that national security notices will not subject companies to conflicting obligations in law; and amendments 45, 70 to 73 and 122 make it clear that warrants must be served in an appropriate manner to a person who is capable of giving effect to it. That deals with the problems that companies with an international dimension have if these things are served to an inappropriate employee—somebody who does not have the power to deal with the warrant.

We have also tabled a number of minor and technical amendments, many of which respond directly to issues raised by the Opposition and by the SNP in Committee. Others, such as amendments 92 and 126, provide important clarification on issues relating to the Independent Police Complaints Commission and the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner in Scotland.

These important changes reflect this Government’s willingness to listen to suggestions that will improve this vital piece of legislation. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security will respond to other amendments when winding up. In the meantime, I look forward to another informed and wide-ranging debate.

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): Labour has taken a responsible and pragmatic approach to this Bill. We have supported the principle of a modern legal framework governing the use of investigatory powers, recognising that as communications have migrated online, the police and security services have lost capability, but equally, we know that much stronger safeguards are needed in law to protect individuals from the abuse of state power. That is the balance we have been trying to achieve.

Following Second Reading, I wrote to the Home Secretary setting out Labour’s seven substantial areas of concern, and I said that unless there was significant movement from the Government in those areas, we would be unable to support moves to put this Bill on the statute book by the December deadline. The group of amendments before us covers three of those seven issues: the double-lock process and the test to be applied by judicial commissioners; the protections for sensitive professions; and the position of trade unions with respect to this Bill. I will discuss each of those issues in turn, but I start by raising an issue that emerged in Committee.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the shadow Immigration Minister, identified a potential loophole that allowed warrants to be modified after initial approval without proper scrutiny by judicial commissioners, thereby undermining the double lock. The Government have part-closed this loophole for sensitive professions, but we feel they need to go further and close it for everyone, to ensure that people cannot be added to thematic warrants by modification without the involvement of a judge. I hope that Ministers will listen to that concern and reassure us that they are open to further discussion.

I know that the judicial review test and the double lock have been discussed today, so I will not detain the House long. As Members on both sides of the House know, one of our earliest demands was that there should be independent judicial oversight of the approval of warrants, and we were pleased when the Home Secretary conceded that point some months ago. Labour has always believed that the judicial commissioner must be able to consider the substance of the Home Secretary’s decision to issue a warrant, not just the process. Put simply, it must be a double lock, not a rubber stamp.

My hon. and learned Friend has done painstaking work on this issue in Committee and outside, and we thank in particular the Minister for Security for his willingness to listen to our concerns and for the manuscript amendment tabled today by the Home Secretary. It accepts the spirit of the proposals we tabled in Committee by ensuring that judicial commissioners will have to take into account their duties under the overarching privacy clause when reviewing the Home Secretary’s decision to grant a warrant. Judicial commissioners’ decisions must therefore be taken in line with human rights concerns. They must consider whether the same result could have been achieved by other means, and whether public interest concerns are met. In short, it will require much closer scrutiny of the initial decision of the Home Secretary and, significantly, bring greater clarity than the Government’s initial judicial review test would have done. We believe that that does indeed amount to a real double lock and, I have to say, a real victory for the Opposition. I confirm that we will support the Government’s amendment tonight.

When we talk about protections for sensitive professions—lawyers, journalists and Members of Parliament—it might sound to anyone watching this debate as though we in this House were once again seeking special status for ourselves in the eyes of the law. That is why it is important that I emphasise that these are not special
privileges or protections for Members of Parliament, but protections for members of the public. If someone seeks the help of an MP at a constituency advice surgery or of a lawyer, or blows the whistle to a journalist, they should be able to do so with a high degree of confidence that the conversation is confidential.

Robert Neill: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that a point we need to make is that the privilege is not that of the lawyer, but that of the client? It is therefore entirely proper for us to emphasise that particular care should be taken when dealing with privilege, which is attracted to the client. It is not ourselves as lawyers or as Members of Parliament that we put in a privileged position; it is the person who comes to seek advice who has to have protection.

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman makes a tremendously important point very well. This is about a basic protection for the public—a safeguard for the public. Also, on MPs and the Wilson doctrine, it is also a protection for our democracy that people can seek the advice of a Member of Parliament without fearing that someone else is listening. The hon. Gentleman is spot on, but I have to say that we do not feel that the Bill as it stands provides sufficient re assurance to the public that that confidentiality will be mostly respected. To be fair, the Government have moved on this point, but we believe that further work is needed, and that they need to continue to talk to the professional representative bodies. I will take each group in turn, starting with MPs.

We believe that the Bill is the right place to codify the thrust of the Wilson doctrine, but in our letter to the Home Secretary we expressed concern that the Bill required only that the Prime Minister be consulted before investigatory powers were used against MPs. We argued that the Prime Minister should personally be asked to approve any such action, and we are pleased that the Government have accepted this. I note that the Joint Committee on Human Rights, chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), has proposed a further strengthening of the doctrine and a role for the Speaker, who should be notified and able to challenge a decision on intercepting the communications of a Member of Parliament. We have not yet taken a view on that proposal. It is right to debate it as the Bill progresses to the Lords, and perhaps we can return to it later.

Joanna Cherry: Bearing in mind that the protection is for parliamentarians across these islands, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Presiding Officers in the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Welsh Assembly would have to be involved, not just the Speaker in this House?

Andy Burnham: That is a fair point, and the amendment tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham seeks to ensure that. Perhaps this is an issue that the Government need to think about. Of course the provisions should apply to Members of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The point made by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) should be accepted.

On journalists and journalistic sources, we welcome the fact that the Government have moved to put protections originally in the codes underpinning the Bill into the measure itself. We note, however, that the National Union of Journalists believes that wider protections are still needed, and the Government should continue to work with it to get that right.

Finally, on legal privilege there has been the least progress of all. Serious concerns have been expressed by the Bar Council and the Law Society about the fact that the provisions would weaken privacy protections currently enjoyed by lawyers, but those concerns are not adequately reflected in the Bill. It is disappointing that Ministers have yet to meet the legal bodies. [Interruption.] I did not quite hear what the Solicitor General said. I am happy to give way if he wants to clarify the position.

The Solicitor General: I have met the Bar Council, and I am meeting the Law Society on Wednesday, so I can assure him that there is engagement.

Andy Burnham: My mistake; I did hear the Solicitor General say that he was meeting those bodies this week. It is a little disappointing—I am not making a petty point—as we wish we could have made more progress before this debate. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said, this is extremely important, and our debates would be improved if there had been more progress in this area. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is firmly on the Solicitor General’s radar, and the excellent points made by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) show that there is concern in all parts of the House about moving further to get this right. In the absence of acceptable Government amendments, amendments 139 to 141 tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham are a step in the right direction. If amendments were forthcoming from the Government, we would certainly support them.

Mr David Davis: This point has just occurred to me, looking at the exchange of letters between Front-Bench spokespersons on bulk collection. What the right hon. Gentleman has been saying about privilege, whether legal, parliamentary or journalistic, applies only to targeted interception, but a great deal of bulk interception is shared with our allies, the National Security Agency, and there is no carve out for any of the protections that he has discussed. I can think of circumstances in which lawyers might be targeted by the NSA because their clients are suspects—or, indeed, irritating Members of Parliament might be targeted; I am thinking of the right hon. Gentleman. In the discussions between the Front-Bench spokespersons, when the bulk collection inquiry is progressed, that should be picked up, so that the issue is dealt with.

Andy Burnham: I do not know whether that was a compliment, but I will take it as such. The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. To be fair to the Government, there has been movement on thematic warrants: if an MP or a journalist was to be added to a thematic warrant, there would be a judicial oversight process. The right hon. Gentleman mentions taking that principle even further and relating it to bulk data. I think that David Anderson would need to consider how practically possible that would be, but the right hon. Gentleman’s point needs to be considered.
Labour amendment 262 relates to trade unions and would amend clause 18 to ensure, in statute, that undertaking legitimate trade union activities is never in future a reason for the security services or police using investigatory powers. In recent times, we have been shining a light on this country’s past and learning more about how we have been governed and policed. Revelations about Bloody Sunday, Hillsborough, phone hacking, child sexual exploitation and other matters have all in different ways shaken people’s faith in the institutions that are there to protect us. They raise profound questions about the relationship between the state and the individual. Confronted with those uncomfortable truths about abuses of power, this House needs to provide a proper response and legislate to prevent them in the future. We need to redress the balance in favour of ordinary people and away from the Executive.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Unite, the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians and the GMB, which fought a long campaign to raise the scandal of the illegal blacklisting and secret vetting of construction workers? Can he assure the House that such a gross injustice could not be perpetrated against innocent workers again, and that his amendment would provide an absolute guarantee that legitimate trade union activities would be excluded from monitoring by the security services and the police?

Andy Burnham: I will indeed pay tribute to Unite, GMB and UCATT, which, in the past couple of months, have reached out-of-court settlements on blacklisting—a major and historic victory on their part. I will come on to explain the prime concern behind the Opposition’s amendment, and the case that most justifies our bringing it forward.

In the past, the actions of some in senior positions in politics and in the police have unfairly tarnished the reputation of today’s services and today’s policemen and women. That is precisely why it is crucial that we continue to open up on the past. Transparency is the best way of preventing lingering suspicions about past conduct from contaminating trust in today’s services, and it will help us to create a modern legal framework that better protects our essential freedoms, human rights and privacy.

One such freedom essential to the health of our democracy is trade union activity. Historically, trade unions have played a crucial role in protecting ordinary people from the abuses of Governments and mighty corporations. It is that crucial role, and the freedom of every citizen in this land to benefit from that protection, that amendment 262 seeks to enshrine in law. There will be those who claim that it is unnecessary and the product of conspiracy theorists, but I have received confirmation from the security services that, in the past—under Governments of both colours, it has to be said—trade unions have indeed been monitored. In the cold war, there may well have been grounds for fears that British trade unions were being infiltrated by foreign powers trying to subvert our democracy. That helps to explain the wariness of many Labour Members about legislation of this kind. Outside the security services, it seems that some activity went way beyond that. There is clear evidence that such monitoring was used for unjustified political and commercial reasons, breaching privacy and basic human rights. I mentioned the case of the Shrewsbury 24 on Second Reading, and I remain of the view that that is an outstanding injustice that needs to be settled.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) anticipated, however, I want tonight to focus on the blacklisting of construction workers, which clearly illustrates the necessity of the amendment we have tabled. We have seen the settlement of claims, as I have mentioned, against companies such as Carillion, Balfour Beatty, Costain, Keir, Laing O’Rourke, Sir Robert McAlpine, Skanska UK and Vinci. It has now been proven that those companies subscribed to central lists of workers that contained information on their political views and trade union activities. Those lists were used to vet people and deny them work. That affected the livelihoods of hundreds of people, and it was an outrageous denial of their basic human rights.

By seeking an out-of-court settlement, it would seem that the companies concerned are trying to limit reputational damage, but I do not think that the matter can be allowed to rest there. We need to understand how covertly gained police information came into the hands of a shady organisation called the Consulting Association, which compiled and managed the blacklist.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the remit of the Pitchford inquiry, which has been set up to look into the use of undercover policing, really needs to be extended to cover what went on in Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom or we will never get the full truth of this?

Andy Burnham: That is certainly one way of addressing the concerns that I am putting on record tonight, but another would be to have a separate inquiry into blacklisting per se. Not only was it outrageous, but it is still largely not known about. Most people outside trade union circles do not know that it happened. That is why, by one means or another, there needs to be a process of inquiry about it.

We would not know about the practice were it not for the outstanding work of the Blacklist Support Group and individuals such as Dave Smith who have exposed how much of the information held on individuals appeared to emanate from police sources. For instance, the files hold detailed descriptions of the movements of a number of people at the June 1999 demonstration “Carnival Against Capital”. As a Guardian article by Dave Smith and Phil Chamberlain pointed out, it seems highly unlikely that that intelligence was the product of a site manager who just happened to be passing through London on that day.

The Blacklist Support Group referred the matter to the Independent Police Complaints Commission in 2012. I want to put on record what it found, because it is pretty shocking. Having looked into the concerns, the IPCC wrote in a letter to the Blacklist Support Group:

“The scoping also identified that it was likely that all Special Branches were involved in providing information about potential employees who were suspected of being involved in subversive activity.”

All special branches were likely to have given information that was used to compile the blacklist.
Steve Rotheram: May I expand on the point that my right hon. Friend is making? Perhaps some people outside the Chamber will not understand what subversive activities were. In those days, subversive activities included complaining about health and safety because a person was dying on a building site every single day. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is hardly subversive activity?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those were people who were trying to protect their workmates and colleagues. An individual who protested outside Fiddler’s Ferry power station near us in the north-west was trying to safeguard people’s safety at work, but they were subjected to this outrageous abuse of their rights.

Mr George Howarth: My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful case. I do not know whether he is aware of this, but when the issue first arose during the last Parliament, I took it up with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to ask whether there was any involvement on the part of the Metropolitan police. I got a letter back not from the commissioner himself, but from a senior member of his staff, who now works for one of the agencies, flatly denying that there was any such involvement. Something was happening, as the excerpt my right hon. Friend has read out shows, yet even as recently as three or four years ago, the Metropolitan police utterly denied it.

9.15 pm

Andy Burnham: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is quite clear that “all Special Branches” provided information. There it is in the letter from the IPCC in 2013. I do not think that its astounding confirmation has been properly followed up. As I said in response to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), people have a right to know what information was passed by whom in the police service, who sanctioned the passing of that information to such organisations and the policy under which passing that information was justified.

This is yet another scandal from our country’s past, in which it seems that the establishment rode roughshod over the rights of ordinary people. I pay tribute to the Home Secretary for the courage she has shown in facing up to our past, but the evidence trail has not yet reached its end. This process must continue: we must continue to go wherever the evidence takes us. Such evidence is now taking us to blacklisting and, of course, to Orgreave and its aftermath. In my view, the case for inquiries into that knowledge is unanswerable. I again call on the Government to initiate those inquiries so that people can have the truth.

For tonight, we call on the Government to accept Labour’s amendment to provide protection in law for legitimate trade union activity. Had that provision been in place years ago, it could have prevented the abuses that we saw with the blacklisting of workers. If it could be agreed, such an historic move would give some recognition to the long and proud campaign for fairness in the eyes of the law that has been fought by trade unionists. It would also show a real willingness on the part of the Government to create a modern law that is as much about protecting the rights of the working person as it is about keeping us safe in the 21st century.

Sir Edward Leigh: I rise to speak to my amendment 1, which is, in clause 24, page 19, line 8, at the end to insert that where the subject of the snooping, frankly, is a Member of the House of Commons, that snooping must also involve a consultation with the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Member’s explanatory statement helpfully says:

“This amendment would require the Secretary of State to consult the Speaker before deciding to issue a warrant that applied to an MP’s communications.”

This is a small, but I believe important amendment. It is of course perfectly proper and pertinent that, as we all agree, the Secretary of State consults the Prime Minister before deciding to issue a targeted interception or examination warrant regarding an MP’s communication with a constituent or somebody else. We all understand that, and it is not controversial. However, the Prime Minister is the Queen’s chief Minister of Government and is, by its very nature, a political office holder. It goes without saying that we have complete confidence in the present Prime Minister that no such thing would happen, but we must not make permanent laws based on impermanent situations. Our conscientious Prime Minister, who I am sure is both aware of and respectful of parliamentary privilege, may be succeeded, somewhere down the line, by a man or woman who does not esteem the dearly won privileges of this House. They are not our privileges: they are not for us; they are for the protection of our democracy and of our constituents.

It may be that a future Prime Minister would be under intolerable pressure during a time of national crisis. It is not difficult to imagine that circumstances may come into play in which a future Prime Minister authorises a politically sensitive or even a politically motivated interception against an Opposition Member, or indeed against a Government Member if that Member of Parliament is opposed to the Prime Minister’s policies. We need only think of the intense debates that took place during the Vietnam war and the Iraq war. We remember that the present Leader of the Opposition had strong views about the importance of communicating with Sinn Féin at a time when that was considered intensely controversial—indeed, some at the time would have argued that it was a threat to national security. I am not defending the actions of the present Leader of the Opposition, or making any comment on them one way or another, but one can surely imagine that there may be future situations when there is intense debate on a matter of national security and a Prime Minister may be politically motivated to intercept communications between a constituent and a Member of Parliament.

I believe that it is important to uphold the exclusive cognisance of this House to regulate its own internal affairs, apart from the Government. This House is not the Government but the scrutineer of Government. To reply directly to the point the Solicitor General made, the amendment does not put MPs above the law—far from it. Our conduct is completely within the jurisdiction of normal criminal courts, and the criminal law applies to us as to anyone else. But it is vital that communications relating to our role—only to our role and to no other part of our life—as democratically elected representatives of the people, in a free country, may be protected from Government observation and interference, just as it is vital to remove any temptation to politicise the work of the police.
Amendment 1 would solve that problem, by invoking the importance of the Speaker, an impartial office holder not beholden to any political party or indeed to the Government. You will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the office of Speaker is among the most important in the land. It ranks above all non-royal people in this realm, excepting the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and the Lord President of the Council. The Speaker is endowed with his or her office by the trust placed in him by fellow Members of Parliament, and his impartiality is central to the proper functioning of Parliament. Once he has held the office of Speaker, never again can he re-enter politics—that is a clear convention of this House. He is utterly and completely impartial.

Dr Murrison: I have a great deal of sympathy for what my hon. Friend has to say, but does he share my concern that the Speaker might be seen as a rather in-house arbiter in these matters? In recent times we have seen where that leads us. Does my hon. Friend not have more confidence in the double-lock arrangement that the Front-Bench team has rightly instituted?

Sir Edward Leigh: I am perfectly happy—I think everyone in this House is—with the proposal that if the Secretary of State for the Home Department wishes to investigate communications with a Member of Parliament, the Prime Minister should always also be consulted. No one objects to that. But who appoints the Home Secretary? The Prime Minister does. They are both politicians—by their very nature, they are political animals—and members of the Executive. I have to ask my hon. Friend. Friends to look beyond the present situation; they may indeed have the utmost confidence in the present Secretary of State for the Home Department and the present Prime Minister, but they should always separate their view of those currently on the Front Bench from what might happen in the future.

All I am asking is that if the Government are taking the extreme step of intercepting communications between constituents and Members of Parliament, someone entirely non-political, namely the Speaker, should also be consulted. This is the point: he is no mere presiding officer. We do not call him “the presiding officer”, as is the case in other Assemblies and Parliaments. He is the upholder of order and the defender of the House’s privileges and immunities. I am absolutely not suggesting that he should be dragged into politics. But there is already a precedent. Have we not involved the Speaker very recently in consideration of whether amendments should be separately considered under English votes for English laws? Nobody—certainly not the Government—has suggested that that is dragging the Speaker into politics.

I am a member of the Procedure Committee, and we examined this issue in great detail. The system—I am not defending EVEL as that is not the subject of today’s debate—seems to be working fairly well. Nobody is calling the Speaker to order or complaining about his decision, but there is in a sense a double lock that seems to work quite well.

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend makes a proper point about the Speaker’s role in English votes for English laws, and there are other certification procedures that he, I, and others know about. There is a difference, however, because that relates to the legislative process in this House, and it deals precisely with the point about exclusive cognisance and the privileges of this House in dealing with its own rules and regulations. There is therefore a difference between the points that my hon. Friend raises and involvement in an Executive decision.

Sir Edward Leigh: There may be a difference, but I do not think it is a substantive one. [ Interruption. ] I am delighted that you are now sitting in the Chair, Mr Speaker, because I am talking about you, which I know you always enjoy me doing.

Mr David Davis: Surely one key point is that there would be an inhibition on a Secretary of State or a Prime Minister in the process of approaching the Speaker. They may not be inhibited about talking to each other about an uncomfortable Opposition Member, or indeed an uncomfortable Government Member, but they would be inhibited about approaching the Speaker. That is not separate to what goes on in the House. The one case that we have had was that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), when there was an approach to the Speaker of the day, which I am afraid ended in tears.

Sir Edward Leigh: Exactly. It is an inhibition, and I presume that the Home Secretary and Prime Minister would take that extreme step only because they were convinced that this was a matter of national security. Before they took such a step, which we all agree is serious, would it do any harm to consult somebody who is obviously completely separated from politics?

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Is there not an issue of accountability here? If the judgment is wrong, would it not be extremely regrettable for the Speaker to be dragged into the court of public opinion as someone who got that judgment wrong, as opposed to the Executive or the Prime Minister who could properly be hauled over the coals?

Sir Edward Leigh: I understand that example, but it can be taken to extremes. Every day of the week the Speaker makes decisions. He decides how we conduct our business and who should be called, and we could always argue that we should not give the Speaker more powers because he might make a mistake or be called to account. We are not talking about the Speaker being involved in whether we should pass a particular Bill or controversy; we are talking about a very narrow circumstance in which the Government of the day have decided to intercept the communications of a Member of Parliament. All I am suggesting is that before they take that step, they consult the Speaker.

Mr John Hayes: There are few Members of this House whom I hold in higher regard than I do my hon. Friend, but like it or not, his proposal would draw the Speaker into issues of national security. He is describing highly sensitive matters of a kind that Speakers have not historically been involved in. It would be a radical change.

Sir Edward Leigh: The Minister makes that point, but as Members of Parliament we should try to think outside the political box and our natural loyalties, and just for a moment think about what might happen in
future in a time of crisis. Do we really want to codify the Wilson doctrine in legislation, and say that in future any Government—it does not matter that the Prime Minister ticks a box, because he is also a member of the Government—without any independent second guessing, can intercept those communications and act on them? I understand the Minister’s arguments and assure him that I am not trying to drag the Speaker into politics. I am trying only to protect the traditional privileges of the House. “Privileges” is the wrong word, because it conveys the impression that we are concerned about ourselves. We are not important in all this. What is important is people’s confidence in communicating with their Member of Parliament.

9.30 pm

Mr George Howarth: The difficulty with the hon. Gentleman’s argument is that he assumes that the Prime Minister of the day, regardless of which party he is in, would take such a decision in a vacuum, but it simply could not happen that way. He would have to be satisfied first with proper legal advice that it is in the interests of national security. Secondly, he would have to be satisfied that it is both necessary and proportionate. Passing all those tests requires a lot of advice, and I doubt that any Prime Minister would take the decision lightly. Bringing any Speaker into that decision-making process means that they must be linked to that legal and security advice to satisfy themselves in the same way as the Prime Minister would have to do. I therefore cannot see the difference.

Sir Edward Leigh: I can see what the difference would be in a time of national crisis. The information will be clearly set out by the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister. I do not believe that it would be beyond the abilities of any Speaker now or in future to take an informed decision and to be convinced by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary that the interception was not a political interference but a matter of national security.

All hon. Members agree on that—that the communications can be intercepted if it is a matter of national security—and we all agree that they should not be intercepted because it is politically expedient to do so. All I am asking is that the Speaker, who by the nature of his office does not consider political expediency, can say, “Yes. This is a matter of national security.” I do not believe that that is beyond his abilities. After all, he is ably assisted—is he not?—by the Clerk of the House and a band of parliamentary Clerks, most of whom have spent years accumulating knowledge, wisdom and experience of the ways of the House. They are not radicals or people who will take decisions lightly or wantonly. Together, they form a deposit of institutional memory, which the Prime Minister and No. 10, by the nature of their daily tasks of government and political management, can never be. They must always, necessarily, take a short-term view. That is not a criticism but the nature of the office.

Each of the privileges of this House, in addition to being daily fought for and won over the centuries, exists for a reason. Like many traditions and customs, we interfere with them at our peril. I appeal to the Minister of State, who is deeply aware of the importance of traditions and customs. We may wonder today why this or that one exists, but if we disregard them, we will soon find that the dangers they protect us from are very real.

We also may doubt the day will ever come when a Prime Minister would dare to authorise the monitoring of Members’ communications for politicised reasons, but it is therefore better to remove even the possibility of that temptation existing by simply requiring the Secretary of State to consult the Speaker. It has been said before but it is worth saying again. Nearly 375 years ago, William Lenthall reminded the sovereign that the Speaker had “neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here.”

All I am asking in amendment 1 is that that tradition be maintained. We would do well to continue to put our trust in that defender of our law and our liberties.

Joanna Cherry: The Scottish National party has tabled a significant number of amendments to parts 2 and 5, and chapter 1 of part 9, which are under discussion, but given the constraints of time I will focus my fire on only a few of them, and mainly on part 2 and the system of judicial warrantry.

The Government have put their new double-lock system of warrantry at the heart of their arguments that there are sufficient safeguards in the Bill. In the SNP, we believe that the system of warrantry is too limited in scope and seriously deficient. We have tabled extensive amendments to extend the system of judicial warrantry beyond part 2, so that it would cover warrants to obtain, retain and examine communications data and police hacking warrants. We think the nature and scope of those warrants, and the grounds on which they are granted, are very important.

Amendments 267, 268, 272 and 306 to clause 15 deal with the scope of warrants. The problem with clause 15 as currently drafted is that it permits warrants to be issued in respect of people whose names are not known or knowable when the warrant is sought. This is confirmed by clause 27, which provides that a thematic warrant must describe the relevant purpose or activity and that it must “name or describe as many of those persons as is reasonably practicable”.

Our amendments would retain the capacity of a single warrant to permit the interception of multiple individuals, but require an identifiable subject matter or premises to be provided. We have tabled associated amendments to clause 27. Taken together, they would narrow the current provisions, which effectually permit a limitless number of unidentified individuals to have their communications intercepted.

It is not just the SNP who are concerned about the scope of the thematic warrants. We heard evidence in Committee from Sir Stanley Burnton, the Interception of Communications Commissioner, and from Lord Judge, the chief surveillance commissioner. Both expressed detailed concerns about the breadth of clause 15 as currently drafted. They said it was too wide and needed to be more focused. David Anderson QC, although in favour of thematic warrants, said that clause 15 as currently drafted is “considerably more permissive” than he had envisaged. There we have three very distinguished experts working in this field underlining the necessity of the amendments.

That is a real concern, because it takes us back to our old friend, or in our case our old enemy, bulk powers. If we create thematic warrants, communications intercepted
under bulk powers can be trawled through thematically to look for groups of people sharing a common purpose or carrying out a particular activity. One difficulty with that is that it provides for an open-ended warrant that could encompass many hundreds or thousands of people. That is just not right. It is suspicionless interference. It is not targeted and it is not focused. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House, if they are concerned about supporting an SNP amendment, to comfort themselves with the fact that it is an amendment the necessity of which has been underlined by persons as distinguished as the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and the independent reviewer of terrorism.

I now turn to the grounds, set out in clause 18, on which warrants may be granted, and to SNP amendments 212 and 213. The purpose of the amendments is to remove the economic wellbeing of the UK as a separate purpose for granting a warrant and to require that grounds for interception are tied to a threshold of reasonable suspicion of criminal behaviour. We have tabled similar amendments to the grounds for seeking warrants in relation to communications data under parts 3 and 4, and hacking under part 5. If these amendments are not allowed, people simply will not be able to predict when surveillance powers may be used against them, because the discretion granted to the Secretary of State is so broad as to be arbitrary.

The Joint Committee on the draft Bill recommended that the Bill include a definition of national security, which, of course, is the first ground. I call on the Government, not for the first time, to produce an amendment that defines national security. The Bill is sprinkled liberally with the phrase “national security”. The Government need to tell us what they mean by that phrase, so I call on them to define it. This is not just theoretical or, as the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) called it, merely a law faculty debate; it is a serious issue about language being precise so that there can be some predictability. In the past, the courts have responded with considerable deference to Government claims of national security; they view them not so much as matters of law but as Executive-led policy judgments. As a legal test, therefore, “national security”, on its own, is meaningless unless the Government attempt to tell us what they mean by it.

Dr Murrison: I am listening with great interest to the hon. and learned Lady. She will be aware that the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy has long been trying to define “national security” but has failed to come up with an answer. Will she not accept that the term must necessarily remain loose?

Joanna Cherry: No, I do not accept that. As I say, the phrase is sprinkled throughout the Bill to justify very broad and intrusive powers, and it is incumbent on the Government to explain what they mean by it. We have heard powerful speeches and interventions from Labour Members about how these loose phrases can sometimes be misinterpreted to enable individuals who have done absolutely nothing wrong, such as trade unionists going about their lawful business, to have their livelihoods and communications interfered with. So if the Government want these powers, they have to define the grounds on which they can be exercised.

That takes me to economic wellbeing. The Joint Committee on the Bill said that economic wellbeing should be defined, but the Intelligence and Security Committee went further and said it should be subsumed within the national security definition and that otherwise it was “unnecessarily confusing and complicated”. It was basically saying that if economic harm to the wellbeing of the UK was so serious that it amounted to a threat to national security, it would be covered by clause 18(2)(a). That was the point the ISC made. We do not need a separate category.

Mr Grieve: I intend to touch on this briefly when I speak. It is right to point out that, after making that recommendation, the Committee had the opportunity to hear considerable further evidence provided by the Government, and as a result we were unanimously persuaded that keeping “economic wellbeing” as a separate category was justified. I will amplify my remarks when I speak later, but that was the conclusion we reached.

Joanna Cherry: I do not wish to quibble with the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s conclusion, but unfortunately the rest of us have not been favoured with the basis on which he and his Committee reached it. I am yet to be convinced that the “economic wellbeing” ground is a stand-alone ground that cannot be subsumed within “national security”. If the Government can convince me otherwise, or want to try, I will listen, but I have yet to be convinced, despite having sat through many days of the Bill Committee.

Another problem with the grounds relates to the lack of any “reasonable suspicion” threshold. This recurs throughout the Bill. Our amendments would insert such a requirement. At present, intrusive powers can be authorised to prevent and detect serious crime and, in the case of communications data, even just to collect tax, prevent disorder or in the interests of public safety. These general purposes, however, are left wide open to broad interpretation and abuse if one does not also require a threshold of suspicion. A requirement of reasonable suspicion, when one invokes the purpose of preventing and detecting serious crime, would have the effect of preventing the abusive surveillance of campaigners, unionists and victims by undercover police; police surveillance of journalists’ lawful activities; and surveillance by the agencies of law-abiding non-governmental organisations and MPs. This is not fanciful. We have seen law-abiding NGOs and MPs having their correspondence and activities interfered with in recent times, so these are not just theoretical examples.

The “reasonable suspicion” threshold was recently held to be necessary by the European Court of Human Rights in a case concerning the Russian interception regime, Zakharov v. Russia, with which many hon. Members will be familiar. The Solicitor General will try to make a distinction—if we had time, we could argue about that—but there is a widely held view that the standard set by the ECHR in that case is not met by the grounds in clause 18. I therefore urge fellow hon. Members to support our amendment to clause 18 to ensure that the United Kingdom’s investigatory powers regime meets international human rights standards.

It will be clear from what I have said already that the SNP very much shares Labour’s concerns about the monitoring of legitimate trade union activity. I understand
that the Home Secretary has acknowledged those concerns and given some sort of assurance to the shadow Home Secretary. However, like Labour, the SNP will require an amendment to make that absolutely clear on the face of the Bill. If Labour Members want to push their amendment to a vote this evening, we will support it.

9.45 pm

I am conscious of the time, so I want next to look briefly at judicial review. We have talked about that quite a bit already today. I accept that the Government’s manuscript amendment is an improvement, but in my respectful argument it does not go far enough, and that is because of something I said earlier today. All of us in this Chamber who have practised law and advised clients about judicial review know that key to doing so is knowing what the reasons were for the original decision, and there is absolutely nothing in the Bill requiring the Secretary of State to give any reasons for her or his decision to issue a warrant. Interestingly, clause 21(4) requires the judicial commissioner to give his or her reasons, but the Secretary of State is not required to give reasons. As long as it remains a judicial review standard, I do not see what it is that the judicial commissioner is reviewing, in the absence of reasons for the original decision.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) made the point earlier that the Home Secretary signs many of these warrants—sometimes up to 10 a day. I feel for her in that she should have to issue reasons for them, but the fact that we are talking about judicial review of a decision for which reasons are not required underlines the inadequacy of what is currently proposed.

Briefly, clause 24 relates to parliamentarians and their protection. We heard an eloquent speech from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) about his suggestion that the Speaker should oversee the process in some way. I have already commented that, as envisaged under the amendments tabled by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, it should be the Presiding Officers in the case of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Parliaments. The SNP suggests, in our new clause 23, that a targeted examination warrant relating to a parliamentarian should bypass the politicians completely and be granted only by a judicial commissioner, and we have tabled similar amendments to part 5.

The reason for that is to preserve the Wilson doctrine and depoliticise the process. It is illogical to suggest that an adequate replacement to the previous, complete prohibition on surveillance of politicians is to have a clause that expressly allows surveillance of politicians, only requiring the Secretary of State to consult the Prime Minister prior to authorising interception or hacking. It completely undermines the Wilson doctrine, therefore we cannot support it and would urge the Government to look at our suggestion that it should be a judicial commissioner who authorises warrants to interfere with the communications and the equipment of parliamentarians.

Before I sit down, let me turn briefly to legal professional privilege. I add my voice to the concerns already expressed about the inadequacy of what is in the Bill. It is not just the Bar Council and the Law Society of England and Wales, that are worried about this, the Law Society of Scotland and the Faculty of Advocates have also made representations. Government Members may curl their lips, but legal professional privilege is not there to protect lawyers, just as parliamentary privilege is not there to protect politicians. It is there to protect people who consult lawyers, and those people are our constituents. There is a long-standing convention in England and Scotland that legal communications are privileged, save for the iniquity exception. That is not reflected in the Bill and it needs to be.

There are many more amendments that I would like to speak to, but I am not going to, in recognition of the fact that others deserve time to speak. I would simply say again that the Scottish National Party considers the time afforded to debate the many amendments tabled to this serious and far-reaching Bill to be wholly inadequate, and there are many people beyond this Chamber who also take that view.

Stephen McPartland: I shall speak to four different sets of amendments. As I said earlier, it is a difficult Bill to support, but I acknowledge the work that Ministers and the Government have done in trying to work with Government Members and Opposition Members to produce a Bill with which we can all begin to start to feel comfortable. I am not a lawyer, but amendments 147 to 152, which stand in my name, are designed to leave out clauses that provide for the modification of warrants. In my view as a non-lawyer, these changes seem, through a major modification, to have the potential to change the key components of a warrant. I wonder at what stage a new warrant should be drafted instead. How far can the warrant be modified before it needs to become a new warrant? The warrant provisions seem to be very wide ranging and very ill defined.

The next set comprises amendments 178 to 186, which try to refine the matters to which targeted equipment interference warrants may relate by removing vague and overly broad categories, including equipment interference for training purposes. People outside this place may not be aware of it, but when we talk about “equipment interference”, we are basically talking about hacking devices that can hack into mobile phones, computers, email systems, or the apps that people use for their banking. “Equipment interference” is a nice way of saying state-authorised hacking, which is what we are talking about here. To me, this is an incredibly intrusive power, permitting real-time surveillance, as well as access to everything we store on our digital devices, from text messages to address books, calendars and emails, along with the websites people visit, which apps they use and how they use them.

The Bill also seems to me to provide for thematic hacking warrants, which amount to general warrants to hack groups or types of individuals in the UK. Hacking is not restricted in the Bill to equipment belonging to, used by or in the possession of particular persons or organisations. Even the director of GCHQ has apparently raised concerns about the breadth of the current definitions, which could apply to the equipment of a hostile foreign intelligence service. We here might say, “So what? So be it. That’s what they’re there for”, but what would we say if those warrants allowed all employees and family members of a particular company or the people who visit a particular religious venue or who live in a particular road to be hacked? Would we still say, “So what? Should we be worried?” This may sound unlikely, but the draft equipment interference code of practice permits the targeting of people who are “not of intelligence interest”. If that is not carte blanche, I do not know what is,
because it is in effect allowing hacking of the equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Mr Davis Davis: I am entirely in agreement with my hon. Friend on this. He says that it might not involve hacking a whole street, but it could easily involve hacking two layers of contacts. If I call 100 people, and then the people called by those 100 people are investigated, that would be a very typical intelligence exercise, pursuing the two rings of contacts. That could involve 100,000 people, most of whom have nothing to hide but could become under permanent surveillance by the state.

Stephen McPartland: I totally agree with my right hon. Friend's point. As a Master of Science and Technology, I, of course, have never hacked anything in my life and would never dream of doing so, but it is not a particularly difficult thing to do at the moment. Many people do not appreciate that the measures in the Bill are authorising the state hacking of equipment. Combined with other measures in the Bill, this is not just about hacking the equipment of somebody who may be of particular interest as part of a terrorist organisation; we are talking about every man, woman and child with an electronic device inside the UK. That is where my concerns arise.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I are not entirely in agreement with my hon. Friend on this. He says that it might not involve hacking a whole street, but it could easily involve hacking two layers of contacts. If I call 100 people, and then the people called by those 100 people are investigated, that would be a very typical intelligence exercise, pursuing the two rings of contacts. That could involve 100,000 people, most of whom have nothing to hide but could become under permanent surveillance by the state.

My amendments 196 to 205 are, like the rest, probing amendments to try to get these issues debated and to make people aware of them. They would provide that national security and technical capability notices be subject to a double-lock authorisation by the Secretary of State and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. I appreciate that new clause 10 and other Government amendments are moving some way towards achieving that, which might make what I am about to say obsolete. I do not fully understand those amendments yet, as I am not a lawyer, as I have said.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, but they are not allowed hacking of equipment of anybody anywhere in the UK or overseas, if the agencies choose to do so.
Minister on. The first relates to thematic warrants, and I want to follow up on the points made by the shadow Home Secretary and the shadow Immigration Minister on my own Front Bench, as well as those made by the hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry).

Our starting point is that we must remember that thematic warrants give enormous powers. Those who are authorised have the wide-ranging powers to read someone’s emails, which could include a report sent by a hospital about a medical condition, to listen to their phone calls, to see to whom they have been making calls, to hack their mobile phone and turn it into a listening device, and to look at all their information, including from their bank. The powers are very wide ranging. Such warrants are supposed to be targeted, so I urge the Minister to recognise the feeling across the House that powers are needed to make us safe, but that the Government have not yet sufficiently delineated and narrowed the circumstances in which they should be used. I urge the Government to talk to the Opposition Front-Bench team, their Back Benchers and the SNP to make the targeted powers more targeted.

Mr Winnick: What my right hon. and learned Friend says sums up the position. The Opposition Front-Bench team has managed to negotiate concessions from the Government. I accept their good intentions—the Opposition Front Bench—but the fact is that the powers that the Bill will give the security authorities are unacceptable despite all the concessions, which is a good reason for voting against Third Reading.

Ms Harman: Let us see whether the Minister and the Government will recognise that we are all trying to get the same thing here. We are trying not only to keep the public safe, but to protect privacy. However, we do that—my hon. Friend will recognise this—in the knowledge that the security services do get tempted to overreach their powers. As night follows day, that is what happens.

There are so many examples, after which people think, “How on earth could that ever happen?” It happens because when the security services have powers, they get tempted to overreach them. That is why safeguards and narrow definitions are so important. For example, I was subject to security service surveillance, not because I was subversive but because I was fighting for human rights, women’s rights and workers’ rights. The point is that if they can do it, they will unless there is proper delineation, so I add my voice to those who argue for a narrower definition of thematic powers.

I also highlight the concerns of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to those who query the point about major modifications. The Government have gone such a long way to ensure that warrants are properly issued, so why are they driving a coach and horses through the legal process by saying, “After the warrant has been issued, so why are they driving a coach and horses through the House that powers are needed to make us safe, but that the Government have not yet sufficiently delineated and narrowed the circumstances in which they should be used. I urge the Government to talk to the Opposition Front-Bench team, their Back Benchers and the SNP to make the targeted powers more targeted.

As for legal professional privilege and the constitutional issues that we should bear in mind when thinking about what are described as privileges, we must be extremely careful with such areas. Lawyers are able to hold the Government to account and that is called the rule of law. We do not want to give the Executive the ability to interfere unjustifiably with the rule of law by undermining people in the legal exercise of their rights. I agree with those on the Opposition Front Bench and others who have said that the Government should go back to the Bar Council and the Law Society to ensure that legal professional privilege is properly sorted out.

Turning to my main point, I am sorry that the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is not currently in the Chamber because I largely agree with him, but the Joint Committee on Human Rights has a better way of dealing with the matter. What we need to remember, as MPs, is that this is not just about our constituents being able to come to talk to us confidentially, although we should absolutely defend that. Let me just give one example on that. I had MI6 in my constituency and the cleaners there were about to be privatised, and then sacked or made redundant. They lived in my constituency but they had signed the Official Secrets Act and been told that they were to talk to nobody and were not allowed to be in a union. They came to me very upset, with one of them crying. They said, “We don’t know whether we can speak to you.” I said, “You can speak to me.” They then said, “We think that telling you what we are going to tell you is against the law.” I said, “It doesn’t matter what you are going to tell me. Your legal right, as my constituents, to tell me something that I need to know trumps everything.” They then said that they were going to be made redundant, and so I went along to see someone—I believe it was the director general of MI6—handily taking with me the then deputy general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). We got them all redundancy payments and that was sorted out, but I do not want to digress.

I think that the right of individuals to speak to their MP is important, but we face an even bigger constitutional issue, which relates to the fact that we are here not just to listen to what our constituents say but to hold the Government accountable. They are the Executive, and so the idea that the Executive has the power to hack into the emails and listen to the phones of those who are supposed to be holding them to account—to do all of this—offers a big prospect of the Executive abusing their power and undermining the legislature’s ability to hold them to account. The person in pole position to defend the importance of the legislature holding the Government to account is not the Prime Minister, who is the pinnacle of the Executive. We are here to hold the Prime Minister to account.

I appreciate that the Minister has said, “Make the Prime Minister consent to all our emails being hacked, all our phones being listened to and everything else”, but that gives me no reassurance at all, because the Prime Minister is the wrong person for this. We have gone higher up the tree, but we have gone up the wrong tree, because the person who is there to protect us in doing our job of holding the Government to account is the Speaker. That was recognised in relation to the situation of the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) when there was
the question of the warrant being issued, so this is not unprecedented—the recognition that it is the Speaker who has to protect our rights to hold the Executive to account, which is what we are actually here for.

My Committee discussed this issue at great length. We do not suggest that we make the Speaker an arm of the state and make him start looking at warrants for all of us, but we go further than the hon. Member for Gainsborough, who says that the Speaker should be notified. We say that the Speaker should be notified sufficiently well in advance that if he or she feels that it is right to do so, they can go to be heard by the judicial commissioner to make their views known, and so they can have an intervention in the process. I am certain that if it was known that the Speaker would be notified and have the opportunity to speak about it to the judicial commissioner, that would make the security services much more cautious before they actually went for warrants to intercept all the communications that we are having.

Mr John Hayes: I could make two points about what the right hon. and learned Lady said. She says that the Speaker should be involved but not implicated, but I do not see how the Speaker would not be implicated and become an “arm of the state”—that is not a phrase I would have used, but she used it. The Speaker would by necessity become implicated because he would have to know the grounds on which the Prime Minister or others were acting. I do not really understand how she can claim that the Speaker can be involved but not implicated.

Ms Harman: It is true that we are sending part of the process to the Speaker, but we are not giving them the power to authorise. It would be wrong to make the Speaker be part of the authorising process—someone who applies for the warrant, or someone who, like the judicial commissioner, has to authorise the warrant. What we are talking about is notifying the Speaker, but in sufficient time so that if they notice that it is becoming very widespread, they have the opportunity to go before the judicial commissioner and say, “Look, this is going on too widely.”

Mr Hayes: Let me get this right. The right hon. and learned Lady is saying the Speaker would know when and who, but not what or why, because to know what or why, the Speaker would have to become implicated in the way I described.

Ms Harman: No, I think the Speaker would have to know the basis of the application if they wanted to; otherwise, how could they go before the judicial commissioner and say it was unacceptable? If people say, “Goodness me! That would be telling the Speaker information that would be useful in the hands of Daesh or al-Shabaab,” we would be in trouble anyway if the Speaker were the wrong sort of person to have it. I take a slightly different approach from the hon. Member for Gainsborough. He postulated the issue as politics, which is the Government and the Prime Minister, versus non-politics, which is the Speaker. It is not politics versus non-politics; it is the legislature versus the Executive. That is how we should think about it.

Mr George Howarth: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Ms Harman: I will, but I have a feeling that, sadly, I will disagree with my right hon. Friend, because I heard his intervention earlier and think that he too is barking up the wrong tree. To find myself barking up the same tree as the hon. Member for Gainsborough is a very sorry state of affairs, but I have the hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) on my side.

Mr Howarth: It is typical of my right hon. and learned Friend to get her defence in before hearing the attack. She has been a Law Officer, and when she was Solicitor General I had every confidence in her to be able to sort out the legal advice she gave as Solicitor General from whatever political position she might have taken. Why would she doubt that a Prime Minister could do the same?

Ms Harman: Because the Prime Minister is the Executive, and we need the separation of powers and the balance of powers. I disagreed with the hon. Member for Gainsborough when he was talking about what a great guy the Prime Minister is, so it is not a problem with him, but it might be with the next one. I am on my fifth Prime Minister now and they all have something in common: they regard being held to account as a bit of a nuisance. They do not welcome scrutiny—it is just the nature of the beast. We have to take that into account and accept the fact that, for the rule of law, we have to protect lawyers; for freedom of speech and expression, we have to protect journalism; and for holding the Executive to account, we must protect our rights in this House.

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to one of my predecessors for allowing me to intervene. What if, in a hearing, the Speaker agreed with the application and said, “Yes, go ahead—apply for the warrant. We don’t have any objection to it.”? How would a Member of Parliament hold the Speaker to account for a decision that affected them?

Ms Harman: The point is that the system has accountability for the Home Secretary for issuing the warrant through the judicial commissioner. We are talking about additional protection by way of the Speaker. The Speaker would not be supporting an application; the Speaker would simply be notified, and if they had no objection, it would go through and they would have nothing to do with it—but the Speaker would have knowledge. That is true: the Speaker would have knowledge of it.

In a difficult situation, how do we make sure that we do not put all our rights as a legislature in the hands of the Executive? I appreciate that the Government have tried to work out ways to strengthen the safeguards, but the issue is not just the strength of the safeguards; it is the appropriateness of them. The Prime Minister is not an appropriate safeguard to protect the rights of us in this House to hold him to account. I simply ask the Government to look again.

I congratulate the Government, the Labour and SNP Front Benchers and Back Benchers for working constructively on this. Ultimately, we all want the same
thing: we want to be able to walk the streets safely and
sleep safely in our beds, but not have the Executive
tempted to abuse their power.

10.15 pm

Mr Grieve: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon.
and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham
(Ms Harman). I shall resist being dragged away from
the specific issues on which the ISC has tabled amendments.
However, the Government have moved substantially
on some key issues, providing greater protection, for
which we should be grateful. On the point made by
the right hon. and learned Lady, I confess that I find
the idea that the Speaker could provide the necessary
safeguard, when one looks at the surrounding
circumstances, difficult to follow. Ultimately, the double-lock
mechanism provides far greater protection. We have to
accept that there are scrutiny and oversight mechanisms
in place that mean that if this became a common issue,
it would surface properly in our system, with both the
Interception of Communications Commissioner and,
ultimately, the ISC.

I understand the problem that the right hon. and
learned Lady has raised. I am not unsympathetic to her
anxieties, which have also been expressed by my hon.
Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland).
However, I do not see how the mechanism that has been
proposed and which involves the Speaker would, in
practice, provide the safeguard that the right hon. and
learned Lady seeks.

Amendment 25 was tabled by members of the ISC
and deals with thematic warrants, on which there has
been quite a lot of discussion. I have absolutely no
doubt that thematic warrants have the potential to
intrude into the privacy of a great many people. In the
ISC report on the draft Bill, we recommended that that
greater intrusion should be balanced and constrained,
and suggested that those warrants should be limited in
duration to the period for which they could be authorised.
We then took considerably more evidence from the
agencies on thematic warrants, and they argued persuasively
that if thematic warrants were issued for a shorter time,
there would not be sufficient time for the operational
benefits of the warrant to become apparent before they
had to apply for it to be renewed. We recognised that
the Secretary of State and the commissioner would
therefore have insufficient information on which to assess
necessity and proportionality.

We therefore accept that limiting the duration of a
thematic warrant is not the most effective way to constrain
it. Nevertheless, we remain of the view that clause 15
as currently worded is a very extensive power indeed.
Subsection (2) makes it clear that a targeted interception
warrant is turned into a thematic warrant if it can relate to
“a group of persons who share a common purpose or who carry
on, or may carry on, a particular activity”.

Giving that its ordinary English meaning, it immediately
becomes apparent that the scope is potentially enormous.
However, I want to make it quite clear that we have not
seen any examples of that power being misused in any
way, which presents the House with a challenge. To try
to meet that challenge, the Committee’s suggestion,
after reflection, is that it might be possible to include an
additional constraint by removing the word “or” and
adding “and” after the words, “sharing a common purpose”,
to try to narrow the scope of the provision. That is why
amendment 25 was phrased in that way.

Since then, as often happens in dialogue between the
Committee and the agencies, we have received further
information. I saw persuasive information this morning
that suggested that if we adopted that approach, it
would have the unintended consequence of making
perfectly legitimate operations by the agencies impossible,
and would place a great burden on them, because the
use of a straight, targeted warrant based on the particular
person or organisation, or a single set of premises,
could not meet the necessity and proportionality test of
having to do something further. I tabled this probing
amendment in order to contribute to the debate, but I
still take the view that there is an issue here that the
Government need to consider carefully. It crossed my
mind as I listened to the various submissions that one
possible route might be the creation of a protocol to be
used by the agencies—one that could be seen by the
Intelligence and Security Committee and that would
provide reassurance that the wide scope of the wording
could not be open to abuse.

The point was perfectly reasonably made to me—I
think by the Home Secretary—that the idea that the
Interception of Communications Commissioner would
tolerate an abuse that went outside the necessity and
proportionality test was, in practice, rather unlikely, but
the issue cannot simply be ignored. Something more is
needed, because on the plain wording of the statute, the
scope that “common purpose” and “a particular activity”
allow seems excessive. There must be some constraint,
and I leave it to the ingenuity and common sense of the
Ministers to come up with a solution to this real
problem.

The Solicitor General: I think my right hon. and
learned Friend can see the problem: if we limit the
provision too much—to “common purpose”—we might
end up being able to deal only with conspiracy-type
offences, as opposed to individual ones. We are trying to
be very careful as to the wording, and it certainly is not
the Government’s intention to do anything by sleight of
hand to create a definition that would be unacceptably
wide—far from it.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Solicitor General, and
I have no reason to disagree with his analysis of the way
in which this matter has been approached. I also have
no reason to disagree with him about the necessity of
having thematic warrants in addition to warrants targeted
at premises, individuals or organisations, but the question
is how that reassurance can be provided. I hope very
much that the Government can go away and give this
issue some thought. I suspect it will arise in the other
place, when these provisions are debated there. It is
important, and I think that a solution can be found, but
I accept that, although the amendment we have tabled
would provide one, it would also place the agencies in
difficulty.

Mr John Hayes: Since my right hon. and learned
Friend is inviting me to employ my ingenuity, I will try
to do so. This is, in essence, about proportionality. We
had quite a lot of debate earlier about necessity, but
proportionality matters too. In determining what is
reasonable—
Mr Speaker: Order. I wish to listen to the mellifluous tones of the right hon. Gentleman, as some Members do, and people listening elsewhere might conceivably wish to hear his honourable tones. We would be assisted if he faced the House.

Mr Hayes: I think this is about proportionality. The answer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) is that yes, of course, in establishing the character of the proportionality and therefore the range he described, we may need to think about the sort of protocol he set out.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister, and I leave the matter there.

I turn now to amendments 19, 20 and 21, which deal with the renewal of warrants. They may appear somewhat complicated, but they deal with a very simple issue. Warrants for interception last for up to six months. Under clause 29, the warrant can be extended by a further six months at any time before the original warrant expires. That creates a loophole because it would theoretically allow for a warrant to be renewed immediately after it was issued, thereby permitting interception for 12 months. That is clearly not what the Bill intends. The Secretary of State might well argue—logically—that the commissioner would never approve such a renewal, and that she would not either, but this is nevertheless a loophole that can and should be closed, and these amendments would ensure that it is. I hope very much that the Government can accept them.

I should mention that the amendments in my name relate only to warrants for interception and bulk interception. I would be grateful if the Minister could assure the House that, if the Government accept my amendments, that acceptance will be extended to other consequential amendments of a like character, to ensure that the power cannot be abused elsewhere.

Amendment 16 relates to clause 45 and interception in accordance with overseas requests. The clause gives effect to the European Union’s convention on mutual assistance on criminal matters and permits an overseas authority to request the support of the United Kingdom in undertaking the interception of communications. Curiously, and probably accidentally, it does not repeat the protection that exists in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which ensures that requests can be made only where a person being intercepted will be outside the United Kingdom. That seems to us be another loophole that ought to be dealt with. Although the Government had indicated that it could be dealt with in secondary legislation, the Intelligence and Security Committee do not consider that to be satisfactory. It is far too important an issue to be left to secondary legislation; it should be dealt with in the Bill. If our amendment is accepted, the matter can be resolved without more ado.

Finally, may I touch on an issue that has been raised by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and others, namely economic wellbeing? When the Intelligence and Security Committee first came to consider the issue as a subset of national security in our initial evidence-taking sittings, we came to the conclusion that it ought to be possible to remove economic wellbeing as a criterion altogether. That is why we made the initial recommendation that economic wellbeing, so far as it is relevant to national security and relates to people outside the British islands, be removed from the Bill as grounds for interception. We took the view that it could all be safely contained in the subset of national security. After we published our report, the Government provided us, through the agencies, with additional evidence regarding their reasoning for including it as a separate ground. They also provided us with a number of examples of where it was being or might be used, which illustrated areas where it was useful to have it as a separate category.

Mr George Howarth: Although I am conscious that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not, for obvious reasons, be able to go into detail on all of the examples that were given, one thing that can be avowed under this particular rubric is critical national infrastructure, which is an obvious area where the public and the state need to be protected.

Mr Grieve: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The consequence of damaging national infrastructure would be to cause a severe economic shock to the United Kingdom. At the end of the day, the most persuasive argument of the lot was that listing economic wellbeing separately added transparency as to the purposes for which an investigatory power was being sought. We came to the conclusion that it would probably assist the judicial commissioners in their consideration of the necessity and proportionality of the warrant, precisely because it highlighted that it fell within a category in which economic wellbeing was present; it was therefore in practice likely to be subject to very detailed scrutiny. For all those reasons, we did not table a further amendment on that point.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: Given the lateness of the hour and the number of right hon. and hon. Members still wishing to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, I hope to confine my remarks principally to those amendments that stand in my name, but I would also like to pick up on one or two more general points.

10.30 pm

With regard to the intervention that I made on the shadow Home Secretary concerning the extension of the Pitchford inquiry to Scotland, the House may wish to consider the case reported in the Sunday Herald recently of Dr Nicholas McKerrell, a lecturer in law at Glasgow Caledonian University. Dr McKerrell discovered recently that he is among those who have been blacklisted from working in the construction industry. That was something of a shock, because Dr McKerrell—I do not think he will mind me saying so—is perhaps more accustomed to labouring in law libraries than on building sites. I know a little bit about him. He may not thank me for broadcasting this, but he is a distant cousin of mine, and he comes from the more left-wing branch of the family, if I may say so. He has been involved over a number of years in a variety of different protests, particularly and perhaps most pertinently those surrounding the extension of the M74 motorway around Glasgow in the 1990s.

I bring the case to the House’s attention because Dr McKerrell’s inclusion on the list of those blacklisted from working in the construction industry could have
happened only as a result of information provided to those compiling the blacklists by undercover police officers. That is why it is necessary and important that the work of the Pitchford inquiry should extend to parts of the United Kingdom beyond England, and that the Home Secretary should make it clear at the earliest available opportunity that that is her intention. Otherwise, the Pitchford inquiry will never get to the bottom of the range of enterprises undertaken by undercover police officers. I suggest to the shadow Home Secretary that such investigation into the use of undercover police officers in blacklisting does not exclude the possibility of having the wider inquiry that he seeks into the use of blacklisting more generally.

On the protection of legal privilege, I am enormously concerned that even at this stage of the Bill—after a draft Bill, and after the Bill has been through Committee—various professional bodies, including the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society of Scotland, remain unpersuaded that the Government’s efforts have been sufficiently robust. I think that their judgment is correct, and I look forward to seeing something a bit more substantial.

On the authorisation of warrants relating to Members of Parliament, the right hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). The Bill is undoubtedly necessary, in that it was preceded by interception and surveillance based on something like 66 different legal bases, and that was incomprehensible to almost anybody. I had hoped that the Bill would cover all the previous legal bases, but it does not do so. There are still matters that are not covered by the Bill. For example, the Intelligence Services Act 1994 is still avowed in the Bill, and is used as a mechanism for which it was not intended. I know that because I took that Bill through the House. I know what it was intended to do, and it was nothing like what it is now used for.

Since I have a very limited time, I will press on, but let me say this. Listening to most of the speeches on this group of amendments, I agreed with virtually all of them, particularly the points about modification. The right hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Ms Harman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) made a very good point—whatever the mechanism—about the flaws in the current Wilson doctrine, as now laid down in the Bill. There are therefore many changes yet to come, and I imagine they will come in the Lords, or indeed in the law courts.

In the next few minutes, I will focus on the amendments in my name, principally amendments 208 to 211, which deal with the issue of the so-called double lock. Until the change proposed today, it was more like a double latchkey because it was not really as strong as it was represented to be.

Before I go into that matter, I should tell the House that I take the view that the whole interception strategy used by this country is, in any event, flawed. We are virtually the only serious country in the world that does not use intercept evidence in court. The arguments made by the Government and the agencies are ones that could equally be made anywhere in the world. No other authority follows that. The fact that interception evidence is not used in court is one of the reasons why rather sloppy legal disciplines apply to the use of interception, particularly relying on the Home Secretary to authorise interceptions.

The notion that the Home Secretary can somehow authorise such warrants because she is accountable to the House is, frankly, bogus. Liberty has described that notion as “misconceived and misplaced”. It is worth observing that for the Home Secretary to account in Parliament for the warrants she has signed might put her in a position of criminality as it will be a criminal act, under clause 49 and similar provisions in the Bill, to disclose the existence of a warrant.

On the previous group of amendments, the Solicitor General said it was unfair or unhelpful to look at the facts in other jurisdictions, and he made a reasonable point about the difference between jurisdictions that have inquisitorial processes rather than the adversarial ones with which we are familiar. I gently point out to him that if he looks at other common law jurisdictions—America, Australia, Canada—he will find that the process of warrant authorisations in all those jurisdictions is done by judges, and that there is no precedent for a common law jurisdiction such as ours to embark on the procedure that the Government would have us follow tonight.

Mr David Davis: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael).

The Bill is undoubtedly necessary, in that it was preceded by interception and surveillance based on something like 66 different legal bases, and that was incomprehensible to almost anybody. I had hoped that the Bill would cover all the previous legal bases, but it does not do so. There are still matters that are not covered by the Bill. For example, the Intelligence Services Act 1994 is still avowed in the Bill, and is used as a mechanism for which it was not intended. I know that because I took that Bill through the House. I know what it was intended to do, and it was nothing like what it is now used for.

Since I have a very limited time, I will press on, but let me say this. Listening to most of the speeches on this group of amendments, I agreed with virtually all of them, particularly the points about modification. The right hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Ms Harman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) made a very good point—whatever the mechanism—about the flaws in the current Wilson doctrine, as now laid down in the Bill. There are therefore many changes yet to come, and I imagine they will come in the Lords, or indeed in the law courts.

In the next few minutes, I will focus on the amendments in my name, principally amendments 208 to 211, which deal with the issue of the so-called double lock. Until the change proposed today, it was more like a double latchkey because it was not really as strong as it was represented to be.

Before I go into that matter, I should tell the House that I take the view that the whole interception strategy used by this country is, in any event, flawed. We are virtually the only serious country in the world that does not use intercept evidence in court. The arguments made by the Government and the agencies are ones that could equally be made anywhere in the world. No other authority follows that. The fact that interception evidence is not used in court is one of the reasons why rather sloppy legal disciplines apply to the use of interception, particularly relying on the Home Secretary to authorise interceptions.

The notion that the Home Secretary can somehow authorise such warrants because she is accountable to the House is, frankly, bogus. Liberty has described that notion as “misconceived and misplaced”. It is worth observing that for the Home Secretary to account in Parliament for the warrants she has signed might put her in a position of criminality as it will be a criminal act, under clause 49 and similar provisions in the Bill, to disclose the existence of a warrant.

On the previous group of amendments, the Solicitor General said it was unfair or unhelpful to look at the facts in other jurisdictions, and he made a reasonable point about the difference between jurisdictions that have inquisitorial processes rather than the adversarial ones with which we are familiar. I gently point out to him that if he looks at other common law jurisdictions—America, Australia, Canada—he will find that the process of warrant authorisations in all those jurisdictions is done by judges, and that there is no precedent for a common law jurisdiction such as ours to embark on the procedure that the Government would have us follow tonight.

Mr David Davis: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael).

The Bill is undoubtedly necessary, in that it was preceded by interception and surveillance based on something like 66 different legal bases, and that was incomprehensible to almost anybody. I had hoped that the Bill would cover all the previous legal bases, but it does not do so. There are still matters that are not covered by the Bill. For example, the Intelligence Services Act 1994 is still avowed in the Bill, and is used as a mechanism for which it was not intended. I know that because I took that Bill through the House. I know what it was intended to do, and it was nothing like what it is now used for.

Since I have a very limited time, I will press on, but let me say this. Listening to most of the speeches on this group of amendments, I agreed with virtually all of them, particularly the points about modification. The right hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Ms Harman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) made a very good point—whatever the mechanism—about the flaws in the current Wilson doctrine, as now laid down in the Bill. There are therefore many changes yet to come, and I imagine they will come in the Lords, or indeed in the law courts.

In the next few minutes, I will focus on the amendments in my name, principally amendments 208 to 211, which deal with the issue of the so-called double lock. Until the change proposed today, it was more like a double latchkey because it was not really as strong as it was represented to be.

Before I go into that matter, I should tell the House that I take the view that the whole interception strategy used by this country is, in any event, flawed. We are virtually the only serious country in the world that does not use intercept evidence in court. The arguments made by the Government and the agencies are ones that could equally be made anywhere in the world. No other authority follows that. The fact that interception evidence is not used in court is one of the reasons why rather sloppy legal disciplines apply to the use of interception, particularly relying on the Home Secretary to authorise interceptions.
Now, there are practical, principled and political reasons, as well as reasons of accountability, for that being wrong, full stop. The practical reason is that the Home Secretary has admitted to authorising about 2,500 of these things a year. That is 10 a day—not at most, but on average. On Second Reading, I asked her to tell us how long she took over any of them, but she refused and sidestepped the question. When this situation became public, after the Anderson report, I had letters from policemen who were involved in the creation of warrants who said that it was simply impossible and that 10 a day could not be done—a judge could not do 10 a day. That is the first problem.

The second problem is that we take our judgment from the current Home Secretary. She is very unusual. She has been in office for six years. That is incredibly unusual, and a great reflection on her. But a typical Home Secretary is not there for six years. I was shadow Home Secretary for five years and faced four different Home Secretaries—one and a half years apiece, roughly. What are we looking at, then? We will have someone who has typically been in office for a year or so making really serious judgments in a real hurry. That is not the way to make the sort of balanced judgments that we expect when we are balancing the privacy of our citizens on the one hand and their life and security on the other.

The second reason is one of principle. I take the view, as did David Anderson, that it is perfectly proper for Ministers of the Crown to approve anything that would involve a foreign intercept, let us say, that would create a political problem for the country. I see no argument whatever, other than the vestiges of royal prerogative, why Ministers should make judgments about warrants brought against citizens of this country. I can see nothing that justifies that. Our greatest ally, America, views it with horror. It causes us problems with American companies and trade unions. It is now a wider issue. One thing that has come up in the past few years has been the misbehaviour of police forces and agencies with respect to demonstrators—the legitimate, proper and democratic operations of the Green movement, for example; there is also the blacklisting that the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) referred to. All those things need to be dealt with, and if the privacy guidance and clauses that are effectively built into the Bill do not do that, we must find a way to ensure that we do not just solve the problems of history, but that we solve problems for the future.

10.45 pm

Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I will call Mr Cox briefly, but I wish to call the Minister no later than 10.50 pm.

10.45 pm

Mr Cox: I shall be very brief, Mr Speaker, and I am grateful to you for calling me at this late hour. I wish to address clause 25 and legal professional privilege. In what circumstances, other than the iniquity exception, will legal professional privilege be overridden? In introducing his remarks, the Minister said, I think, that there was some margin where legal professional privilege could be overridden, even where the iniquity exception did not apply. That would be a radical and fundamental change to the legal protection given to the privilege of those conversing with and confiding in their lawyers. It would be unprecedented, and contrary to the decisions of the highest courts in this country. Where does the distinction lie in the Minister’s mind, and how would that square with current legal authority on the subject?

Mr John Hayes: I only hope that your earlier remarks about my style, Mr Speaker, can be matched by my substance.

Let me deal with the last contribution first. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General made it clear that these are matters of continuing consideration, and further discussions are to be held. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) is right to say that we have not yet got to where we want to be, but I understand the weight and significance of his remark about limits on privilege, which will certainly be included in any consideration that we make following those discussions. I do not want to anticipate those
discussions tonight, but, as the shadow Secretary of State recommended, we will engage in them without delay, and conclude them on the basis of adding to the Bill in a way that is sufficient to protect legal privilege.

A number of Members on both sides of the House emphasised the importance of the Bill per se. It is important because it provides law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies with the powers they need to keep us safe, and it does so in a way that makes those powers transparent, while also adding to the checks and balances that are vital in the defence of private interest. It therefore radically overhauls the way in which such powers are authorised and overseen, in particular through the introduction of the double lock for the most sensitive powers. This is a radical change—perhaps the most radical change of modern times in these matters.

The Bill also ensures that these powers are fit for the digital age. As the Chair of the ISC, and others, have said, much of what is done now arises as a result of a series of pieces of legislation that I suppose one could call reactive. They were consequent on the need to provide those who are missioned to protect us with what they require to do so. The Bill draws those powers together and makes them more comprehensible and transparent, which adds to the oversight and safeguards that make up the checks and balances I have described. This is an important Bill, and it is therefore important that we get it right.

That brings me to my second substantial point, which is about the spirit of our consideration. This debate has been conducted in a way that I think does credit to this House, and that is largely—it is unusual to hear a Minister say this, so I wish to emphasise it in the style that you recommended earlier, Mr Speaker—due to the Opposition. The Opposition make choices about how they scrutinise the Government, how they hold the Government to account, and how they deal with legislation on the Floor of the House and in Committee. Those judgments are fundamentally important, not only for the health of the House and our democracy, but for the interests of our people. The Opposition and the Government have worked together on the Bill. If that causes pain to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), so be it, because if we end up with a Bill that is better than it started—and I believe we will end up with a Bill that is considerably better—I take the view that we have done our job as well as we could reasonably be expected to do it.

To that end, as we have said a number of times this evening, we continue to look at these matters. Clearly, the House of Lords will want its say—it is right that it should—and will contribute to further scrutiny, but the spirit that has imbued all we have done until now is important in a Bill that, frankly, any Government of any colour would have introduced, not just because there is a sunset clause on previous legislation, but because the Government know that it is necessary for the powers to be updated so that they are fit for purpose, and for the safeguards to be updated in accordance with that.

Let me deal with some of the specifics—I want to save sufficient time to deal with the salient issue of trade unions, which the shadow Secretary of State spoke about with such passion. Modifications were mentioned by both Opposition and Government Members. It is important to emphasise that the Government have considered the concerns raised in Committee—that point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), Opposition Front Benchers and others.

As a result, we have introduced a number of significant amendments to make it clear that a warrant against a single person cannot be modified into a thematic warrant; to require all major modifications to be notified to a judicial commissioner; and to ensure that the Wilson doctrine and legal professional practice safeguards apply to urgent modifications, so that the double lock, with all that that suggests, applies too.

Those amendments are responses to matters raised in Committee, to ensure that the warranting system is consistent. I entirely accept the point that it would be completely unacceptable to have a robust system for issuing warrants and a less robust system for modifying them. Warranting has to be consistent throughout, and there can be no back-door way of weakening the process. That is not what the Government intend and not what we would allow. We have made those changes but, as I have said, we are happy to consider those matters carefully—I have heard what has been said tonight by Members on both sides of the House about what more might be done.

The hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and others have made the argument repeatedly that more should be stated in the Bill. That is what the manuscript amendment does. On that basis, I am grateful for the comments made by the shadow Secretary of State and the shadow Minister in welcoming the amendment.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) tabled amendments on behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee. Amendments 15 to 17 would add another condition to clause 45, which provides for circumstances in which a telecommunications operator may intercept communications in response to a request made by the international agreement. The additional condition would require that interception must be for the purpose of obtaining information about the communications of people who are known or believed to be outside the United Kingdom. That amendment would replicate the current position in RIPA and, I agree, would provide valuable assurances. As drafted, the amendment contains minor, technical deficiencies, and for that reason, as my right hon. and learned Friend will understand, we will not accept it.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know the Minister of State is greatly enjoying his oration, but I am conscious of the fact that the clock in front of him is not functioning, and I want him to know two things: first, that he should face the House, as we continually exhort him to do; and, secondly, that he has a further seven minutes in which to excite the House.

Mr Hayes: Seven minutes of pure joy, Mr Speaker.

The Government will bring back further amendments to do what my right hon. and learned Friend intends.

Amendments 19 to 23, also tabled on behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee, seek to prohibit a targeted or bulk interception warrant being renewed for more than 30 days. I do not foresee any circumstance
where such a renewal application would be approved by the Secretary of State or judicial commissioner, but this is another matter that I agree could be clearer in the Bill. As with the previous amendment, we will revisit this and table an amendment in the other place.

I am less convinced by the argument my right hon. and learned Friend makes on amendment 25. The amendment would prohibit warrants being sought against suspects who are carrying out the same activity but who may not share a common purpose. In my judgment, a restriction of this kind would have a material impact on current operations. It would, for example, prohibit the targeting of an online forum that is used predominantly—but not exclusively—by child abusers, because the agency could not be certain that everyone accessing the forum was doing so for a common purpose. I have profound reservations about that amendment. I understand the sense of it and I understand why it has been tabled, but I do not think the Government can accept it. I do not want to give the impression that the Government accept any amendment, regardless of what we think about it. That is not our style, however conciliatory we might be.

**Mr Grieve:** I did not quite follow what my right hon. Friend meant by that. I exhorted him to give the matter a little further thought and suggested there might be some ways in which it could be dealt with. I very much hope his answer was not suggesting that he was ruling that out, because that might place me in the position of wanting to put the amendment to the House.

**Mr Hayes:** “Very much thought” is my middle name. Actually, that is several middle names, isn’t it, Mr Speaker? I will of course do that. Indeed, I thought the point my right hon. and learned Friend made about ways in which we could achieve what he sets out to do was well made, as I said in an earlier intervention.

Power is legitimised only by the means by which those who exercise it are held to account. The health of our open society relies on the acceptance that those with whom we differ should be free to make their case, campaign or crusade. The Labour Opposition tabled an amendment on trade unions, and I want to be crystal clear about our response to it: it would neither be proportionate nor lawful for the security or intelligence agencies to investigate legitimate trade union activity. However, there are good reasons for seeking to put the amendment to the House.

**Mr Grieve:** I will of course do that. Indeed, I thought the point my right hon. and learned Friend made about ways in which it could be dealt with. I very much hope his answer was not suggesting that he was ruling that out, because that might place me in the position of wanting to put the amendment to the House.

**Mr Hayes:** I cannot add to that, so I had better just sit down. Thank you very much.

**Andy Burnham:** The Minister’s comments at the Dispatch Box will have given hope to thousands of trade unionists in this country. Their legitimate role has been properly recognised by him at the Dispatch Box—long may that spirit continue from the Government Benches!

11 pm

**Mr Hayes:** Notwithstanding that technical point, which I will happily deal with after the debate—I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making it—I will certainly accept what the Opposition have proposed as a matter of principle. It seems absolutely right that they have brought it to the House’s attention, and they can perfectly properly claim it as a victory, because I am persuaded of the need to do this. It was not in the original Bill, but it will be in the Bill as it goes forward. In that spirit and that mood, it is vital to understand that the Bill is in our national interest and there to promote and preserve the common good. It is therefore right that it make further progress.

**Gavin Robinson:** I am concerned about the terminology used in amendment 262. It refers to the British Islands, which include the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. If the Minister accepts the amendment, are we legislating outwith our jurisdiction?

11.1 pm

**New clause 8**

_Further provision about modifications_

‘(1) A person may make a modification within subsection (2) only if the person considers—

(a) that the modification is necessary on any relevant grounds (see subsection (3)), and

(b) that the conduct authorised by the modification is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct.

(2) The modifications within this subsection are—

(a) a major modification adding the name or description of a person, organisation or set of premises to which the warrant relates, and

(b) a minor modification adding any factor specified in the warrant in accordance with section 27(8).

(3) In subsection (1)(a) “relevant grounds” means—

(a) in the case of a warrant issued by the Secretary of State, grounds falling within section 18;

(b) in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers, grounds falling within section 19(4);

and for the purposes of subsection (1) any reference to the Secretary of State in section 18(3)(b) or the Scottish Ministers in section 19(4)(b) is to be read as a reference to the person making the modification.
(4) Sections 24 (Members of Parliament etc.) and 25 (items subject to legal privilege) apply in relation to the making of a major modification within subsection (2)(a) above as they apply in relation to the issuing of a warrant.

(5) Where section 24 applies in relation to the making of a major modification—
(a) the modification must be made by the Secretary of State, and
(b) the modification has effect only if the decision to make the modification has been approved by a Judicial Commissioner.

(6) Where section 25 applies in relation to the making of a major modification—
(a) the modification must be made by—
(i) the Secretary of State or (in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers) a member of the Scottish Government, or
(ii) if a senior official acting on behalf of a person within sub-paragraph (i) considers that there is an urgent need to make the modification, that senior official, and
(b) except where the person making the modification considers that there is an urgent need to make it, the modification has effect only if the decision to make the modification has been approved by a Judicial Commissioner.

(7) In a case where section 24 or 25 applies in relation to the making of a major modification, section 21 (approval of warrants by Judicial Commissioners) applies in relation to the decision to make the modification as it applies in relation to a decision to issue a warrant, but as if—
(a) the references in subsection (1)(a) and (b) of that section to the warrant were references to the warrant as modified,
(b) any reference to the person who decided to issue the warrant were a reference to the person who decided to make the modification, and
(c) “relevant grounds” in that section had the meaning given by subsection (3) above.

Section 31 contains provision about the approval of major modifications made in urgent cases.

(8) If, in a case where section 24 or 25 applies in relation to the making of a major modification, it is not reasonably practicable for the instrument making the modification to be signed by the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) a member of the Scottish Government in accordance with section 30(3), the instrument may be signed by a senior official designated by the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Scottish Ministers for that purpose.

(9) In such a case, the instrument making the modification must contain a statement that—
(a) it is not reasonably practicable for the instrument to be signed by the person who took the decision to make the modification, and
(b) the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) a member of the Scottish Government has personally and expressly authorised the making of the modification.

(10) If at any time a person mentioned in section (Persons who may make modifications)(3), or
(a) the modification is made by virtue of section (Persons who may make modifications)(3), or
(b) section 24 or 25 applies in relation to the making of the modification.

(11) Where major modification is made by a senior official in accordance with section (Persons who may make modifications)(1) or section (Further provision about modifications)(6)(a)(ii), the Secretary of State or (in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers) a member of the Scottish Government must be notified personally of the modification and the reasons for making it.

(12) In this section “senior official” has the same meaning as in section (Persons who may make modifications).”—(Mr John Hayes.)

The new clause provides that a Judicial Commissioner must be notified whenever a major modification of a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 2 is made. This requirement does not apply in a case where the modification needs to be approved under clause 31. The clause also reproduces what was clause 30(12) and extends it to apply to cases where a senior official makes an urgent major modification in relation to which clause 25 applies.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

Clause 15

Subject-matter of warrants

Amendment proposed: 267, page 12, line 3, leave out “or organisation”—(Joanna Cherry.)

These amendments would retain the capacity of a single warrant to permit the interception of multiple individuals but would require an identifiable subject matter or premises to be provided. This narrows the current provisions which would effectively permit a limitless number of unidentified individuals to have their communications intercepted.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 67, Noes 271.

Division No. 8 [11.01 pm]

AYES
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina  Cowan, Ronnie
Arkless, Richard  Crawford, Angela
Bardell, Hannah  Davis, rh Mr David
Black, Mhairi  Day, Martyn
Blackford, Ian  Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Blackman, Kirsty  Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Boswell, Philip  Durkan, Mark
Brake, rh Tom  Edwards, Jonathan
Brock, Deidre  Farron, Tim
Brown, Alan  Ferrier, Margaret
Cameron, Dr Lisa  Gethins, Stephen
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  Gibson, Patricia
Chapman, Douglas  Grady, Patrick
Cherry, Joanna  Grant, Peter
Clegg, rh Mr Nick  Gray, Neil
Hendy, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Muhlolland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Marion Fellows and Owen Thompson

**NOES**
Adams, Nigel
Afridi, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argr, Edward
Alkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Connor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cartidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehan
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleaver, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Djagnogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Downen, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, rh Mr Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, Mr Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kacwyczinski, Daniel
Kanishan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCARTney, Jason
McCARTney, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Munter, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philips, Stephen
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Rosyton
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Souby, rh Anna
Spencer, Mark
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, lain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swaney, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Symes, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vara, Mr Shalesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim
Tellers for the Noes:
George Hollingbery and
Margot James

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 17

POWER OF SECRETARY OF STATE TO ISSUE WARRANTS

Amendment made: 36, page 14, line 1 , leave out subsection (4) .—( Mr John Hayes .)
This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Clause 18

GROUNDS ON WHICH WARRANTS MAY BE ISSUED BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendment proposed: 312, page 14, line 22, leave out paragraph (c) .—( Joanna Cherry .)
See amendment 313.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 66, Noes 272.
Division No. 9

[11.14 pm]

AYES
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Boswell, Philip
Brake, rh Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Dockerty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferrier, Margaret
Gellins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Grays, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus
Mc Nally, John
McCaff, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Stephens, Chris
Thewlis, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel

NOES
Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crab, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Mims
Davies, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donnells, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Downen, Oliver
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hallon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hollywood, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howell, John
(Mr John Hayes.)

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 18

GROUNDS ON WHICH WARRANTS MAY BE ISSUED BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendment made: 262, page 14, line 38, at end insert—

'(6) The fact that the information which would be obtained under a warrant relates to the activities in the British Islands of a trade union is not, of itself, sufficient to establish that the warrant is necessary on grounds falling within this section.'

(Andy Burnham.)

This amendment restricts the application of warrants in relation to trade union activity.

Clause 19

POWER OF SCOTTISH MINISTERS TO ISSUE WARRANTS

Amendment made: 37, page 16, line 4, leave out subsection (6)—(Mr John Hayes)

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

Clause 21

APPROVAL OF WARRANTS BY JUDICIAL COMMISSIONERS

Manuscript amendments made: 497, page 17, line 10, after “must” insert “—

(a)”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 498.

Amendment 498, page 17, line 11, at end insert”, and

() consider the matters referred to in subsection (1) with a sufficient degree of care as to ensure that the Judicial Commissioner complies with the duties imposed by section (General duties in relation to privacy).”—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment makes it clear that a Judicial Commissioner must, when carrying out a review under clause 21(1), exercise sufficient care to comply with the general privacy duties contained in NC5.

Clause 24

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ETC.

Amendment made: 53, page 19, line 7, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State may not issue the warrant without the approval of the Prime Minister.”—(Mr John Hayes.)

In cases where clause 24 applies, the amendment requires the Prime Minister to approve the warrant.

Clause 30

MODIFICATION OF WARRANTS

Amendments made: 54, page 23, line 26, at end insert—

'( ) But a warrant may not be modified as mentioned in subsection (2)(a) if it relates only to a particular person or organisation, or to a single set of premises, as mentioned in section 15(1).”

The amendment prevents the modification of a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 2 that relates only to a particular person or organisation or to a single set of premises.
This amendment is consequential on NC8.

Amendment 56, page 23, line 30, leave out “section” and insert “Chapter”

This amendment is consequential on NC7, NC8 and NC9.

Amendment 57, page 23, line 36, leave out subsections (5) to (14)

This amendment is consequential on NC7 and NC8.

Amendment 58, page 25, line 21, at end insert—

‘( ) Sections (Persons who may make modifications), (Further provision about modifications) and 31 contain further provision about making modifications under this section.” —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on NC7, NC8 and NC9.

Clause 31

APPROVAL OF MAJOR MODIFICATIONS MADE IN URGENT CASES

Amendments made: 59, page 25, line 24, leave out “30(7)” and insert “(Persons who may make modifications)(3)”

This amendment is consequential on NC7.

Amendment 60, page 25, line 24, at end insert—

‘( ) This section also applies where—

(a) section 25 applies in relation to the making of a major modification of a warrant under this Chapter;

(b) the person makes the modification without the approval of a Judicial Commissioner, and

(c) the person considered that there was an urgent need to make the modification.”

This amendment extends clause 31 to provide for the approval by Judicial Commissioners of certain major modifications made in urgent cases.

Amendment 61, page 25, line 25, leave out “a designated senior official” and insert “the appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 60.

Amendment 62, page 25, line 27, at end insert—

“the appropriate person” is—

(a) in a case falling within subsection (1), a designated senior official, and

(b) in a case falling within subsection (2), a Judicial Commissioner.”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 60.

Amendment 63, page 25, line 32, leave out “30” and insert “(Persons who may make modifications)”

This amendment is consequential on NC7.

Amendment 64, page 25, line 33, leave out subsection (4)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 67.

Amendment 65, page 25, line 36, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 60.

Amendment 66, page 25, line 38, leave out “senior official’s” and insert “appropriate person’s”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 60.

Amendment 67, page 25, line 40, at end insert—

‘( ) As soon as is reasonably practicable after a designated senior official makes a decision under subsection (5)—

(a) a Judicial Commissioner must be notified of—

(i) the decision, and

(ii) if the senior official has decided to approve the decision to make the modification, the modification in question, and

(b) the Secretary of State or (in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers) a member of the Scottish Government must be notified personally of the matters mentioned in paragraph (a)(i) and (ii).”

This amendment provides that, where a designated senior official has decided whether to approve a modification, a Judicial Commissioner, and the person who issued the warrant, must be notified of the decision.

Amendment 68, page 25, line 41, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 60.

Amendment 69, page 25, line 43, leave out paragraph (a)

—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 67.

Clause 35

SERVICE OF WARRANTS OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM

Amendments made: 70, page 29, line 4, leave out “on a person outside the United Kingdom”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 71.

Amendment 71, page 29, line 5, at end insert—

‘( ) A copy of the warrant must be served in such a way as to bring the contents of the warrant to the attention of the person who the intercepting authority considers may be able to provide assistance in relation to it.”

The amendment makes it clear that, where a section is required under clause 34 to provide assistance in relation to a warrant, a copy of the warrant must be served in such a way that the person is aware of the contents of the warrant and so can provide that assistance.

Amendment 72, page 29, line 6, leave out “the person” and insert “a person outside the United Kingdom”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 71.

Amendment 73, page 29, line 19, after “person” insert “outside the United Kingdom” —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 71.

Clause 50

SECTION 49: MEANING OF “EXCEPTED DISCLOSURE”

Amendments made: 75, page 40, line 7, at end insert—

“( ) a disclosure made to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament for the purposes of facilitating the carrying out of any of its functions.”

This amendment makes it clear that disclosure may be made to the Intelligence and Security Committee without breaching clause 49.

Amendment 76, page 40, line 35, after “Part” insert “or under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of RIPA”

This amendment enables a disclosure of information to be made that relates to interception warrants under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in general.

Amendment 77, page 40, line 35, after “to” insert “any” —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 76.
Schedule 3

EXCEPTIONS TO SECTION 48

Amendment made: 74, page 204, line 44, leave out sub-paragraph (3) and insert—

'( ) In a case where a person who is not a nominated person is or has been conducting an investigation under Part 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 into a person's death, nothing in section 48(1) prohibits—

(a) a disclosure to the person that there is intercepted material in existence which is, or may be, relevant to the investigation;

(b) a disclosure to a person appointed as legal adviser to an inquest forming part of the investigation which is made for the purposes of determining—

(i) whether any intercepted material is, or may be, relevant to the investigation, and

(ii) if so, whether it is necessary for the material to be disclosed to the person conducting the investigation.” —[Mr John Hayes.]

This amendment creates a further exception to clause 48 to enable intercepted material to be disclosed to the legal adviser to an inquest in order to determine whether it is or may be relevant.

New Clause 11

PERSONS WHO MAY MAKE MODIFICATIONS UNDER SECTION 104

'(1) The persons who may make modifications under section 104 of a warrant are (subject to subsection (2))—

(a) in the case of a warrant issued by the Secretary of State under section 91 or 93—

(i) the Secretary of State,

(ii) a senior official acting on behalf of the Secretary of State;

(b) in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers under section 92—

(i) a member of the Scottish Government, or

(ii) a senior official acting on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

(2) Any of the following persons may also make modifications under section 104 of a warrant, but only where the person considers that there is an urgent need to make the modification—

(a) the person to whom the warrant is addressed;

(b) a person who holds a senior position in the same public authority as the person mentioned in paragraph (a).

Section 105 contains provision about the approval of modifications made in urgent cases.

(3) Subsection (2) is subject to section (Further provision about modifications under section 104(4) and (5) (special rules where sections 94 and 100 apply in relation to the making of a modification under section 104). (4) For the purposes of subsection (2)(b), a person holds a senior position in a public authority if—

(a) in the case of any of the intelligence services—

(i) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service or a member of the Senior Management Structure of Her Majesty’s Diplomatic Service, or

(ii) the person holds a position in the intelligence service of equivalent seniority to such a person;

(b) in the case of the Ministry of Defence—

(i) the person is a member of the Senior Civil Service, or

(ii) the person is of or above the rank of brigadier, commodore or air commodore.” —[Mr John Hayes.]

This new clause reproduces clause 104(6) to (8) and also includes provision consequential on NC12.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.
New Clause 13

NOTIFICATION OF MODIFICATIONS

(1) As soon as is reasonably practicable after a person makes a modification of a warrant under section 104, a Judicial Commissioner must be notified of the modification and the reasons for making it.

(2) But subsection (1) does not apply where—

(a) the modification is to remove any matter, name or description included in the warrant in accordance with section 101(3) to (5),

(b) the modification is made by virtue of section 104(2),

(c) section 94 or 100 applies in relation to the making of the modification.

(3) Where a modification is made by a senior official in accordance with section 104(5)(a)(ii), the Secretary of State or (in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers) a member of the Scottish Government must be notified personally of the modification and the reasons for making it. This new clause reproduces (with some changes) clause 104(4), (5), (9) and (10). It requires Judicial Commissioner approval for modifications where clause 94 or 100 applies, and restricts who may make such modifications.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

Clause 94

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ETC.

Amendments made: 88, page 71, line 41, leave out “This section” and insert “Subsection (3)”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 91.

Amendment 89, page 72, line 2, leave out “This section” and insert “Subsection (3)”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 91.

Amendment 90, page 72, line 10, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

‘(3A) Subsection (3B) applies where—

(a) an application is made under section 96 to a law enforcement chief for a targeted equipment interference warrant, and

(b) the purpose of the warrant is to obtain—

(i) communications sent by, or intended for, a person who is a member of a relevant legislature, or

(ii) a member of a relevant legislature’s private information.

(3B) The law enforcement chief may not issue the warrant without the approval of the Secretary of State unless the law enforcement chief believes that the warrant (if issued) would authorise interference only with equipment which would be in Scotland at the time of the issue of the warrant or which the law enforcement chief believes would be in Scotland at that time.

(3C) The Secretary of State may give approval for the purposes of subsection (3B) only with the approval of the Prime Minister.

(3D) In a case where the decision whether to issue a targeted equipment interference warrant is to be taken by an appropriate delegate in relation to a law enforcement chief under section 96(3), the reference in subsection (3B) to the law enforcement chief is to be read as a reference to the appropriate delegate.” —[Mr John Hayes.]

Clause 94, as amended by amendment 90, requires the Secretary of State to obtain the approval of the Prime Minister before a targeted equipment interference warrant is issued by the Secretary of State in circumstances where the purpose of the warrant is to obtain communications sent by a member of a relevant legislature or a member of a relevant legislature’s private information. This amendment deals with the case where a law enforcement chief has power to decide to issue a targeted equipment interference warrant under clause 96. In similar circumstances, the law enforcement chief requires the approval of the Secretary of State before issuing a targeted equipment interference warrant. The approval of the Secretary of State may in turn only be given with the approval of the Prime Minister. There is an exception for the case where the warrant would authorise interference only with equipment which would be in Scotland at the time of the issue of the warrant (or which is believed to be in Scotland).

Clause 96

POWER TO ISSUE Warrants TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Amendments made: 92, page 74, line 8, at end insert—

‘(3) A law enforcement chief who is the chairman, or a deputy chairman, of the Independent Police Complaints Commission may consider that the condition in subsection (1)(a) is satisfied only if the offence, or all of the offences, to which the serious crime relates are offences that are being investigated as part of an investigation by the Commission under Schedule 3 to the Police Reform Act 2002.”

Clause 93

POWER TO ISSUE WARRANTS TO THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE

Amendment made: 40, page 71, line 34, leave out subsection (2)—[Mr John Hayes.]

This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.
This amendment is related to amendment 125. It makes special provision about how clause 96(1)(a) applies where the law enforcement chief is the chairman, or a deputy chairman, of the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Amendment 41, page 74, line 14, leave out subsection (11) —(Mr John Hayes.)
This amendment is consequential on new clause 5.

**Clause 103**

**RENEWAL OF WARRANTS**

*Amendments made: 93, page 81, line 35, leave out subsection (8)*

This amendment is consequential on amendment 91.

Amendment 94, page 81, line 43, leave out “Section” and insert “Sections94 (Members of Parliament etc.) and”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 91.

Amendment 95, page 81, line 43, leave out “applies” and insert “apply”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 91.

Amendment 96, page 81, line 44, leave out “it applies” and insert “they apply” —(Mr John Hayes.)
This amendment is consequential on amendment 91

**Clause 104**

**MODIFICATION OF WARRANTS ISSUED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE OR SCOTTISH MINISTERS**

*Amendments made: 97, page 82, line 19, at end insert—

"( ) But—

(a) where a targeted equipment interference warrant relates only to a matter specified in section90(1)(a), only to a matter specified in section90(1)(d), or only to both such matters, the details included in the warrant in accordance with section101(3) may not be modified;

(b) where a targeted examination warrant relates only to a matter specified in section90(2)(a), the details included in the warrant in accordance with section101(5) may not be modified."

Where a targeted equipment interference warrant relates only to a particular person or organisation or to a particular location (or to both), this amendment prevents the details included in the warrant in accordance with clause 101(3) from being modified (so, for example, names cannot be added). It also provides for a comparable restriction on the modification of targeted examination warrants.

Amendment 98, page 82, line 22, at end insert—

“This is subject to section (Further provision about modifications under section104(7))."

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 99, page 82, line 23, leave out subsections (4) to (12)

This amendment is consequential on NC11, NC12 and NC13.

Amendment 100, page 83, line 35, at end insert—

"( ) Sections (Persons who may make modifications under section104), (Further provision about modifications under section104), (Notification of modifications) and105 contain further provision about making modifications under this section.” —(Mr John Hayes.)
This amendment is consequential on NC11, NC12 and NC13.

**Clause 105**

**APPROVAL OF MODIFICATIONS UNDER SECTION 104 MADE IN URGENT CASES**

*Amendments made: 101, page 83, line 38, leave out “104(7)” and insert “(Persons who may make modifications under section104(2)”*

This amendment is consequential on NC11.

Amendment 102, page 83, line 38, at end insert—

‘(1A) This section also applies where—

(a) section100 applies in relation to the making of a modification under section104,

(b) the person making the modification does so without the approval of a Judicial Commissioner, and

(c) that person considered that there was an urgent need to make the modification.”

This amendment extends clause 105 to provide for the approval by a Judicial Commissioner of certain modifications made in urgent cases.

Amendment 103, page 83, line 39, leave out “a designated senior official” and insert “the appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 104, page 83, line 41, leave out from “section,” to end of line 43 and insert “the appropriate person” is—

“(a) in a case falling within subsection (1), a designated senior official, and

(b) in a case falling within subsection (1A), a Judicial Commissioner.”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 105, page 83, line 44, leave out subsection (4)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 108.

Amendment 106, page 84, line 1, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 107, page 84, line 3, leave out “senior official’s” and insert “appropriate person’s”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 108, page 84, line 5 , at end insert—

‘( ) As soon as is reasonably practicable after a designated senior official makes a decision under subsection (5)—

(a) a Judicial Commissioner must be notified of—

(i) the decision, and

(ii) if the senior official has decided to approve the decision to make the modification, the modification in question, and

(b) the Secretary of State or (in the case of a warrant issued by the Scottish Ministers) a member of the Scottish Government must be notified personally of the matters mentioned in paragraph (a)(i) and (ii).”

This amendment provides that, where a designated senior official has decided whether to approve a modification, a Judicial Commissioner, and the person who issued the warrant, must be notified of the decision.

Amendment 109, page 84, line 6, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 110, page 84, line 8, leave out paragraph (a)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 108.
Amendment 111, page 84, line 17, leave out “a designated senior official” and insert “an appropriate person”.

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 112, page 84, line 19, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”.

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Amendment 113, page 84, line 23, leave out “designated senior official” and insert “appropriate person”. — (Mr John Hayes.)

See the explanatory statement for amendment 102.

Clause 106

MODIFICATION OF WARRANTS ISSUED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT CHIEFS

Amendments made: 114, page 85, line 7, at end insert —

‘( ) But where a warrant relates only to a matter specified in section 90(1)(a), only to a matter specified in section 90(1)(d), or only to both such matters, the details included in the warrant in accordance with section 101(3) may not be modified.’

Where a warrant issued by a law enforcement chief under Part 5 relates only to a particular person or organisation or to a particular location (or to both), this amendment prevents the details included in the warrant in accordance with clause 101(3) from being modified (so, for example, names cannot be added).

Amendment 115, page 85, line 9, at the beginning insert —

“except in the case of a modification removing any matter, name or description.”

This amendment provides that there is no requirement to satisfy a necessity or proportionality test where a modification is simply removing a matter, name or description from a warrant.

Amendment 116, page 85, line 10, leave out —

“warrant as modified continues to be”

and insert “modification is”

This amendment alters the test that applies to the modification of a warrant issued under Part 5 by a law enforcement chief so that the person deciding whether to make the modification has to consider whether the modification itself (rather than the warrant as modified) satisfies the test of necessity.

Amendment 117, page 85, line 12, leave out —

“warrant as so modified” and insert “modification”

This amendment alters the test that applies to the modification of a warrant issued under Part 5 by a law enforcement chief so that the person deciding whether to make the modification has to consider whether the modification itself (rather than the warrant as modified) satisfies the proportionality test.

Amendment 118, page 85, line 30, leave out —

“warrant as modified” and insert “modification”

This amendment is consequential on amendments 116 and 117.

Amendment 119, page 85, line 33, leave out subsection (7) and insert —

‘(7) Sections 94 (Members of Parliament etc.) and 100 (items subject to legal privilege) apply in relation to the making of a modification to a warrant under section 106, other than a modification removing any matter, name or description, as they apply in relation to the issuing of a warrant.”

This amendment is related to amendment 91 and provides for the special safeguards in clause 94 (as well as those in clause 100) to apply in relation to modifications of warrants issued by law enforcement chiefs (other than modifications removing a matter, name or description).

Amendment 120, page 85, line 36, at end insert —

‘( ) In the application of section 94 in accordance with subsection (7), subsection (3B) is to be read as if for the words from “unless” to the end of the subsection there were substituted “unless the law enforcement chief believes that the warrant (as modified) would authorise interference only with equipment which would be in Scotland at the time of the making of the modification or which the law enforcement chief believes would be in Scotland at that time”.

( ) Where section 94 applies in relation to the making of a modification to a warrant under section 106, subsection (3)(b) of this section has effect in relation to the making of the modification as if the words “except where the person making the modification considers that there is an urgent need to make it” were omitted.” —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 119.

Clause 110

SERVICE OF WARRANTS OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM

Amendments made: 121, page 88, line 8, leave out “on a person outside the United Kingdom”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 122.

Amendment 122, page 88, line 9, at end insert —

‘( ) A copy of the warrant must be served in such a way as to bring the contents of the warrant to the attention of the person who the implementing authority considers may be able to provide assistance in relation to it.”. —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment makes it clear that, where a person is required under clause 109 to provide assistance in relation to a warrant, a copy of the warrant must be served in such a way that the person is aware of the contents of the warrant and so can provide assistance.

Clause 115

SECTION 114: MEANING OF “EXCEPTED DISCLOSURE”

Amendment made: 123, page 92, line 37, at end insert —

“( ) a disclosure made to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament for the purposes of facilitating the carrying out of any of its functions.” —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment enables disclosure to be made to the Intelligence and Security Committee without breaching clause 114.

Clause 117

RESTRICTION ON ISSUE OF WARRANTS TO CERTAIN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Amendment made: 124, page 94, line 10, at end insert —

“( ) the chairman, or a deputy chairman, of the Independent Police Complaints Commission.”. —(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 92.

Schedule 6

ISSUE OF WARRANTS UNDER SECTION 96 ETC: TABLE

Amendments made: 125, page 214, line 37, at end insert —
Clause 216

NATIONAL SECURITY NOTICES

Amendments made: 78, page 167, line 11, leave out from first “a” to end of line 16 and insert “national security notice under this section if—

(a) the Secretary of State considers that the notice is necessary in the interests of national security,

(b) the Secretary of State considers that the conduct required by the notice is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct, and

(c) the decision to give the notice has been approved by a Judicial Commissioner.

’( ) A “national security notice” is a notice requiring the operator to take such specified steps as the Secretary of State considers necessary in the interests of national security.”

The effect of the amendment is that the approval of a Judicial Commissioner is required for the giving of national security notices.

Amendment 79, page 167, line 34, after “Sections” insert “(Approval of notices under section 216 or 217 by Judicial Commissioners)” — (Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment NC10.

Clause 217

MAINTENANCE OF TECHNICAL CAPABILITY

Amendments made: 80, page 167, line 36, leave out from second “a” to end of line 37 and insert “technical capability notice under this section if—

(a) the Secretary of State considers that the notice is necessary for securing that the operator has the capability to provide any assistance which the operator may be required to provide in relation to any relevant authorisation,

(b) the Secretary of State considers that the conduct required by the notice is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct, and

(c) the decision to give the notice has been approved by a Judicial Commissioner.

’( ) A “technical capability notice” is a notice—

The effect of the amendment is that the Secretary of State may give a technical capability notice only if the necessity and proportionality tests set out in the amendment are met and a Judicial Commissioner has approved the decision to give the notice.

Amendment 81, page 168, line 2, at end insert—

“relevant authorisation” means—

(a) any warrant issued under Part 2, 5 or 6, or

(b) any authorisation or notice given under Part 3;”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 80.

Amendment 82, page 168, line 13, leave out “(see subsection (9))” — (Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 80.

Amendment 83, page 168, line 35, leave out subsection (6)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 80.

Amendment 84, page 168, line 45, leave out subsection (9)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 80.

Amendment 85, page 169, line 1, after “Sections” insert “(Approval of notices under section 216 or 217 by Judicial Commissioners)” — (Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment NC10.
Clause 218

FURTHER PROVISION ABOUT NOTICES UNDER SECTION 216 OR 217

Amendments made: 86, page 169, line 17, leave out “Where the relevant notice” and insert “In the case of a technical capability notice that”

This amendment clarifies that clause 218(4) is relevant only in relation to technical capability notices under clause 217.

Amendment 87, page 170, line 9, at end insert—

‘( ) Subsection (9) applies to a person to whom a national security notice is given despite any other duty imposed on the person by or under Part 1, or Chapter 1 of Part 2, of the Communications Act 2003.” —(Mr John Hayes.

The amendment makes it clear that a telecommunications operator that is given a national security notice must comply with it even if that would potentially conflict with any requirements imposed on the operator under Part 1 or Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Communications Act 2003, which make provision about the functions of OFCOM and the regulation of electronic communications networks and services.)

Bill to be further considered tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Ordered.

That the Motion in the name of Chris Grayling relating to the Electoral Commission shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(Guy Opperman.)

Mr Speaker: Sadly, I say to the Minister for Security that no oration on that matter was required.

Excess Winter Deaths

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

Mr Speaker: I am sure that colleagues who—unaccountably—are leaving the Chamber will do so quickly and quietly, so that the hon. Gentleman who has the Adjournment debate can make his case and be heard with courtesy and attentiveness.

11.30 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I am grateful to have secured this opportunity to raise the important subject of excess winter deaths again in this House. I first raised the issue with the Prime Minister some four years ago. Since then, tragically, 117,000 people have died unnecessarily because of the cold—43,000 in the winter of 2014-15 alone. I think we can all agree that it is simply unacceptable that each year tens of thousands of people are dying unnecessarily. I am not going to pretend that this is an easy problem to solve or that any one Government are to blame. Tonight I intend to outline where I believe the Government’s approach can be improved and, in a constructive manner, offer suggestions of steps that I believe should be taken to address this national scandal, because while today was a very warm day, now—during the summer months—is precisely the time when we should be preparing for the winter.

The majority of those who are dying are elderly. We know that the demographic group most affected by excess winter deaths is women aged over 85, yet we also know from the evidence across Europe that more people are dying unnecessarily here than is the case elsewhere. Scandinavian countries including Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden all have significantly lower rates of excess winter deaths than the UK, despite all of those countries being considerably colder. One of the reasons for that is that, in policy terms, Scandinavian countries tend to be better prepared. As former director general of Age UK Michelle Mitchell put it, “excess winter deaths are much lower because they take staying warm seriously and prepare for the cold weather.”

We know that that preparation is key, and I will outline several areas where preparation in our country could be improved.

The first is public health. The Office for National Statistics analysis of the most recent excess winter deaths figures highlights flu as an important factor in mortality levels, so I have to say to the Minister that I was concerned to be left waiting this spring for the Government’s flu plan for the upcoming winter. It was published just before recess, but that was some two months later than last year. Will the Minister say why the Government’s flu preparations are behind compared with a year ago?

Secondly, we know that cold homes are a major cause of excess winter deaths. They are also a burden on our public finances. Former chief medical officer Liam Donaldson has estimated that cold homes cost the NHS £850 million each year. Unfortunately, many elderly people live in fuel poverty—people like Lynne from Cumbria, who to keep warm in winter has to put on several layers of clothing and heat a hot water bottle, because she cannot afford to have the heating on when she needs to. For people like Lynne energy prices are a big issue. I welcome the fact that energy prices are
falling, but they are not falling in line with wholesale prices, and too many energy customers find themselves on tariffs that lead to them paying more than they should. What discussions has the Minister had with her colleagues at the Department of Energy and Climate Change about alleviating fuel poverty to help to prevent excess winter deaths?

In addition, more can and should be done about home insulation. Although neither programme was perfect, I thought the green deal and energy company obligation were steps in the right direction. However, the green deal has now expired and the energy company obligation expires next year. We have been told that it will be reformed and renewed but, as yet, no timeline has been set out by the Government for doing so. May I ask the Minister what discussions she has had with fellow Ministers at the Department of Energy and Climate Change about ensuring that home insulation is increased?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing an important issue to the House in this Adjournment debate. In the period from July 2014 to August 2015, there were 870 excess winter deaths in Northern Ireland—the highest figure since 2009-10. It is unbelievable that the figure is so high in a developed nation such as ours. Does he agree that we need to do more to eradicate winter deaths, not just to reduce them? In other words, it should be target zero.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He is absolutely right to draw attention to the heavy costs that his part of the world has borne. He is right to point out that in a prosperous, wealthy nation—yes, of course we have challenges—it is simply unacceptable that anyone should die as a result of the cold. The numbers that he has outlined in Northern Ireland and the national numbers that I outlined are simply unacceptable. As I said, this not the fault of any single Government—this is an issue that has challenged successive Governments. The Prime Minister recently said to me that these figures act as a standing rebuke to all Governments. The issue for us in the House tonight is what practical measures and action the Government can take to reduce the numbers and get to the point, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, where no one dies in this country as a result of the cold.

I was outlining some of those practical measures and was asking the Minister about the conversations that I hoped she would have with her colleagues at DECC on home insulation. Any measures that the Government seek to take should be targeted at those groups such as the elderly who are the most vulnerable to the cold. That brings me to a crucial point about the importance of cross-government working. Excess winter deaths are clearly an issue that requires a cross-government approach, but despite the fact that nearly 44,000 people died unnecessarily in the most recent winter for which we have figures, there is not a joined-up cross-government plan to reduce excess winter deaths.

A number of Departments, including the Department of Health, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Cabinet Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government, have policies which could contribute to reducing excess winter deaths. As yet, there is no overarching cross-government strategy to join up those policies and ensure that they contribute in the best possible way to reducing excess winter deaths. It is often left to local authorities to develop their own approach to reducing excess winter deaths. In Barnsley, we are fortunate that our local authority takes this issue very seriously. The council is making a concerted effort to ensure that vulnerable and elderly people live in heated homes.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. Does he agree that it is not just about the responsibility of Government or of local authorities? Fuel companies have a duty to ensure that as wholesale prices come down so too do the bills that people, including the most vulnerable people in our society, pay.

Dan Jarvis: I agree, and it is important that we seek to have a debate with the energy companies about what practical measures they would be prepared to take to reduce fuel poverty, particularly for the most elderly and vulnerable members of the community. I recently had the great privilege of engaging in a webchat on Mumsnet, and this was an issue that many people raised. What practical measures are energy and utility companies prepared to take? That is partly a matter for the regulator, and it is partly a matter for Government, but it is also, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, a matter for the energy companies. I hope that they will listen carefully to the content of our debate. It is not in their interests for elderly people to freeze to death, and I look forward to having a constructive dialogue with them ahead of the winter months to see what measures can be taken to reduce the number of deaths this winter.

I was talking about the work that is taking place locally. My local authority is making a concerted effort to ensure that the vulnerable and the elderly live in warmer homes. The most recent practical example was the council securing funding for a warm homes programme, which offers free central heating replacements for people on low incomes who have no gas central heating system. I recently met one of my constituents, John Key, who had benefited from the scheme. At 84 years old, he had never had gas central heating and had never been able to heat the top floor of his home. Now, thanks to Barnsley Council, he is able to do that.

However, as I frequently say, not everyone is lucky enough to live in Barnsley, and I fear that what we have developing across the country is a patchwork approach to preventing excess winter deaths. That may well explain why there is substantial regional variation in the national figures, with the excess winter death rate in the south-west almost 20% higher than the rate in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Tonight, therefore, I am calling for the Government to bring forward a national strategy to reduce excess winter deaths. The strategy should be cross-government and should incorporate the following elements: a clear plan for reducing the number of excess winter deaths, with regular assessments to review the plan’s success; an independent assessment of what additional policies would help to reduce excess winter deaths; and a cross-departmental working group to co-ordinate current policy efforts to reduce excess winter deaths.
Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is outlining a plan of action. Does he feel that there is a role that the Salvation Army and church groups, whose congregations are normally elderly people, could play in the Government’s strategy?

Dan Jarvis: I absolutely do believe that there is a role for the charitable sector and for a range of organisations that make hugely significant contributions. However, the point I am trying to make concerns the means by which we draw those contributions together—the practical co-ordination measures that can be taken at a local level, led by directors of public health, to ensure that we have the most effective response and bring together all the different agencies locally, including the local authority, the clinical commissioning group, the local hospital, the GPs practices and the organisations the hon. Gentleman rightly referred to.

Before drawing to a conclusion, I want to take the opportunity to tell the House that I have started a petition today on Parliament’s petition website so that people across the country can join me in calling for a national strategy. I am pleased to say that, despite the fact that the petition launched only a few hours ago, it has already received a signature from one of the Minister’s own constituents—I hope she will welcome that contribution.

To conclude, the way in which a society cares for the most vulnerable is an important metric by which any society should seek to be judged. At the moment, given the numbers of people who are dying each year, we as a country are failing that test. Reducing excess winter deaths is an issue Members on both sides of the House should make more of. As a Health Minister, I will focus a little bit more on the health points, but I give the hon. Member for Barnsley Central an undertaking that we will take up those questions of his that it would be more appropriate for the Department of Energy and Climate Change to answer, and we will make sure that he gets a response.

Let me return to the flu. I want to address the hon. Gentleman’s point about the high number of excess winter deaths in 2014-15. The principal reason that excess mortality was higher that winter than in previous seasons is that the main strain of flu circulating in 2014-15, which was AH3N2, was one to which older people were particularly vulnerable. Flu affects different groups of people in different years. For example, the strain circulating in the season just gone, namely 2015-16, had more impact on children and younger people. The impact of the 2014-15 strain on older people unfortunately resulted in a large number of flu outbreaks in care homes, and higher than expected numbers of admissions to hospital and intensive care for flu. Cold snaps and other respiratory infections may also have contributed to an increase in excess mortality. The situation was not unique to the UK; 14 other European countries also reported an increase in excess mortality due to the same circulating strain of flu.

The hon. Gentleman will recall, I am sure, media reports on the effectiveness of the 2014-15 flu vaccine. There is a complex system behind understanding what goes into the vaccine, and there is a long lead time in preparing it in the required quantities. It is based on the World Health Organisation’s analysis of the circulating strains, but occasionally, for technical reasons, we do not get the match we are looking for. Although the interim mid-season figures caused concern, I am pleased to report that the final findings showed that the vaccine provided some protection against the primary strain, and good protection against the B strain that circulated later in the season. Nevertheless, it was a very difficult strain of the flu that affected older people in particular. Initial findings indicate that the vaccine for the season just gone, namely 2015-16, was well matched to the predominant circulating strain.

Vaccination remains the best protection against flu. The seasonal flu vaccination is offered free of charge to those people in whom flu can be more serious and even fatal. I urge those Members present to encourage their constituents—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does this—to get the free vaccines. Despite the fact that they are free and that a lot of effort goes into promoting
people’s eligibility, it is surprising that there is still a large number of people who do not take advantage of them. It is something with which we ask constituency Members to assist. I have always felt that our surgeries, where we may see some of the most vulnerable members of our community, give us an opportunity to do that. I am always looking for ways to promote this through Members of the House.

In September 2013, we rolled out a new programme offering children flu vaccination. This programme aims to protect children and reduce the transmission of infection in the wider population. We know that the programme works, because it reduced flu levels among children who received the vaccine and among the wider community. It is important to explain that this is why we focus on children so much. In 2014-15, GP consultations for flu-like illnesses were 59% lower in the pilot areas where the vaccine was offered to primary school children than in other areas. Those results are important, and they demonstrate why the child flu programme is essential to protect not only children but the whole community. Some commissioners refer to small children as “super-spreaders” of their members of family and of the community are especially vulnerable.

I turn to the cold weather plan, which is at the core of what the hon. Gentleman called for. As he is aware, in addition to the flu programme, Public Health England annually publishes a cold weather plan for England, which is a collaboration between the Department of Health, NHS England and the Local Government Association. That plan provides guidance on how to keep warm in the winter and information on where support is available. That is underpinned by a cold weather alert service provided by the Met Office. The plan is aligned with additional guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on reducing excess winter mortality and morbidity and the health risks associated with cold homes. We are trying to draw together all the key strands of the health system and local government.

Those most at risk of excess deaths include the elderly, those with long-term and severe illness and young children. To protect those who are most vulnerable, NHS England and PHE last winter ran an integrated marketing campaign, “Stay Well This Winter”. The campaign encouraged people particularly at risk of being admitted to hospital during the winter to take actions to help them stay well. Those actions included: getting a flu jab, keeping houses warm, seeking advice from a pharmacist at the first sign of feeling unwell, getting prescriptions before the Christmas period and taking prescribed medicine as directed.

We targeted the campaign at helping those with long-term health conditions. Last year, we enlisted charities that cater for people with particular conditions, because a lot of people with long-term health conditions do not realise that they are eligible for that free support. We also targeted those aged 65 or over, pregnant women and parents of under-fives. We had very positive feedback from the campaign, in the light of which we are planning to run it again this winter for a longer period.

I turn to the issue of cold homes, which the hon. Gentleman focused on to a large extent, and to the Government’s work to reduce the number of cold homes, as he rightly challenges us to do. There must be more that we can do, and it is vital to keep asking ourselves what more can be done. There has been significant progress, although too many homes are cold in the winter months, and excess winter deaths in the coldest quarter of homes are almost three times as high as in the warmest quarter. To address this, the Department of Energy and Climate Change has published a fuel poverty strategy for England with clear targets to improve housing. The Government have also made grants and sources of advice available to help people to make their homes more energy-efficient, which can improve home heating as well as helping with bills. For example, the warm home discount provides a one-off £140 discount on electricity bills for 2 million households, including 1.3 million of the poorest pensioners. The extension of the warm home discount to 2020-21 will help households who are at most risk of fuel poverty with their energy bills.

The Government also dedicate £2 billion a year to helping pensioners with their energy bills, which means that some of the most vulnerable in our society each receive up to £300 every winter. On top of that, we are ensuring that the poorest in our society get £140 off their energy bills every year, and we are requiring energy companies to help us to make 1 million homes warmer by 2020. I heard the challenge from my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) to energy companies to do more, and he is quite right to make that challenge. There is more that can be done all round on this.

Last year, we invested £1 million in nine existing local schemes through the fuel poverty and health booster fund. That is about ensuring that people who are ill as a result of living in a cold home can get something done about the root cause of their illness. I turn to the cold weather plan, which is at the core of what the hon. Gentleman called for. As he is aware, in addition to the flu programme, Public Health England annually publishes a cold weather plan for England, which is a collaboration between the Department of Health, NHS England and the Local Government Association. That plan provides guidance on how to keep warm in the winter and information on where support is available. That is underpinned by a cold weather alert service provided by the Met Office. The plan is aligned with additional guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on reducing excess winter mortality and morbidity and the health risks associated with cold homes. We are trying to draw together all the key strands of the health system and local government.

Those most at risk of excess deaths include the elderly, those with long-term and severe illness and young children. To protect those who are most vulnerable, NHS England and PHE last winter ran an integrated marketing campaign, “Stay Well This Winter”. The campaign encouraged people particularly at risk of being admitted to hospital during the winter to take actions to help them stay well. Those actions included: getting a flu jab, keeping houses warm, seeking advice from a pharmacist at the first sign of feeling unwell, getting prescriptions before the Christmas period and taking prescribed medicine as directed.

We targeted the campaign at helping those with long-term health conditions. Last year, we enlisted charities that cater for people with particular conditions, because a lot of people with long-term health conditions do not realise that they are eligible for that free support. We also targeted those aged 65 or over, pregnant women and parents of under-fives. We had very positive feedback from the campaign, in the light of which we are planning to run it again this winter for a longer period.

I turn to the issue of cold homes, which the hon. Gentleman focused on to a large extent, and to the Government’s work to reduce the number of cold homes,
enable front-line staff to hand-hold people through the process, particularly if they are vulnerable, is really important.

I hope that I have given the hon. Gentleman some sense of the things that are going on. We are continuing to invest time and effort in learning, through an iterative process, about what has worked previously. I stress the fact that we were particularly affected by that strain of flu and the nature of the vaccine’s match to it, and it was not only the UK that was affected in that way. Nevertheless, I take his central point that we must all look at what more we can do to bear down on this problem. I am very happy to take away the points that he raised, and to bring them up with ministerial colleagues with responsibility for energy. I am sure that he will return to this subject, and I am happy to discuss it further with him outside the House and, no doubt, at some point in the future, on the Floor of the House again. I thank him for bringing this vital topic to the House’s attention this evening, and I thank all colleagues who have stayed for this late but important debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.57 pm

*House adjourned.*
The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Young People

1. Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that young people are not disproportionately affected by reductions in government expenditure.

2. Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that young people are not disproportionately affected by reductions in government expenditure.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): The Government have a long-term economic plan designed to help young people, which includes 3 million new apprenticeship starts, a 10-year low in youth unemployment, the lifetime individual savings account to help first-time buyers, 360,000 16-year-olds doing National Citizen Service and record numbers going to university.

Helen Hayes: The Chancellor has claimed that the Government “put the next generation first.”—[Official Report, 16 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 951.]

However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s “Is Britain Fairer?” report, which was published last year, found that younger people in the UK faced the worst economic prospects for generations. Young people in my constituency are bearing a disproportionate burden of the Government’s cuts. The abolition of the education maintenance allowance has made it harder for 16 and 17-year-olds to pursue educational opportunities; university tuition fees have trebled and are set to rise again; changes to the schools funding formula will see—

Mr Speaker: Order. All we need is a question with a question mark at the end of it in one sentence.

Helen Hayes: Oh!

Mr Speaker: Sorry, but that is the way it is.

Helen Hayes: Sorry, Mr Speaker. My question is, when will the Chancellor offer a fair deal to our young people, and stop closing off opportunities and driving them into debt?

Greg Hands: That was an extraordinary question. It ignored all the announcements that I made about what the Government have been doing for young people. Let us not forget the situation we inherited in 2010, when youth unemployment had gone up by 45% under Labour. The facts are these: a record number of young people are going to university, including a record number from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the proportion of young people struggling financially has almost halved since the hon. Lady’s days in 2010.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The wages of 18 to 21-year-olds fell by about £1,000 a year during the last Parliament, yet under-25s are excluded from the national living wage. Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury condemn what the Minister for the Cabinet Office said: that that is because people under 25 are simply not productive enough?

Greg Hands: The hon. Gentleman is ignoring our amazing record on youth unemployment since we took office six years ago. Youth unemployment has fallen by 102,000 this year. Youth employment is up 94,000 over the year and is close to the highest proportion on record. On why the national living wage does not apply to those who are under 25, I remind him that the national minimum wage does apply to those who are under 25 and is increasing under this Government. For younger workers, the priority is to secure work and gain experience. Youth unemployment remains higher than the unemployment rate for those aged over 25.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Since 2010, nearly half a million fewer children and young people are in households where there is worklessness. Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the Government will continue to help households into work and to cut poverty?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend is quite right, and we will continue to take action in this space. The number of households where nobody had ever worked doubled under Labour. Thanks to us, youth employment is up 94,000 over the year and continues to rise.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way to give a fairer deal to younger people is to make sure that they are not saddled with the debts of reckless spending? Will he assure me that he will do everything he can to ensure that this Government balance the books?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend is quite right that it is future generations who would have to repay the debt that the last Labour Government left us and the even greater debt that the current Labour team want to give us with their reckless spending pledges. Household debt as a proportion of income has fallen since Labour’s financial crisis. We are in a much healthier condition in 2016 than we were in 2010.

Mr Speaker: Order. I must advise colleagues that we are today visited by Mr Kadri Veseli, the Speaker of the Parliament of Kosovo, who is visiting the UK in the year in which that independent nation celebrates eight years of independence. My colleague and his team are warmly welcome in the House.
Northern Powerhouse

2. Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): What progress he has made on the establishment of the northern powerhouse.

Mr Osborne: The hon. Lady is being a little churlish. We committed £6 billion to investment in transport in Humberside and Yorkshire, the area that her constituency is in. Specifically on flood defences, she raised on the Floor of the House very specific schemes that she wanted me to fund. I funded those in the Budget. As she well knows, the future phases do not yet have plans or a price tag, but I have said that in principle we are committed to those as well. If she works with us we will deliver those schemes, which of course were never delivered under a Labour Government.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Chancellor mentioned transport investment, yet his Government have presided over a situation in which there is 24 times more transport investment in London than in the north. However, on this occasion, although it pains me to do so, I want to ask the Chancellor to agree with me that people in the north need our country to remain at the heart of Europe so that our cities will keep growing.

Mr Osborne: First, it is quite right that we invest in major transport infrastructure in our capital city, which we have done with Crossrail and Crossrail 2, but that has not been to the exclusion of investment elsewhere in our country. In the hon. Lady’s part of the north-west there has been massive investment in electrification of the railways—I note that under the Labour Government only 10 miles of the country’s entire railways were electrified. High Speed 2 will help with fast train journeys to Merseyside as well as to Manchester. Now, with the new Merseyside Mayor agreed, we can go on pouring more money into the infrastructure of Merseyside so that we support private businesses in that area in growing and creating private sector jobs.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): What progress has he made on the establishment of the northern powerhouse.

Mr Osborne: I have agreed with my hon. Friend, and congratulated him and other west Yorkshire MPs who spoke out powerfully on the need for further investment in flood defences in west Yorkshire and in Leeds. We have provided that, with around £350 million extra in flood defence investment over the coming years to protect the businesses and communities he represents. Our neighbourhood planning Bill will ensure that we have a national infrastructure commission on a statutory footing to look at the big national challenges that we face, whether transport investment, broadband or indeed flood defence.

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. In recent years there has been a focus on economic development in the big cities of the north, but we now want to support the counties and county towns of the north of England. In the area that she represents so well we have the new growth deal for the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire city deal area. We are looking to devolve more economic powers to counties so that they too can see the benefits of securing economic growth. My door is always open to good, sensible proposals for investment in the counties of the north of England.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Chancellor speaks about investment in transport and in flood defences, both of which are crucial in my city of Leeds. Yet last month the Government cancelled the Leeds trolleybus scheme, and in 2011 flood defences were cancelled in Leeds, which contributed to the flooding we saw in December. Earlier this year the Government announced some money for flood defences, but it was just a fraction of what was cancelled five years ago, so I am surprised by the complacency of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), and ask the Government to invest properly in flood defences in our city.

Mr Osborne: The hon. Lady is being a little churlish. We committed £6 billion to investment in transport in Humberside and Yorkshire, the area that her constituency is in. Specifically on flood defences, she raised on the Floor of the House very specific schemes that she wanted me to fund. I funded those in the Budget. As she well knows, the future phases do not yet have plans or a price tag, but I have said that in principle we are committed to those as well. If she works with us we will deliver those schemes, which of course were never delivered under a Labour Government.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Chancellor mentioned transport investment, yet his Government have presided over a situation in which there is 24 times more transport investment in London than in the north. However, on this occasion, although it pains me to do so, I want to ask the Chancellor to agree with me that people in the north need our country to remain at the heart of Europe so that our cities will keep growing.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): This week is Humber business week. Despite the forthcoming opening of the A160 into Immingham docks, business leaders tell me that they feel somewhat disconnected from the northern powerhouse project. Will the Chancellor outline what future schemes might benefit them?
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Recent figures showed a 9.6% drop in the value of new construction project starts recorded in the so-called northern powerhouse to the end of 2015. Interestingly, despite the Chancellor’s rhetoric on investment, much of the public capital invested thus far has been delivered by the EU. Does he therefore disagree with the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), who said recently that Brexit will not affect Greater Manchester’s vision and access to funding?

Mr Osborne: As the hon. Lady well knows, I certainly believe that Britain is stronger in the European Union, and that it helps the northern powerhouse, but I make this observation: investment projects in the north of England are up over 100% in the last two years, which is in striking contrast to other areas. To give a sense of scale, investment projects in London are up 7% in the last two years. That is welcome, but in the northern powerhouse, they are up 127%. We are rebalancing the economic geography of this country. I am sure she will welcome the fact that the north of England now has the highest employment rate in the country’s history, and that we have seen the fastest falls in unemployment in the north of England.

Employment Trends

3. Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in the level of employment.

9. Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in the level of employment.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds): We have the highest employment rate on record, a record number of women in work, and the lowest claimant count since 1974. That means millions more opportunities for our fellow citizens. We must not now put at risk the security that has been brought about by our long-term economic plan.

Chris Green: From April to June 2014 to April to June 2015, the employment of British workers in the UK increased by a welcome 84,000, but the figures are three times higher for EU nationals. With respect to the national living wage, what assessment has been made of anticipated job growth in the UK? Does my hon. Friend believe that that will benefit the UK or EU citizens most?

Damian Hinds: Almost two thirds of the increase in employment over the past five years is accounted for by UK nationals. Today, nine in every 10 people in a job in the UK are UK nationals. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, Britain deserves a pay rise and the national living wage delivers it.

Michael Tomlinson: I am sure the Minister and the whole House welcome the latest unemployment figure in my constituency—it stands at only 361, or less than 1%—but what more can be done to ensure that that trend continues, given that we are down to the last few and the most difficult cases, especially bearing in mind the over-50s and those in the 18 to 24-year-old bracket?

Damian Hinds: I welcome that news from Mid Dorset and North Poole, and by further increasing support for the hardest to help we share my hon. Friend’s keenness to ensure that no one is left behind. We have announced the new youth obligation and made it more cost-effective for employers to hire young people and apprentices. We are also helping older jobseekers to retrain through pilot schemes that began in April 2015.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): This morning, the head of Hitachi warned that a Brexit vote means that jobs will be lost. What is the Treasury’s estimate of the number of jobs that will be at risk if we leave the European Union?

Damian Hinds: Our projection is that, following the immediate economic shock that would follow from Brexit, 500,000 jobs would be lost and there would be an increase in unemployment. Part of that is from the initial impact on foreign direct investment, but that effect continues thereafter.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): It is a concern not just of Hitachi but of any non-European company that has its European headquarters in the UK. The UK is much the most attractive location for them currently, and they would be in great difficulty if we left the European Union. Has the Department made an assessment of what that group of employers contributes and will contribute in future to UK employment, which would be at risk if we left the EU?

Damian Hinds: We have modelled the effect on foreign direct investment. One does not have to believe that people currently in the UK would leave. All one has to consider in relation to the detrimental impact on the UK is what will happen to foreign direct investment in the future. There are many good reasons to invest in Britain, but we know that 72% of firms that invest in this country say that our membership of the European Union is a key factor.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Alongside genocide and war, we hear all about the threat to jobs of leaving the European Union. Will my hon. Friend tell me what will be done if we vote to stay in and continue to have unlimited immigration from 27 foreign countries? What will be done to protect my constituents, low-paid workers who have seen their wages flatline because of unlimited immigration?

Damian Hinds: We have already taken steps to ensure that people cannot just come here and claim benefits from day one. The renegotiation the Prime Minister secured addressed the unnatural draw of our in-work benefits system. I should also say that one should not assume that the effect on immigration would be quite as great as is sometimes supposed, particularly when we look at the other models of agreements with the European Union, a number of which include free movement.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Does the Minister agree that a vote to leave the European Union on 23 June could have a negative effect on employment trends, particularly in Northern Ireland where 50,000 jobs are related to exports to the EU? The Chancellor saw the effect of that directly yesterday in Warrenpoint in my constituency.
Damian Hinds: I know that my right hon. Friend was in the hon. Lady’s constituency yesterday. Northern Ireland is of course in a particularly sensitive position, because of the land border with the Republic of Ireland, which would be a land border with the EU if we left. There are more people in work in Northern Ireland than ever before and we need to protect that.

Business Support

5. Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): What fiscal steps he is taking to support business.

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The Government are backing small and large businesses as part of our long-term economic plan. Our corporation tax rates are the lowest in the G20 and will fall even further to 17%. In the Budget, we cut the business rates burden in England for all rate payers and ensured that 600,000 businesses permanently pay no rates at all. This is a Conservative Government who support businesses and the jobs they create.

Robert Jenrick: In towns such as Newark, where 11,000 new jobs have been created under this Government, the task ahead is to attract not just any businesses but those that ensure that people are well paid. With that in mind, does the Chancellor acknowledge and agree that not only have 900,000 new businesses been created since 2010, but that the latest research by NatWest shows one in four working people are now in high-skilled, well-paid jobs?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right to point out all the good things that are happening in Newark. Across the east midlands, we have seen the creation of 53,000 new small and medium-sized businesses since we came into Downing Street—a remarkable achievement. We have to ensure that we continue to move people up the job scale and that their wages continue to grow. The good news is that of the jobs being created at the moment 80% or so are full time and the majority are in skilled occupations.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): We all know the benefits of innovation to business and to the economy; so why does the Chancellor think his decision to change innovation support from grants to loans is anything other than a bad idea that will increase cost and risk to companies seeking to innovate?

Mr Osborne: I think the hon. Gentleman would accept, as I would, that it has been a challenge for the UK to turn good inventions in the laboratory into good inventions in the workplace that sell around the world. Our innovation support has had to be updated and modernised. The idea of loans is actually borrowed from a French initiative that has worked well in that economy, in terms of turning scientific invention into good products in the marketplace.

Stewart Hosie: That is a rather unconvincing answer. Of course it is not simply about innovation, but exports. We all understand the benefits to business and the economy of exporting more, so why does the Chancellor think it is a remotely good idea to take the decision to cut the UK Trade & Investment budget by £42 million over the next four years, making it more difficult to export and more difficult for him to meet his own target of doubling exports by the end of the decade?

Mr Osborne: Over the past five or six years, we have greatly increased the UKTI budget, but as with every Department, since it is paid for by the taxpayers that the hon. Gentleman and I represent, we need to make sure we get value for money. The new head of UKTI is ensuring that the money is going to the frontline to support small and medium-sized Scottish exporters and others in selling around the world. He should welcome the enormous success of many Scottish businesses, from the whisky business to agricultural industries and manufacturing, in exporting around the world, with the support of UKTI—the clue is in the first two letters.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): The Chancellor has introduced a subsidy for peer-to-peer lending tax relief on ISAs, which is a high-risk, high-return market. Most people support the intention, which is to increase competition in the SME lending market, but many are becoming concerned that some of these loans are being marketed to those who cannot reasonably be expected to understand the risks. What is the Treasury doing to ensure that the taxpayer does not end up encouraging the marketing of schemes to people who can least afford to lose the money?

Mr Osborne: At its own request, the peer-to-peer lending industry is now regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, which is alert to the risks that my right hon. Friend identifies, but I wish to make a broader observation. In the financial crash, we saw the limitations of the UK’s credit system, where many companies were reliant on bank finance. In the last few years, we have tried to broaden the range of financing options for small and medium-sized businesses, in terms of not just capital markets but innovative new products such as peer-to-peer lending. Using things such as ISA wrappers to encourage this new form of finance for small businesses is a good thing for our economy.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): To help Welsh businesses, will the Chancellor consider abolishing the Severn crossing tolls in 2018, rather than just halving them?

Mr Osborne: By halving the tolls, we have taken a significant step to help Welsh businesses and businesses on the other side of the border, while ensuring we have the resources to maintain the bridge without having to draw on the same taxpayers through their tax bill.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I have had business and broadband events at Easingwold, in my constituency, and this Friday we have invited several providers, including fibre and satellite providers, as well as providers of point-to-point wireless, which, in our experience, is the best solution for those in the hardest-to-reach areas. Will the Chancellor consider extending the excellent satellite voucher scheme to point-to-point wireless or allowing communities to pool vouchers to facilitate and fund community-based schemes?

Mr Osborne: I am happy to take a close look at my hon. Friend’s proposal—I know what a rural constituency he represents. We have piloted support in north Yorkshire for rural businesses and their broadband links, and as announced in the Queen’s Speech, we are considering
using the digital economy Bill to make broadband a universal service obligation, because we know what a transformative effect it can have on the rural economy.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor talks about supporting business, and like Labour I am sure he will want to see long-term sustainable business growth in Britain. After his six years at the helm, what is the forecast for business investment growth this year?

Mr Osborne: According to the forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility, business growth this year and in the years ahead will be positive, whereas it was negative when I became Chancellor, so things are improving.

Seema Malhotra: The OBR has revised down business investment growth by a huge 4.9% since November, even after taking into account the fiscal measures the Chancellor has introduced, and we know that growth could fall further if we leave the EU. The acting head of the British Chambers of Commerce recently highlighted frustration among businesses over infrastructure projects, the huge skills gap, childcare, housing and the uncertainty around the apprenticeship levy. It almost sounds like gruel today without the jam tomorrow. Does the Chancellor agree with him?

Mr Osborne: Where was Labour’s apprenticeship levy—before they complain about what we are doing? If Labour wants to contribute to this important debate about how we make our economy more productive, we will need a better contribution. The hon. Lady’s Parliamentary Private Secretary has been in an email exchange with the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) in which the latter complained about these questions at Treasury Questions, saying that the brief she had just been sent was a disgrace and demonstrated that the Labour Treasury team—

Mr Speaker: Order. The Chancellor should remain seated. If that is the sum total of what he has to contribute on his feet in response to that question, frankly it was not worth the breath. It was utterly feeble and constitutionally improper. Learn it—it is very simple!

Brexit

6. Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the economy of the UK leaving the EU.

Mr Hanson: The head of the World Trade Organisation said yesterday that the process of negotiating deals outside Europe would take decades. Is that not one of the reasons why confidence would be hit, currency would fall and jobs would be lost, including the 24,000 in Wales that the Minister has mentioned, and why companies such as Hitachi have mentioned today that they would pull out of the United Kingdom? Do we not agree on this one, Minister?

Damian Hinds: I think we do agree on the turmoil that uncertainty can bring, and the uncertainty about future trade deals that the right hon. Gentleman raises is part of that. There is much more uncertainty as well, of course, for businesses that currently trade with other European countries and people who are employed in those countries or might be thinking of going to them. All these things generate uncertainty, which creates economic turmoil in the short run. There is a real danger of missing out on a very large number of third-party trades in the long run, when all the EU trade deals currently under negotiation are finished, which will account for some 80% of our trade.

Mr Cunningham: Can the Minister say what the economic benefits are of us being in the European Union, particularly in places such as Coventry and the west midlands, and more importantly what the impact on manufacturing is?

Damian Hinds: The automotive sector in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency and elsewhere is particularly important. It is a high value-added sector that has been a great British success story in recent years and it has complex cross-border supply chains, so it is unsurprising that those speaking out in favour of remain include the chief executives of Jaguar Land Rover and Rolls-Royce and the chairman of the Coventry and Warwickshire local enterprise partnership.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Considering that the UK has been a member of the EU for over 40 years and we still do not even have a trade deal with the United States of America, the largest economy in the world, does my hon. Friend not agree that our economy would benefit from the United Kingdom being able to negotiate our own free trade deals?

Damian Hinds: The businesses that I speak to say overwhelmingly that they feel they would get a better deal with the increased economic clout—five times the economic weight—that comes from being a member of the EU as opposed to Britain being on its own. All these trade deals take a long time, but when all the current EU negotiations are completed, the EU will have more trade deals with the rest of the world—so we will, too—than the United States and Canada combined.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The living wage is a very attractive economic policy, especially in eastern Europe. Given the extensive financial modelling that my hon. Friend has conducted, can he tell the House his official estimate of the number of unskilled migrants coming to this country from eastern Europe in the first five years after a vote to remain?

Damian Hinds: The national living wage makes sure that British workers who are low paid cannot be undercut by people coming from other countries. It will be of
great benefit to our economy. It is also the case that as our legal minimum pay increases, we will still be within the middle range internationally.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Yesterday the Chancellor told the people of Northern Ireland that house prices would fall by 18% if we voted to leave the EU, even though the day before he said that housing costs would go up by 9%. He told us that 14,000 jobs would be lost in export industries, even though the exchange rate, which would help exports, was set to plummet, and made an uncanny prediction about incomes in 14 years’ time. Does the Minister not realise that the Chancellor is expending his own credibility and that of the Government, given the panic that has now set in, by trying to sell the threadbare economic case for remaining in the EU?

Damian Hinds: Saying that house prices would come down, but housing costs would go up is not inconsistent at all, as the cost of borrowing would go up. Northern Ireland is a special case when it comes to the housing market, but in many parts of the country people might say that while it would be a good thing for house prices to come down, that should not be a result of crashing the economy and making it more difficult for people to borrow.

As for the long-term forecast, it is, of course, difficult to predict what will happen 15 years hence. What the Treasury analysis seeks to do is say, other things being equal, what will happen to the 15-year forecast whether we are in or out of the European Union, and the answer is clear: in the central scenario, GDP will be hit to the tune of £4,300 per household.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, given that so many international firms—including, most recently, Hitachi—have made it very, very clear that being in the European Union and in a single market means that this is a good country in which to invest, the obvious thing to do for the purposes of investment and jobs is remain in the European Union?

Damian Hinds: I do agree with that. The United Kingdom has the third highest stock of foreign direct investment in the world, coming behind only the United States and China. We are the biggest recipient of foreign direct investment in the European Union, and also from the EU. The experience of accession countries shows that the move into the European Union really does make a difference, and that it is not just about tariffs, but about membership of a customs union. Some, indeed most, of the alternative models do not include that, but it is very important in relation to, for example, the cross-border supply chains about which the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) asked earlier.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Only two countries, Germany and the Netherlands, run a surplus with Britain; the rest run a deficit. Does the Minister agree that in the event of a Brexit, those other countries would vote for tariffs—as, indeed, would Germany—in order to stop Japanese car imports? Has he created a model to assess what impact those tariffs would have on employment levels in the short and medium terms, and on inward investment? I suggest that the impact would be disastrous.

Damian Hinds: Different countries will have different interests, and no doubt they would come to the surface during the two years of the article 50 negotiations. A very large majority of other countries using enhanced qualified majority voting would be needed to agree a deal. Fundamentally, however, I do not think that this is about the deficit that one country has with the EU, or vice versa; I think that it is about the relative size of the export market to that country. While 44% of our exports go to the EU, the EU figure is 8% in the other direction, which means that in any negotiation, the other side will have the better hand.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Can the Minister explain why we are paying more than £10 billion net this year for a £68 billion trade deficit with a declining part of the world’s economy, when anyone with even an ounce of common sense knows that it is possible to have a £68 billion trade deficit with a declining part of the world’s economy for nothing?

Damian Hinds: I think that I detected a revised figure in my hon. Friend’s assessment of our net contribution to the European Union. The fact is that for every pound that is paid in tax in this country, a little over a penny goes to the European Union. That is a cost—it is not a trivial cost, and I do not belittle it—but what comes with it are the trade benefits, the enhancement of our economy and the protection of jobs and investment that we want to see.

Exports

7. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What steps he is taking to increase exports. [905194]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): Over the last six years, UK Trade & Investment has more than doubled the number of businesses that it helps. It now aims to help a further 100,000 firms to export by 2020.

Alan Brown: I thank the Minister for her answer, but it did not make it clear what is actually being done to increase exports. The Chancellor promised that his growth strategy would be underpinned by a doubling of exports to £1 trillion by the end of the decade, but to date his targets have been missed, and the export figures are moving in the wrong direction. What will the Government do to turn that dire performance around?

Harriett Baldwin: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned earlier the important work that UKTI is doing in not only promoting the Exporting is GREAT brand around the world, but, now—across the whole Government—encouraging all our embassies around the world to focus their resources on increasing the potential opportunities for our world-class exporters.
Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is an important role to be played by not only our embassy network, but our chambers of commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. I also welcome the fact that some of our larger banks have also set themselves targets for getting additional customers to start to export during the next five years.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister aware that Huddersfield and Yorkshire are already a northern powerhouse in terms of manufacturing and the quality of partnership with universities? Is she aware that my universities in Yorkshire and the manufacturing sector are terrified that we will leave the European Union? It will bankrupt the universities and the manufacturing sector.

Mr Speaker: Did we get a reference to exports? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman meant to mention it.

Mr Sheerman: We have great exporters as well.

Mr Speaker: Well done.

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the fact that the UK’s universities are unanimous in expressing the value that they put not only on higher education, but on the potential for those educated in universities to export in due course. He is absolutely right to highlight the fact that all other trade deals would be worse than the current zero-tariff trade deal that we have as a member of the EU.

Capital Gains Tax/Corporation Tax

8. Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): What assessment he has made of which groups within the UK population will benefit from planned changes to (a) capital gains and (b) corporation tax.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): Changes to capital gains tax will provide greater incentives to invest in companies. Up to 130,000 individuals a year, including up to 50,000 basic rate taxpayers, are estimated to pay lower tax as a result of the changes to CGT. The further cut to the corporation tax rate to 17% announced at the Budget will benefit over 1 million companies, large and small, supporting UK companies to invest, grow and create jobs.

Clive Lewis: Treasury figures show that just 200,000 individuals will benefit from capital gains tax to the tune of £600 million in the first year—a giveaway of £600 million. On corporation tax, we have the lowest in G7—lower even than Saudi Arabia, Russia and China. At the same time, the Resolution Foundation found that the poorest 20% of families in this country will lose £565 over the course of this Parliament because of the changes to corporation tax, is important for all our constituents.

Mr Gauke: One of the hon. Gentleman’s hon. Friends asked earlier about encouraging business investment, which we want to encourage because it is through having an environment in which businesses invest that we see improved productivity, the conditions for growth and people benefiting from higher wages. I say to the hon. Gentleman, and to the House as a whole, that pursuing policies that favour business investment and encourage businesses to invest, such as cutting CGT and corporation tax, is important for all our constituents.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): In 2010, the Chancellor told this House that raising capital gains tax was necessary to “create a fairer tax system.”—[Official Report, 22 June 2010, Vol. 512, c. 178.]

Given that the Chancellor is now cutting capital gains tax—overwhelmingly to the benefit of the richest 0.3% of people—what does he think has changed?

Mr Gauke: As I outlined a moment ago, the purpose of the tax measures is to encourage people to invest in businesses. The changes are specifically targeted at companies—the cut in CGT does not apply to residential property—and in place in an environment in which businesses can grow and prosper. That is absolutely the right approach to follow. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are other countries that have taken different approaches, of which he has been full of praise. It is not quite working out in Venezuela, is it?

Disabled People: Government Expenditure

11. Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that disabled people are not disproportionately affected by reductions in government expenditure.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds): The Government have protected the value of disability benefits, exempting such payments from the uprating freeze and exempting those in receipt of them from the benefit cap. Disability spending will be higher in every year to 2020, relative to both 2010 and today.

Barbara Keeley: That may the case, but a 40% reduction in core Government funding to local authorities has led to cuts that affect services. Local authorities are required to provide short breaks for children with disabilities, but 58% of local authorities have cut their short break funding by 15% or more. It is Carers Week. What will Treasury Ministers do to reverse the trend and ensure that there is money for local authorities to fund those important short breaks?

Damian Hinds: We have provided funding for respite breaks. The hon. Lady is right to identify this as an important thing for carers in this, Carers Week. There are 200,000 more people now receiving carer’s allowance in this country. The Care Act 2014 extends rights to assessments, and the Government are launching the new carer strategy in recognition of how important a role this is for millions of people throughout the country.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Recognising the risks of homelessness for disabled people, may I welcome the financial commitment in the Budget to prevent homelessness? But does the Minister recognise the risks of a local housing allowance cap on supported housing?

Damian Hinds: I, in turn, acknowledge my hon. Friend’s welcome for the additional money for tackling homelessness that was in the Budget—and, indeed, that has been
provided previously. On the LHA cap, we now have a joint evidence review being conducted by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, and the one-exception, to make sure that we get this right, so that we can have a long-term, sustainable funding solution for this sector.

Contingencies Fund

13. Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In what circumstances the use of his Department’s Contingencies Fund is authorised.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): The Government seek parliamentary authority for their spending plans through supply procedure. Occasionally, expenditure on some services is so urgent that it cannot await normal procedure. The Contingencies Fund enables the Treasury to make repayable cash advances to Departments for urgent services, and Treasury officials assess cases on the basis of criteria set out in Treasury guidance.

Diana Johnson: Extra support being consulted on for contaminated blood victims is coming from the Department of Health’s budget, where there is simply not enough money, yet previously central contingency funds have been used to deal with national scandals such as Equitable Life. Before the spending review, 18 MPs, from six parties, wrote to the Chancellor suggesting that the £230 million the Treasury was getting from the sale of the blood products company could fund a fair settlement for contaminated blood victims. We have had no reply, so will the Minister look at this again?

Greg Hands: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. I will ensure that she gets a reply, which she deserves, because this is a deeply distressing issue and the Government take it very seriously indeed. I do not believe it is appropriate to use the Contingencies Fund in this particular case. She will know that the consultation on the reform of financial support to those affected closed on 15 April, and we will be replying in due course. Meanwhile, the Department of Health has identified additional money—£100 million from its budget—for these purposes. This is in addition to the £22.5 million that it spends on this annually, as well as the further £25 million announced in March 2015. These steps will more than double the support.

Tax Transparency

14. Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): What steps he is taking to improve tax transparency.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The Government have played a leading role in driving forward international action on tax transparency. The introduction of country-by-country reporting has increased the transparency between multinationals and tax authorities, and we are pushing for this to be made public on a multilateral basis. We led the way throughout the development of the common reporting standard, which will see more than 100 countries automatically exchange information on financial accounts, and on a similar initiative for the automatic exchange of beneficial ownership information. We have consistently advocated for public registers of beneficial ownership, with the UK’s going live as of this month.

Owen Thompson: The planned closure of 137 HMRC offices has clearly been affecting employees, their families and communities. What steps has the Minister taken to look into introducing a moratorium on these closures, to support the wider work of improving tax transparency?

Mr Gauke: I commend the hon. Gentleman’s ingenious ability to raise this issue. It is important that HMRC’s funds are spent efficiently, to ensure that they are spent on delivering the tax being collected that we want, rather than on buildings. The savings from buildings are being spent on collecting more tax.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): The Minister will have seen the different approaches that the French and UK authorities have taken towards cases such as Google’s. What more can he do to ensure that Parliament and the public have faith that HMRC is getting good deals in such situations? For example, will the National Audit Office be allowed to review those most high-profile cases and give some assurance that a good deal was achieved?

Mr Gauke: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) is that, some years ago, HMRC brought in an assurance procedure to ensure that all such settlements are properly scrutinised. HMRC is very confident that it has reached a fair and proper settlement with Google. It is worth pointing out that, in recent years, we have seen increases in revenue collected by HMRC and increases in yield from its compliance activities including from large businesses.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): If we are to tackle tax evasion and avoidance effectively we need to remain within the EU. Will the Chancellor and the Minister join me in calling on all MEPs to support the new anti-tax avoidance directive being voted on in the European Parliament tomorrow? Conservative MEPs abstained at the Committee stage, and this morning there are worrying noises that they may be thinking of abstaining once again. Will the Minister make it clear now that Conservative MEPs will be voting for the directive?

Mr Gauke: The anti-tax avoidance directive was discussed a couple of weeks ago at the ECOFIN meeting, which I attended. The UK made the case for us taking strong action and working through an anti-avoidance tax directive. What we suggested and proposed was taken on board. The matter will also be addressed at the ECOFIN
meeting next week. The UK is pushing for progress and it is working co-operatively with other member states to ensure that we do make progress.

**John McDonnell:** I am mystified as to whether Conservative MEPs will be voting for the directive tomorrow. I just live in hope that they will. The European directive did show the value of European Union co-operation in tackling tax avoidance and evasion. As part of that co-operation, following the raids on Google’s Paris offices, will the Chancellor inform the House what arrangements are in place with the French authorities for sharing information from the raid? If new evidence comes to light, will the Chancellor stand ready to reopen his deal with Google?

**Mr Gauke:** The first point of which I must remind the shadow Chancellor is that all settlements are reached by HMRC. Operational matters are rightly for HMRC, and not for Treasury Ministers. Of course if there is new evidence, HMRC will take it into account. The position is that HMRC has made it very clear that, under the law that existed between 2005 and 2015, it believes that it has reached a settlement that ensures that the right amount of tax has been collected—and that is what its job is. Our job is to ensure that it has the tools and the rules, and that is what we are delivering.

### Topical Questions

**T1. [905214]** **Mrs Flick Drummond** *(Portsmouth South)* *(Con)*: If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne):** The core purpose of the Treasury is to ensure the stability and prosperity of the economy.

**Mrs Drummond:** We are all extremely grateful that the Treasury was able to have funding for local infrastructure projects, which clearly shows the success of the Government’s policies. However, there has been no major investment in rail infrastructure in Hampshire for nearly 60 years, and that is holding back our productivity. Will my right hon. Friend meet me, local councils and local enterprise partnerships to sort out this issue as a matter of urgency, as we have committed to build 102,000 new homes by 2030 and our roads are already full?

**Mr Osborne:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of investment in infrastructure in Hampshire and in her constituency of Portsmouth. There is money going into the road infrastructure, such as the M27, and some investment in rail infrastructure, such as Southampton Central station, but, clearly, there is room to do more. As someone who has some experience of the rail services from Portsmouth, I know that they are not as good as they could be. I am very happy to meet her, her colleagues and local businesses to see what more we can do.

**T4. [905217]** **Martyn Day** *(Linlithgow and East Falkirk)* *(SNP)*: In Scotland, we have introduced robust anti-avoidance rules—they are among the toughest in the world—on devolved taxes. The Scottish National party has repeatedly called on the Chancellor to embolden compliance by guaranteeing that the beneficial ownership of companies and trusts is made public. Has he taken steps to assure the people of the UK that this progressive step will happen?

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** The UK is bringing in a register of beneficial ownership for companies. On trusts, where there are tax consequences that will also be included. So, yes, the UK is leading on that, and we are pretty much the first country to do so.

**T2. [905215]** **Maggie Throup** *(Erewash)* *(Con)*: I have been contacted by a number of constituents who are having difficulty with this year’s online HMRC self-assessment system, particularly with the level of customer service they are getting from the helpdesk. Will the Minister look into this issue as a matter of urgency so that we can get a speedy resolution to the problems and ensure that my constituents are not penalised?

**Mr Gauke:** I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the specific points, but I would also say that the customer performance of HMRC last year was clearly not at an acceptable level. In the run-up to the self-assessment deadline at the end of January 89% of calls were getting through first time and the average waiting time was less than five minutes. That can be improved on, but we should note that it is a much higher performance than has been achieved in HMRC’s previous history.

**T5. [905218]** **Cat Smith** *(Lancaster and Fleetwood)* *(Lab)*: I note that the Minister has yet to respond properly to the shadow Chancellor’s question about the new anti-tax avoidance directive in the European Parliament, which is being voted on tomorrow. In light of Conservative MEPs’ abstention at the committee stage, will someone now confirm whether they will support it tomorrow?

**Mr Gauke:** Just to be clear, the text of the anti-tax avoidance directive has not been finalised. It was discussed at the ECOFIN meeting a couple of weeks ago and will be discussed again in a week’s time, on 17 June. It has not been finalised. What I can say is that the UK Government’s position is very clear: we want something strong and effective, and that is the case that we have been advocating in the Council of Ministers.

**T3. [905216]** **James Berry** *(Kingston and Surbiton)* *(Con)*: The devolution of business rates, allowing local areas to shape their own future, will be of a real benefit to my constituents in Kingston, who pay some of the highest council taxes in the country and receive one of the lowest Government grants in return. Will my right hon. Friend confirm when the first business rate devolution deals will be rolled out and whether Kingston can be at the front of the queue?

**Mr Osborne:** My hon. Friend and his local council have been at the forefront of calling for this major reform of local government finance, which is, of course, now being undertaken across the whole country. I can
confirm that London will be moving ahead of many other areas and we will start the retention of business rates in local areas from April 2017.

Mr Osborne: The first thing I would say is that there were those remarkable figures recently showing that 25% of UK electricity generation is now from renewable energy. That is second only to Germany and is an amazing transformation in our energy supply under this Conservative leadership. Second, we need to renew the next generation of nuclear power stations, starting with Hinkley Point, but the deal we have signed makes sure that taxpayers are not exposed to the construction risk.

T6. [905219] Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I note that the Government will publish a report on the progress of payments to Equitable Life policyholders who are victims of the great scam, and I congratulate the Government on the progress that has been made to compensate those individuals. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to review the amount of money paid to victims of the scam so that we can fulfil the debt of honour that we owe them?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): I can announce that although the Equitable Life payment scheme is now closed to new claims, payments being made under the scheme to with-profit annuitants are not only tax free but will continue for the life of the relevant annuity.

T7. [905220] Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): The eye-watering costs of the proposed new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point C will put public finance at risk, as well as the strike price, pushing up energy bills for businesses and consumers. Will the Chancellor redirect this investment to cleaner, safer and cheaper energy sources such as renewables and carbon capture and storage?

Mr Osborne: Both the downward revisions to which the hon. Gentleman refers—from the OECD and the IMF—are specifically for this year and in both cases the organisations attribute that to the referendum on our membership of the EU and the potential exit from the EU. They say that if the country votes to remain, membership of the EU and the potential exit from the EU will not affect the ability of the British economy to grow.

Mr Osborne: I am afraid I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. He is opposing a measure that we have introduced which says to people who are in dispute with HMRC about the money they pay because of their potential use of tax evasion or avoidance schemes that they should pay up front and, if they win their case, they get their money. Every other taxpayer has to do that. As a result of the measure, we have raised hundreds of millions of pounds for public services and won some key court judgments. I find it remarkable for a Liberal Democrat to be siding with those who want to evade their taxes.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): I hope that my hon. Friend has experienced only the ambulance chasers, not the whiplash. He is right to highlight the cost that this puts on motorists, which we estimate is about £90 a year for every motorist in the country. That is why we have already taken steps to reform this area. Last year in the autumn statement we announced further reforms, which will remove the right to cash compensation for minor whiplash injuries, while ensuring that genuine claimants are rehabilitated.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Genuine tax avoidance must be tackled, but HMRC pursuing people who invested legally in schemes, not to avoid tax, and who are now being hit with accelerated payments, is an affront to natural justice, treating them as guilty until proved innocent. Will the Chancellor meet me and a group of people who are seriously detrimentally affected by this?

Mr Osborne: I am afraid I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. He is opposing a measure that we have introduced which says to people who are in dispute with HMRC about the money they pay because of their potential use of tax evasion or avoidance schemes that they should pay up front and, if they win their case, they get their money. Every other taxpayer has to do that. As a result of the measure, we have raised hundreds of millions of pounds for public services and won some key court judgments. I find it remarkable for a Liberal Democrat to be siding with those who want to evade their taxes.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that we need to work with our businesses to tackle our productivity gap and especially to ensure that we have a skilled workforce in engineering and design and technology to boost our economy further?

Mr Osborne: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I know how much she championed skills in her constituency in Wiltshire. The apprentice levy, which has now been legislated for, will ensure that we are able to increase the number of apprentices in this country towards the 3 million that we committed to in the manifesto. Crucially, more money will go into skilled apprenticeships in fields such as design and engineering. She wants to see more of those, and so do I.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Many constituents of mine, including those working at RF Brookes, tell me that their employers are attacking their terms and conditions because of the national living wage. Does the Chancellor agree that this abuse should not go on as it is giving constituents of mine an overall pay cut?

Mr Osborne: We certainly expect businesses to pay the national living wage and to honour not just the letter of the law—we have increased enforcement of the living wage through HMRC—but the spirit of it, which means that employers should pay that wage and not find ways to cut other allowances to make good on the pay bill.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I welcome the Government’s support for the reporting of gender pay gap figures. What steps is the Minister taking to reduce the gender pay gap in the financial services sector?
Harriett Baldwin: I welcome this question because our financial services sector is not only our highest-paid sector, but the one with the widest gender pay gap. That is why we launched the Women in Finance charter, and we are asking all financial services firms to implement the recommendations in the excellent review by Jayne-Anne Gadhia, the chief executive of Virgin Money, on the representation, or rather the under-representation, of senior women in financial services.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Government have made significant public spending cuts affecting disabled people, including nearly £30 billion of cuts in social security to 3.7 million disabled people. Given that disabled people are twice as likely as the general population to be living in poverty, how many more disabled people will be living in poverty by 2020?

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds): In fact, spending on disability benefits is going up, not down. There are many more personal independence payments claimants getting the highest rate than there were under disability living allowance; 200,000 more people are getting carers allowance; 22,000 more people are getting help through Motability, and we have a firm commitment to work towards halving the disability employment gap, which is so important for driving up incomes. The gap has remained stubbornly wide, but the most recent quarter showed a small decrease.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): In 1945 there was a dream of a link road from what is now the M6 to Heysham port, through which 10% of our GDP comes in. That link road will soon be opening. Does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor agree that part of the long-term economic plan is to show that this area of Lancashire will be regenerated? More to the point, would he, diary permitting, like to open the road?

Mr Osborne: I remember visiting the road with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister just days before the general election. Because our hon. Friend had been such a champion of his constituency, his constituents said, “Let’s have him back in Parliament championing more investment in Lancashire.” Diary permitting, I would be delighted to open the link road. Indeed, when I was at Warrenpoint in Northern Ireland yesterday, I met the company that trades between Heysham and Warrenpoint, and it is investing in new jobs there.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Wales Bill being introduced later today will leave Wales with a vastly inferior fiscal settlement to those for Scotland and Northern Ireland. Why cannot Wales have full income tax powers like Scotland, corporation tax powers like Northern Ireland and air passenger duty powers like both those countries?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to get on with income tax devolution. I will be having further meetings with the Welsh Government to ensure that we do that. At the same time, we need to look at questions such as how to adjust the block grant, which of course will depend on what is devolved and when. We have also set the funding floor at 115% for the duration of this Parliament.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The black country economy in the west midlands has been one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the UK over the past few years, with new jobs and investment. Does the Chancellor agree that we need to continue to focus on investing in growth in the black country and avoid the economic risk that would come from us leaving the European Union?

Mr Osborne: I agree with my hon. Friend on both points. First, I think that there is an enormous amount of exciting news in the black country, with businesses there growing and creating jobs, and more investment is coming into the part of the country he represents so well. Secondly, I think that economic growth would be at risk if we left the European Union. We have today heard warnings from the chairman of the Federal Reserve, the head of Hitachi and the head of the World Trade Organisation, all telling us that there is a real economic risk for the UK if we vote to leave.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): What assessment has the Chancellor made of the impact on the British economy of overcrowding in airports in London and the south-east, and how much will further delay cost us?

Mr Osborne: It is absolutely clear that we need additional runway capacity in the south-east of England. That is what the Davies report suggested. Of course, the Government now need to come forward with a conclusion to that report, but we wanted to address the issue of air quality. When we raised that issue, some people asked whether it was necessary to look into it. If we look at the debates in the mayoral contest over the past few months, we see that air quality is an important issue to get right. We are close to finishing that work, and then we will report back on the Davies commission and future airport capacity.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) to put his urgent question, I should explain that, on account of the subsequent business, its importance and the likely level of subscription to it, the UQ will run for a maximum of half an hour, so the limits on the Front Benchers and Back Benchers involved do need to be observed.
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

12.38 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Under-Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on NHS commissioning in relation to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this urgent question. As the House knows, HIV can be a devastating illness, and we know that pre-exposure prophylaxis—PrEP—can make a difference to those at risk of contracting HIV and to those who are already HIV positive. However, it is crucial that we have a full understanding of all the issues surrounding PrEP.

As with any new intervention, PrEP must be properly assessed in relation to clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. That is why we have today asked NICE to conduct an evidence review of Truvada for PrEP of HIV in high-risk groups. This evidence review signifies the next step forward and will inform any subsequent decisions about commissioning. It will look at the evidence for effectiveness, safety, patient factors and resource implications. The NICE evidence summary will run alongside a pilot scheme in which we are investing up to £2 million. Public Health England is currently identifying the most effective places for the pilot to take place.

It is also important to remember that Truvada, the drug used for PrEP, is not yet licensed for this use in the UK. That is why, as well as the pilot scheme, the Government want to see the evidence review, which will help to inform future commissioning decisions about PrEP.

PrEP is only one of a range of activities designed to tackle HIV, which is of course a Government priority. It is also important to stress that the challenge remains of tackling high rates of some sexually transmitted infections, particularly in high-risk MSM—men who have sex with men—communities. Our £2.4 million national HIV prevention and sexual health promotion programme gives those at highest risk the best advice to make safer choices about sex.

The UK has world-class treatment services and is already ahead in reaching two of the three UNAIDS goals of ensuring that we have 90% diagnosed infection, 90% of those diagnosed on treatment and 90% viral suppression by 2020. In 2014, 17% of those living with HIV had undiagnosed infection, but 91% of those diagnosed were on treatment, of whom 95% were virally suppressed. We are determined to continue to make real progress to meet these goals, and we are considering carefully the role that PrEP can play in helping us to get there.

Andrew Gwynne: I thank the Minister for that reply. This is a subject we do not debate enough in the House, and I am grateful to Mr Speaker for giving us the opportunity to debate it today.

Seventeen people are diagnosed with HIV every day. Each year, there are thousands of new infections. In the UK, there are more people living with HIV than ever before. We know that PrEP has the potential to be a game-changer—it has proved effective in stopping HIV transmission in almost every case—yet as a result of this latest decision, this life-changing drug will remain inaccessible to people at risk of HIV. Does the Minister therefore share my concern about the precedent this decision sets in terms of NHS England shunting other preventive costs on to local government? Will she explain why pre-exposure prophylaxis is being dealt with differently, compared with the correct commissioning model for PEP, or post-exposure prophylaxis?

I want to ask the Minister three specific questions. First, does she accept that, under section 7A of the National Health Service Act 2006—a mechanism by which the Secretary of State can delegate power—the Health Secretary can give NHS England the power to commission PrEP? If so, why has he not done so? Secondly, if the Government expect local authorities to commission PrEP, how much additional funding will the Minister make available to them? Can we assume that there will be no further cuts to public health grants, or is this just a case of passing the responsibility and the financial buck? Thirdly, on the next steps, I understand that key stakeholders, including the National AIDS Trust, have written a joint letter to the Public Health Minister requesting an urgent meeting. Will she today agree to meet them to see whether a way forward can be found without the need for costly, protracted legal action?

PrEP has been described as the beginning of the end for the HIV epidemic. It is time for the Minister to show some leadership, to use the section 7A powers she has and to think again.

Jane Ellison: Some of the shadow Minister’s questions are simply ahead of the moment, as it were. As I said clearly in my statement, NHS England has made clear how it feels about being the commissioner, based on a legal argument that it has published. No decision has been made about who the commissioner is. Clearly, we need to reach a decision, and we discussed that earlier today in the Health Committee. However, there are a number of stages we have to go through—as I say, the drug is not even licensed for use as PrEP in the UK.

We have set out a series of stages we will go through, which will help to inform a final decision. On the questions the hon. Gentleman posed, we are not in a position to make a judgment. There is more we need to know about clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness and about the pilot—

Andrew Gwynne: We know.

Jane Ellison: No, that is not the case. There has been an important study—the PROUD study—but that looked at clinical effectiveness. There is a wider piece of work to be done—of which the pilot programme that we have announced is part—to enable us to understand where PrEP fits in in terms of clinical and cost-effectiveness, and how it fits into the HIV prevention landscape more broadly, alongside other HIV interventions that are commissioned. There is work yet to do, but we are not standing still. We have announced this important pilot and committed money to it, and we have asked NICE for an evidence review. All this will go into our consideration.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I agree with the shadow Minister apart from on one thing, which is his asking my hon. Friend the Minister
to show leadership. Having campaigned on many male sexual health issues as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS, I can say that this Minister has been unfailingly supportive in addressing many of the issues facing not just men's sexual health, but particularly gay men's sexual health. I therefore take issue with that call for leadership.

Having said that, I have lost too many friends to AIDS over the years not to challenge NHS England's decision not to fund PrEP. HIV infection rates in this country are on the increase and existing strategies are not working. It is not acceptable to suggest that we simply continue to do the same. I have a meeting with the Minister on 13 June. Will she agree to widen that to other stakeholders?

Jane Ellison: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I take this issue extremely seriously. He is right to say that we face a challenge in relation to HIV rates, and particularly, as I said, STI rates in the high-risk MSM community. I stress again that while it will no doubt have an important part to play, PrEP is not a silver bullet for sexual infections, particularly in some of those high-risk groups. It is important to understand that. We have to continue to look at a whole range of measures. When I recently met the chief executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, we touched on this.

As my hon. Friend says, we have a meeting coming up. I apologise for not responding to the shadow Minister's question about meeting stakeholder groups. Of course I will meet all the key stakeholder groups. I have already had some formal and some informal discussions on this, but of course I am very open to having further such discussions. Stakeholders were involved in the process that NHS England has been involved in. NHS England has made its position clear, and there is a matter due to go before the courts on which I will not comment further. Yes, I will engage on this. Yes, of course I accept that we need to do more, and of course we all share the concerns about rising HIV infection rates, particularly among the MSM community. I too lost friends to the AIDS epidemic that my hon. Friend mentions. I take this issue extremely seriously, but we have to follow a sensible process, and that is what the Government are doing.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Anyone in this House will be glad to see the results of the PROUD study and the 85% reduction in new infections. However, there is more to understand, in that we did not see a good response in heterosexual women. While the PROUD study and the 85% reduction in new infections, particularly in some of those high-risk groups. It is important to understand that. We have to continue to look at a whole range of measures. When I recently met the chief executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, we touched on this.

As my hon. Friend says, we have a meeting coming up. I apologise for not responding to the shadow Minister's question about meeting stakeholder groups. Of course I will meet all the key stakeholder groups. I have already had some formal and some informal discussions on this, but of course I am very open to having further such discussions. Stakeholders were involved in the process that NHS England has been involved in. NHS England has made its position clear, and there is a matter due to go before the courts on which I will not comment further. Yes, I will engage on this. Yes, of course I accept that we need to do more, and of course we all share the concerns about rising HIV infection rates, particularly among the MSM community. I too lost friends to the AIDS epidemic that my hon. Friend mentions. I take this issue extremely seriously, but we have to follow a sensible process, and that is what the Government are doing.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Anyone in this House will be glad to see the results of the PROUD study and the 85% reduction in new infections. However, there is more to understand, in that we did not see a good response in heterosexual women. While the PROUD study and the 85% reduction in new infections, particularly in some of those high-risk groups. It is important to understand that. We have to continue to look at a whole range of measures. When I recently met the chief executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, we touched on this.

As my hon. Friend says, we have a meeting coming up. I apologise for not responding to the shadow Minister's question about meeting stakeholder groups. Of course I will meet all the key stakeholder groups. I have already had some formal and some informal discussions on this, but of course I am very open to having further such discussions. Stakeholders were involved in the process that NHS England has been involved in. NHS England has made its position clear, and there is a matter due to go before the courts on which I will not comment further. Yes, I will engage on this. Yes, of course I accept that we need to do more, and of course we all share the concerns about rising HIV infection rates, particularly among the MSM community. I too lost friends to the AIDS epidemic that my hon. Friend mentions. I take this issue extremely seriously, but we have to follow a sensible process, and that is what the Government are doing.

My main complaint is on the failure to go through a process of looking at clinical evidence and cost-effectiveness and then making a decision. Why was the company not encouraged to get through this earlier and go to NICE? I do not understand why we are only going to NICE now, because that gives the answer that we need. It is relatively poor of “NHS England to have made the decision on the basis of, “It’s not our job—it’s your job.” That is the most insulting bit for the community. In Scotland, our Cabinet Secretary asked it to go through the European Medicines Agency, which it applied for in February, and then the Scottish Medicines Consortium. It is on the right path now, but that is where we should have gone first.

Jane Ellison: It is probably worth clarifying that we asked NICE to undertake an evidence review, not a technology assessment. What drugs are licensed for are matters for drug companies to address. The Government do not initiate the process on whether a drug is licensed—the drug company must initiate it. It also worth noting that when a drug is licensed for a new purpose, as would be the case for Truvada in PrEP, the company could apply for the patent to be extended to cover this new use. Again, that is something that the drug company would do.

On the hon. Lady’s first point, I agree that we need to consider the impact on women in the circumstances she described. That is one of the arguments for carefully planning this pilot programme and taking those sorts of factors into account.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The process that the Minister has outlined is correct, but does she recognise that the French Government have already approved Truvada for pre-exposure prophylaxis, and does she understand the urgency in this? The results of the UK PROUD study, funded by the MRC, are quite unequivocal, so we really need to get this going. Will she also reflect on the fact that the study showed no difference in the incidence of other sexually transmitted diseases, because Truvada does not protect against them, so the message has to go out that a condom is absolutely essential?

Jane Ellison: My hon. Friend is quite correct on his latter point about the impact of PrEP. Whether it was commissioned or not, and whoever it was commissioned by, we would still have the significant challenge that he describes around STIs. Drug-resistant gonorrhoea, for example, is a problem that we are increasingly aware of.

There are international comparisons that we can look at, as my hon. Friend mentions. I have looked at the matter in some detail, and the picture across the world is that many countries are in broadly the same position as the UK. They are trying to understand, leaving aside the question of clinical effectiveness, more about how PrEP can be used as part of an HIV prevention programme in broader cost-effectiveness terms, and how it compares in cost-effectiveness terms with other available interventions. My hon. Friend is right that there is work to do, and we are not resting easy on this. We are moving forward, and we are working on and planning these pilots now.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): When does the Minister expect the damaging buck-passing between NHS England and local authorities, which is one of the disastrous results of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to be resolved? Does she agree that it would be far more appropriate for NHS England to be the commissioner of something like PrEP than for local government to commission it? Finally, will she be very cognisant of the danger that we are going back to the bad old days when certain groups were stigmatised? Stigma is disastrous for public health policy, and it will result in an explosion of sexual disease in this country if we do not always
bear in mind the danger that decisions by NHS England— not just on this, but on drug treatment for hepatitis C —may have a disastrous impact on public health.

Jane Ellison: The NHS England position is based on a legal argument, and as the matter is likely to go before the courts, it is not really appropriate for me to comment further. There was a little discussion this morning on this subject in the Health Committee, for which some Members were present. I have laid out a process by which we will work out how and where this is commissioned. Clearly, we need to identify the commissioner.

I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman’s challenge about fragmentation, simply because if we look around the world at a series of very different health systems, we see that they are all going through broadly the same process of understanding where PrEP sits. There are a number of options, but first we need to go through this work. On his latter point about stigma, he is right to identify that it is a significant concern, but I do not accept that that is what this represents. He knows my personal commitment to tackling stigma, and we could not have made it clearer that addressing rising HIV rates, addressing STIs in the MSM community and looking at the challenges surrounding things such as chemsex are all very much front of mind, and we have given considerable time and thought to them. We must challenge stigma wherever it rears its head.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given the challenges of HIV, I think that my constituents would be excited by the prospects that PrEP offers. They would, however, be a little disturbed by the fact that every country in the world seems to be going through the same process, and duplicating, replicating and holding up what could be a very exciting development to combat the spread of HIV across Africa. Many countries are suffering from this far worse than we are, and they would be horrified by the thought that the process could get bogged down in a court when this treatment, if it were available, could do very real good.

Jane Ellison: My hon. Friend is right to recognise that PrEP has potential. It is, in fact, being used in some places internationally. The point I was making was that there is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution. Different countries have different challenges. For example, the level of HIV prevalence and the services available to manage that prevalence, and to manage testing, are very different in different countries. That forms different landscapes into which PrEP might fit. To give an example from Africa, PrEP was licensed last year, and it will be available for sex workers in selected sites. HIV prevalence among female sex workers is estimated to be just under 60% in South Africa. There are different contexts in which PrEP is being taken forward, and that is just one of them.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Local authorities’ public health budgets are being stretched to breaking point, and this is arguably one of the false economies of this Government’s approach, in terms of its impact. Does the Minister agree that in the context of such stretched budgets, the implication that local authorities should fund PrEP is simply unworkable, and will she make it clear that her position is that NHS England is the natural commissioner of PrEP?

Jane Ellison: I have been very clear about NHS England’s position, and I have said that no decision has yet been made about commissioning. I do not accept the hon. Lady’s challenge about spending on public health. We have committed to spend £16 billion over the next five years on the public health grant. In addition to that, we have committed more than £1 billion this year alone in the section 7A agreement and £300 million on vaccines that we buy in the Department of Health, plus system-wide leadership through things such as the sugary drinks levy and the forthcoming childhood obesity strategy. All in all, this is the radical upgrade in prevention that was talked about in the NHS “Five Year Forward View”.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) in thanking the Minister for her work, and in particular for engaging with the LGBT community. I know that they are quite concerned about last week’s statement by NHS England. Given the disappointing outcome of NHS England’s PrEP review and the fact that we have the worst of all scenarios, which is effectively a legal challenge, will the Minister commit to finding a way around the NHS England decision while a new trial is under way? Does she agree that the accelerated medicines pathway could provide a perfect platform for bypassing the frustrating system that we are talking about?

Jane Ellison: I will reflect on the latter point with my hon. Friend the Member for Life Sciences, who is sitting alongside me. I have made clear the NHS position on commissioning. The measures that I have announced today—the NICE evidence review and the trial that we are planning for, which we will move forward with later in the year—are all part of understanding how we get to the right decision. It is not something on which I will make a snap decision now, but we have set out a process by which we can get to that point.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): As a vice-chair of the all-party group on HIV and AIDS, I share many of the concerns expressed by the chair, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer). Many people in the LGBT community share our concerns about the current situation. Much as I respect the Minister, I was a little disappointed that she appeared to cast doubt on the efficacy of PrEP. As well as the PROUD study, there have been two other major studies, and 30,000 people are using PrEP in the US. There is clear evidence of its efficacy. Can the Minister give hope to people out there that this is not a political decision or a cost decision? Will she reverse it? Will she use her section 7A powers and take the right decision on this issue?

Jane Ellison: We have not made a decision on commissioning yet. We have laid out a pathway. Let me be clear: I completely understand and accept the point about clinical effectiveness. The point I was making was that there are wider considerations about how we commission something in the context of a whole series of HIV prevention services. That is slightly different
from clinical effectiveness, on which the PROUD study showed very good results. I am not saying that it is not clinically effective; we just have to understand more about how it sits in the context of everything else that we do, and we have to understand more about its cost-effectiveness. The modelling work that was undertaken indicated that PrEP can be cost-effective for some high-risk groups, but the period over which that cost-effectiveness pays back needs to be more broadly understood.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I do not doubt the Minister’s commitment to this issue, but she has to understand how it looks to the outside world. This is a Government who brought forward legislation to ban poppers, for goodness’ sake, but it looks as though they have got their head in the sand over PrEP. Israel, Kenya, Canada, France and the United States all get it. Why are we so far behind?

Jane Ellison: The first point is a red herring, because I understand that the matter has been resolved. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman’s criticism. It is slightly disappointing, although I understand the reason for it in the context of this urgent question, that Members are forgetting that the UK has a world-leading position on HIV treatment in all the ways that I laid out in my response to the urgent question. Our movement towards the UNAIDS goals is very significant, so to say that the UK is somehow not a leader in HIV treatment and prevention is not right. We have clearly acknowledged that PrEP has a role to play, but we need to understand more about what that is.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister clarify her previous answer in which she said that she is putting aside the clinical significance of this? I find it quite confusing that she can do that. Does she agree that although the UK has been a leader in HIV prevention for decades, our progress is under threat because of her decision? Will she now think again?

Jane Ellison: Not for the first time, may I clarify that no decision has been made about the commissioning of PrEP? I am therefore not sure why the hon. Gentleman would say that. I have been very clear about the clinical effectiveness. What I am saying is that there is more work to do to understand the wider cost-effectiveness of this in the context of the commissioning of HIV prevention more broadly.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): My constituency falls wholly within the borough of Southwark, which has the second highest HIV prevalence in the country. What assessment has the Minister and the Department making of the potential impact of this policy change not only on my constituents, but on the long-term costs for the NHS if PrEP is not available?

Jane Ellison: There is no policy change and I have laid out the position. It is important to understand that even in the modelling work that has been done, PrEP is not a silver bullet. It has an important part to play, but it is not a silver bullet in terms of HIV prevention and it does not affect some of the broader issues that I mentioned in my response, for example in respect of STIs.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): This is another example of the over-cluttered, over-bureaucratic and confused system for approving drugs in this country. May I draw the Minister’s attention to the fact that NHS England promised £2 million to allow 500 people to be treated in this way? Does she understand people’s dismay that it is now passing the buck and saying that it is down to local authorities, which we all know are incredibly cash-strapped?

Jane Ellison: The NHS is seeking clarity through the courts on its own position. No decision has been made about who will be the final commissioner for PrEP, so what the hon. Gentleman said is not quite right. The £2 million that has been committed to the pilot is important and will inform our understanding of this important intervention.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Slough has an extraordinarily high incidence of HIV and AIDS, much of it undiagnosed. Our local authority is the smallest unitary authority in the country and has faced cuts to its central Government funding of 50%. It has no prospect of being able to fund a challenge of this size. Does the Minister understand that this delay in sorting out who will pay for PrEP will lead to the deaths of hundreds of people in Britain?

Jane Ellison: As I have mentioned, Truvada is not yet licensed for use as PrEP in this country. We have set out a process by which we can understand far more about how PrEP might fit into the landscape. The right hon. Lady mentioned undetected HIV. The Government have invested significant effort and funding into detecting HIV. We have the world’s first home testing service and last year we launched the major HIV innovation fund, which has come up with some new and extremely cutting-edge ideas on how to improve HIV detection and diagnosis. I fully accept that this is a major challenge in her area, but PrEP is only one part of a wider programme of work. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: I think his Whips are pleased to see the arrival of the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). He has never knowingly been keen to be hurried on anything.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Minister clarify the timescale for the decisions? Evidence reviews and trials can take months and years, but clearly, as other Members have said, people do not have months and years. Will she tell us what the process and the timescales will be, so that we can be reassured—or not?

Jane Ellison: We would expect to get the evidence review that we have called for in the autumn. NHS England is already working on plans for the pilot programme, which will happen over a two-year period. We hope to get that under way towards the end of this year. Both those pieces of work are under way. We expect the pilots to be informed by the review, hence we want to get it back in a relatively short time.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am flabbergasted that the Minister has come before the House today to say that the legislation that her Government introduced on the reorganisation of the NHS was so incompetent that NHS England is having to go to court
to work out who is entitled to commission these services. Can she tell us how much public money will be spent on the legal case?

Jane Ellison: I am not in a position to comment on that. I do not accept the hon. Lady's central criticism. If she had been present at the Health Committee this morning, she would have heard an hour of evidence from myself, Duncan Selbie and Simon Stevens on how the new arrangements are making a significant difference to public health in this country and to the health of the public.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, the SSI plant on Teesside closed, with the loss of 9,000 jobs. Lord Heseltine, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the northern powerhouse Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) are in my constituency at the Riverside stadium, launching the noble Lord's much-awaited report in response to that crisis. I received notification of that by email at 3.33 yesterday and a copy of the report at 6.20 this morning. In fairness, having contacted the Secretary of State, I accept that he is under the impression that I was contacted properly. However, I assure the House that I was not. I have searched for those emails. Colleagues have received them, but I have not.

All I am asking for is some guidance, Mr Speaker. A report about my constituency is going to be delivered in my constituency. Can better direction be given to Ministers on how best they can communicate such activity to Members of Parliament, rather than assuming that it has been properly communicated through emails?

Mr Speaker: I say to the hon. Gentleman and the House that there is a firm convention that if a Member intends to visit the constituency of another Member on official business, as opposed to purely private or personal business, the Member whose constituency is being visited should be notified in advance. Nothing is written down anywhere, but it would be a courtesy to notify the Member sufficiently in advance that he or she could be present, or at least in the vicinity, in his or her constituency if it was so wished. That would rather depend on the circumstances of the event, but there should be proper notice.

In the case of Ministers, the requirement is stipulated in the ministerial code. If that has not been complied with in this case, it is regrettable. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and it will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench. Doubtless it will be communicated, in the forceful terms in which he typically expresses himself, to the Secretary of State.

I hope that it will not be necessary for this point constantly to be raised and then underlined by me from the Chair. It is an elementary courtesy and I think that a lot of people who are listening to our proceedings will think, “Surely colleagues can treat each other in a civil and grown-up way, as would happen in other institutions.” Indeed, I note in the distance some agreement with the point I have just made.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I fear that I am going to disappoint you, because my point of order follows on from that exact point, although it does not relate to Ministers. I discovered that the hon. Members for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and for Corby (Tom Pursglove) were in my constituency last week with the Grassroots Out campaign. They were not on official business, but were campaigning, and they failed to advise me in advance. Will you
remind all Members that, by convention, we notify each other in advance? I might not have wished to be there alongside them, however.

Another issue is that factually incorrect information was shared with my constituents. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wellingborough would be horrified to learn that he misled my constituents, in the same way that I am horrified. How can he correct that?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. With reference to her last point about allegedly factually incorrect information being disseminated to her constituents, I am bound to say to her that that is a matter of politics. Although I do not know the people of Great Grimsby, I dare say they can bear with stoicism and fortitude the proffering of views to them with which their locally elected Member of Parliament may disagree. That is not a matter for the Chair. [Interruption.] I do not think it is fishy. However, a visit was undertaken, admittedly not by Ministers, but by Members engaged in professional business, and the hon. Lady should therefore have been notified.

Given the context of the EU referendum campaign, I recognise that there will be Members—including doubtless the hon. Members for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and for Corby (Tom Pursglove)—who may well visit a great many constituencies in a concentrated period. Nevertheless, the convention is an important courtesy and should continue to apply. It is not very difficult or time consuming to comply with it, so I hope that colleagues on both sides of the House will do so from now on.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The issue we have just discussed in the urgent question on pre-exposure prophylaxis is one that I and many other Members consider to be of huge national importance. Despite the effect of the drug, the numbers of people involved and the great national interest, Parliament has not actually substantially debated the issue aside from that urgent question. As a new Member of the House—I confess that I am still trying to get my head around this place, although I suspect I never will—may I ask whether it would be in order to seek a debate on PrEP under Standing Order No. 24 and, if it would be in order, how one might go about that?

Mr Speaker: It is certainly open to the hon. Gentleman to seek such a debate—there is nothing improper about it—but I know that he would not seek advance agreement from me in respect of an application that has not yet been made, the terms of which therefore cannot be known to me and upon which it would therefore be wholly unreasonable to expect me to adjudicate. Apart from that, his point was all right.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): It is devolved.

Mr Speaker: I also say to the hon. Gentleman that, as the Minister mentioned perfectly properly from a sedentary position, the issue is a devolved matter and can therefore be considered elsewhere, as well, but it is perfectly proper for it to be considered here. There are a range of opportunities for its consideration. The mechanism he mentions is a possible approach; there are also Backbench Business Committee debates, Adjournment debates and debates in the name of the relevant Opposition party. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is on very good terms with the powers that be in his own party; if they judge it a sufficient priority, they might choose to nominate it as a subject for such a debate. Knowing the Minister as I do, I am sure that she would very courteously come along, if it was her responsibility to do so, to listen to the hon. Gentleman’s sonorous tones and speak as appropriate.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You might be interested to know, as might other Members, that the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS is holding its own debate and inquiry on the issues under discussion in the urgent question this afternoon and tomorrow. I encourage all Members to attend.

Mr Speaker: What a helpful soul the hon. Gentleman is. He is a purveyor of public information, and we owe him a debt of gratitude.

BILL PRESENTED

WALES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Alun Cairns, Secretary Stephen Crabb, Secretary David Mundell, Mr Oliver Letwin and Greg Hands, presented a Bill to amend the Government of Wales Act 2006 and make provision about the functions of the Welsh Ministers, and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).
1.13 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I beg to move amendment 390, page 95, line 27, leave out clause 119.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 391, page 96, line 36, leave out clause 120.
Amendment 392, page 97, line 15, leave out clause 121.
Amendment 393, page 98, line 20, leave out clause 122.
Amendment 394, page 98, line 38, leave out clause 123.
Amendment 275, in clause 123, page 99, line 10, leave out from “must” to end of line 11, and insert “subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right”.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners.

Amendment 395, page 99, line 19, leave out clause 124.
Amendment 396, page 99, line 24, leave out clause 125.
Amendment 9, in clause 125, page 99, line 33, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

“(4) The operational purposes specified in the warrant must be ones specified, in a list maintained by the heads of the intelligence services, as purposes which they consider are operational purposes for which intercepted content or secondary data obtained under bulk interception warrants may be selected for examination.”

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to amend the Bill to provide for a designated list of operational purposes, such that only a purpose on that list may be specified in a warrant relating to bulk powers.

Amendment 10, page 99, line 37, leave out from “issued” to end of line 39 and insert “are specified in the list mentioned in subsection (4).”

“(5A) An operational purpose may be specified in the list mentioned in subsection (4) only with the approval of the Secretary of State.

“(5B) The Secretary of State may give such approval only if satisfied that the operational purpose is specified in a greater level of detail than the descriptions contained in section 121 subsections (1)(b) or (2).”

To make clear that the Secretary of State must approve all operational purposes specified on the list.

Amendment 11, page 99, line 39, at end insert—

“(5C) The list of operational purposes mentioned in subsection (4) must be reviewed at least annually by the Prime Minister.”

To ensure that the list of Operational Purposes is reviewed at least annually by the Prime Minister.

Amendment 12, page 99, line 39, at end insert—

“(5D) The Investigatory Powers Commissioner and Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) will be kept informed of any changes to the list of Operational Purposes in a timely manner.

(5E) Subject to subsection 201(7), the Investigatory Powers Commissioner must include in his Annual Report a summary of those Operational Purposes which, during the period of his report, have been specified in any warrants issued under Parts 6 and 7.”

To ensure that the ISC and Commissioners are kept informed of changes to the list of Operational Purposes. To ensure that a summary of the Operational Purposes are published each year.

Amendment 397, page 100, line 2, leave out clause 126.
Amendment 398, page 100, line 10, leave out clause 127.
Amendment 22, in clause 127, page 100, line 12, leave out “before it would otherwise cease to have effect” and insert “during the renewal period”.

See amendment 20.

Amendment 20.

Amendment 153, page 101, line 9, leave out clause 128.
Amendment 154, page 102, line 25, leave out clause 129.
Amendment 401, page 103, line 8, leave out clause 130.
Amendment 402, page 103, line 31, leave out clause 131.
Amendment 403, page 104, line 19, leave out clause 132.
Amendment 404, page 105, line 44, leave out clause 133.
Amendment 405, page 106, line 24, leave out clause 134.
Amendment 406, page 108, line 1, leave out clause 135.
Amendment 408, page 108, line 39, leave out clause 137.
Amendment 409, page 109, line 16, leave out clause 138.
Amendment 410, page 110, line 40, leave out clause 139.
Amendment 212, in clause 139, page 110, line 42, leave out “review the Secretary of State’s conclusions as to the following matters” and insert “determine”.

Amendment 213, page 111, line 7, leave out subsection (2).

Amendment 278, page 111, line 7, leave out from “must” to end of line 8, and insert “subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right.”

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners. This amendment is an alternative to amendments 212 and 213 (which are a package).

Amendment 411, page 111, line 16, leave out clause 140.
Amendment 412, page 111, line 21, leave out clause 141.
Amendment 413, page 112, line 2, leave out clause 142.
Amendment 414, page 112, line 10, leave out clause 143.
Amendment 155, page 113, line 9, leave out clause 144.
Amendment 156, page 114, line 19, leave out clause 145.
Amendment 417, page 115, line 2, leave out clause 146.
Amendment 418, page 115, line 25, leave out clause 147.
Amendment 419, page 116, line 7, leave out clause 148.
Government amendments 44 to 47.

Amendment 420, page 116, line 35, leave out clause 149.
Amendment 422, page 118, line 39, leave out clause 151.
Amendment 423, page 119, line 8, leave out clause 152.
Amendment 424, page 119, line 36, leave out clause 153.
Amendment 425, page 120, line 10, leave out clause 154.
Amendment 426, page 121, line 33, leave out clause 155.
Amendment 427, page 122, line 4, leave out clause 156.
Amendment 428, page 123, line 1, leave out clause 157.
Amendment 214, in clause 157, page 123, line 3, leave out “review the Secretary of State’s conclusions as to the following matters” and insert “determine”.
Amendment 215, page 123, line 15, leave out subsection (2).
Amendment 281, page 123, line 15, leave out from “must” to end of line 16, and insert “subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right”.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners.
Amendment 429, page 123, line 24, leave out clause 158.
Amendment 430, page 123, line 41, leave out clause 159.
Amendment 431, page 124, line 34, leave out clause 160.
Amendment 432, page 125, line 3, leave out clause 161.
Amendment 433, page 125, line 25, leave out clause 162.
Amendment 434, page 126, line 3, leave out clause 163.
Amendment 157, page 127, line 1, leave out clause 164.
Government amendments 127 and 128.
Amendment 158, page 128, line 14, leave out clause 165.
Amendment 437, page 129, line 1, leave out clause 166.
Amendment 438, page 129, line 25, leave out clause 167.
Amendment 439, page 130, line 14, leave out clause 168.
Amendment 440, page 131, line 33, leave out clause 169.
Amendment 441, page 132, line 3, leave out clause 170.
Government amendment 129.
Amendment 442, page 133, line 30, leave out clause 171.
Amendment 443, page 134, line 12, leave out clause 172.
Amendment 444, page 134, line 19, leave out clause 173.
Government amendment 130.
Government new clause 14—Health records.
New clause 3—Restriction on use of class bulk personal dataset warrants—
“(1) An intelligence service may not retain, or retain and examine, a bulk personal dataset in reliance on a class bulk personal dataset warrant if the head of the intelligence service considers
(a) that the bulk personal dataset includes a large quantity of sensitive personal data, or
(b) that the nature of the bulk personal dataset, or the circumstances in which it was created, is or are such that its retention, or retention and examination, by the intelligence service raises issues which ought to be considered by the Secretary of State and a Judicial Commissioner on an application by the head of the intelligence service for a specific BPD warrant.
(2) An intelligence service may not retain, or retain and examine, greater than twenty distinct bulk personal datasets in reliance on any class BPD warrant.
(3) In subsection (1) ‘sensitive personal data’ means personal data consisting of information about an individual (whether living or deceased) which is of a kind mentioned in section 2(a) to (f) of the Data Protection Act 1998.”

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to place greater restrictions on the use of Class BPD warrants in relation to the retention/examination of sensitive personal data (relating to race, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, health, or sexual orientation). To cap the number of datasets which may be covered by any Class warrant.
Amendment 445, page 135, line 4, leave out clause 174.
Amendment 446, page 135, line 21, leave out clause 175.
Amendment 447, page 135, line 37, leave out clause 176.
Amendment 448, page 136, line 9, leave out clause 177.
Amendment 303, in clause 177, page 136, line 44, at end insert—
“(5) Subsection (6) applies where a warrant application under this section relates to ‘patient information’ as defined in s.252(10) of the National Health Service Act 2006, or relating to ‘mental health’, ‘adult social care’, ‘child social care’, or ‘health services’ as defined by the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
(6) The Secretary of State may issue the warrant only if—
(a) there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the retention, or (as the case may be) the examination, of material referred to in subsection (5); and
(b) specific arrangements have been made for the handling, retention, use, destruction and protection against unauthorised disclosure of such material”.

An amendment to restrict the retention of patient information obtained under provisions in this Bill.
Amendment 449, page 137, line 1, leave out clause 178.
Amendment 24, in clause 178, page 137, line 17, leave out “and” and insert—
“(aa) a statement outlining the extent to which sensitive personal data as defined by section [Restriction on use of class BPD warrants] is expected to be part of the bulk personal dataset, and”.

On behalf of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, to require specific BPD warrant applications to set out the extent to which datasets may include sensitive personal data (relating to race, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, health, or sexual orientation), in order that the Secretary of State may properly assess the proportionality of obtaining the dataset.
Amendment 304, page 138, line 2, at end insert—
“(8) Subsection (6) applies where a warrant application under this section relates to ‘patient information’ as defined in s.251(10) of the National Health Service Act 2006, or relating to ‘mental health’, ‘adult social care’, ‘child social care’, or ‘health services’ as defined by the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
(9) The Secretary of State may issue the warrant only if—
(a) there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the retention, or (as the case may be) the examination, of material referred to in subsection (5); and
(b) specific arrangements have been made for the handling, retention, use, destruction and protection against unauthorised disclosure of such material.”

An amendment to restrict the retention of patient information obtained under provisions in this Bill.
Amendment 450, page 138, line 3, leave out clause 179.
Amendment 216, in clause 179, page 138, line 5, leave out “review the Secretary of State’s conclusions as to the following matters” and insert “determine”.
Amendment 217, page 138, line 22, leave out subsection (2).

Amendment 284, page 138, line 22, leave out from “must” to end of line 23, and insert “subject a person’s decision to issue a warrant under this Chapter to close scrutiny to ensure that the objective in issuing a warrant is sufficiently important to justify any limitation of a Convention right”.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners. This amendment is an alternative to amendments 216 and 217 (which are a package).

Amendment 452, page 139, line 4, leave out clause 181.
Amendment 453, page 140, line 1, leave out clause 182.
Amendment 454, page 140, line 15, leave out clause 183.
Amendment 455, page 141, line 4, leave out clause 184.
Amendment 456, page 141, line 26, leave out clause 185.
Amendment 159, page 142, line 13, leave out clause 186.
Amendment 160, page 143, line 22, leave out clause 187.
Amendment 459, page 144, line 7, leave out clause 188.
Amendment 460, page 144, line 25, leave out clause 189.
Amendment 461, page 146, line 2, leave out clause 190.
Amendment 462, page 147, line 5, leave out clause 191.
Amendment 463, page 147, line 21, leave out clause 192.

Amendment 305, in clause 192, page 147, line 42, at end insert—

“(4A) A direction under subsection (3) may only be made for material relating to ‘patient information’ as defined in s.251(10) of the National Health Service Act 2006, or relating to ‘mental health’, ‘adult social care’, ‘child social care’, or ‘health services’ as defined by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 if the Secretary of State considers that—

(a) there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the retention, or (as the case may be) the examination, of such material; and

(b) that specific arrangements have been made for the handling, retention, use, destruction and protection against unauthorised disclosure of such material.”

Amendment 456, page 138, line 22, leave out clause 193.

An amendment to restrict the retention of patient information obtained under provisions in this Bill.

An amendment to clarify the role of judicial commissioners. This amendment is an alternative to amendments 216 and 217 (which are a package).

Amendment 452, page 139, line 4, leave out clause 181.
Amendment 453, page 140, line 1, leave out clause 182.
Amendment 454, page 140, line 15, leave out clause 183.
Amendment 455, page 141, line 4, leave out clause 184.
Amendment 456, page 141, line 26, leave out clause 185.
Amendment 159, page 142, line 13, leave out clause 186.
Amendment 160, page 143, line 22, leave out clause 187.
Amendment 459, page 144, line 7, leave out clause 188.
Amendment 460, page 144, line 25, leave out clause 189.
Amendment 461, page 146, line 2, leave out clause 190.
Amendment 462, page 147, line 5, leave out clause 191.
Amendment 463, page 147, line 21, leave out clause 192.

Amendment 305, in clause 192, page 147, line 42, at end insert—

“(4A) A direction under subsection (3) may only be made for material relating to ‘patient information’ as defined in s.251(10) of the National Health Service Act 2006, or relating to ‘mental health’, ‘adult social care’, ‘child social care’, or ‘health services’ as defined by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 if the Secretary of State considers that—

(a) there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the retention, or (as the case may be) the examination, of such material; and

(b) that specific arrangements have been made for the handling, retention, use, destruction and protection against unauthorised disclosure of such material.”

Amendment 456, page 138, line 22, leave out clause 193.
The fundamental point is this: why should we as Members of Parliament be expected to vote through legislation that is to be reviewed? That seems an unprofessional way—to say the least—to do business, and I would feel very uncomfortable crossing my fingers and hoping for the best. I also appeal to Labour colleagues to be a little more circumspect about trusting this Government with their votes today.

Let us take a look at one of the countries I mentioned earlier that has already reviewed bulk powers—the USA. The Snowden revelations revealed that the National Security Agency was running a bulk domestic telephone records programme. The NSA and others put up a strong case for maintaining it. The NSA produced a dossier of 54 counter-terrorism events in which, it said, bulk powers contributed to success in countering terrorism, but two entirely independent American bodies reviewed all 54 counter-terrorism cases and determined that only 12 had any relevance to the use of bulk powers under section 215 of the USA Patriot Act 2001.

One of those groups—the President’s Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies, which is a very well respected, high-powered and independent body, set up under the auspices of President Obama—concluded:

“Our review suggests that the information contributed to terrorist investigations by the use of section 215...was not essential to preventing attacks and could readily have been obtained in a timely manner using conventional section 215 orders.”

The other body—the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board—concluded similarly. It said that it had “not identified a single instance involving a threat to the United States in which the program”—meaning the use of bulk powers—“made a concrete difference in the outcome of a counterterrorism investigation.”

It went further, saying that it was “aware of no instance in which the program directly contributed to the discovery of a previously unknown terrorist plot or the disruption of a terrorist attack.”

Whatever I think the outcome of the review will be—none of us knows, because it has not happened—it is none the less a recognition that the Government have failed to convince both the House and wider society of the necessity of the powers.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that the independent review looks at the American experience, given that America is one of our chief allies? Does she also agree that the Opposition should seek an assurance from the Government that the independent review will do so?

Anne McLaughlin: I will come on to that point shortly.

The review is welcome—of course it is, not least because it is hoped that David Anderson QC will do what Liberty and others have called for and use the opportunity properly to challenge the evidence and produce a thorough, comprehensive and unbiased examination of the necessity of all bulk powers in the Bill. However, the review was called for long ago by Liberty and other respectable organisations. The Government could and should have completed it before asking MPs to vote for the Bill.

When we are dealing with proposals that are so broad—the proposal is effectively for bulk data harvesting from mainly innocent citizens—it is incumbent on the Government to prove that there is an operational case and that the powers are necessary, and to ensure that the safeguards in place are rigorous. The Government have neither proven the operational case for the powers nor have they delivered safeguards and oversight of sufficient calibre to make the powers justifiable.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anne McLaughlin: I will give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman but I am trying not to give way too often.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. As I indicated when I spoke on Second Reading, I appreciate that bulk powers are controversial, but I am absolutely sure that we do not conduct data harvesting in this country. It simply does not happen. The use of bulk powers is not for that purpose, but for the purpose of examining material. Even though that may be done in bulk, it is done in a way that does not amount to the generalised harvesting of data for their examination. It simply is not.

Anne McLaughlin: My answer to that is simply that if the Bill allows for bulk data harvesting, it can still happen. We cannot sit here and say, “No, it will never happen.”

The SNP argument is not to do down our security services or anyone else working to keep our constituents safe. We argue that we would fail as a Parliament if we assert our power on behalf of our constituents and fail to place proper limitations on the scope of the state to interfere in the lives of innocent private citizens.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anne McLaughlin: I will not give way at the moment—I have given way too many times and others want to speak.

To use an illustrative analogy, if we were to authorise the opening, scanning and retention of all mail via a particular post office in the hope that one day we could go back once we had found, via another investigative technique, a suspicion about a certain user of that post office, our constituents would rightly be marching on this place demanding that we stop such an outrage. Do the Governments really believe that people using that post office would be content to believe that all was well as long as the letters were stored in a big safe to which only the good guys had the key, or that they would be...
read only after a warrant was required? I do not believe so—people are not that daft and, strangely, for some unknown reason, they are not that trusting—yet the Government are asking us to focus on the issue of access and examination, and to ignore the massive combine harvester in the room, meaning bulk data collection. Government Members may well groan, but we are entitled to express our opinions on the Bill and to scrutinise the legislation rigorously.

On the Government's own terms, that abuse of public privacy is of very limited use anyway. Targeted powers are far more effective and could resolve many of the privacy concerns. If we have a justifiable case to access information, we already know who we should be targeting for data collection. Why are we wasting time and resources using bulk techniques for that collection?

Seema Kennedy: The hon. Lady referred to unknown targets, but surely one advantage of bulk data gathering is finding those unknown people out there who wish to do us harm.

Anne McLaughlin: I wonder how the hon. Lady believes we will do that. The evidence reviewed by the Committee showed that bulk powers are counter-productive because the sheer scale of the data makes them impossible to analyse adequately. In fact, I believe the Government used the limited capacity of the security services to analyse bulk datasets—people who are not future-proofing the Bill if we say that it is absolutely fine to have intrusive bulk techniques because now, in 2016, we do not have the technical capabilities to analyse all the data. Some present-day practices are reliant on 32-year-old laws—they date back to 1984, of all years. If we get the measure wrong, there is every possibility that we will enshrine in law invasive practices that will become feasible only at some point in the next 32 years. Perhaps the most worrying powers of part 6 refer to bulk equipment interference, which the Government helpfully outline as follows:

"bulk equipment interference is not targeted against particular person(s), organisation(s) or location(s) or against equipment that is being used for particular activities".

It is therefore an indiscriminate form of interference that leaves systems vulnerable, not only to our own security services using their powers sparingly and proportionately, but to those looking to cause harm and to profit from broken security. If the front door of someone's house has been kicked in by the police, criminals are not prevented from entering after their departure.

Our concerns regarding the bulk powers provisions in part 6 are connected to many of our concerns regarding the use of bulk datasets. At the heart of the matter is the retention of intimate personal details regarding the tens of millions of ordinary citizens of this country who do not merit such information being held by the state. We welcome the review of the use of bulk powers and recognise that other parts of the Bill impact on part 6—it cannot stand in isolation. If bulk datasets are acquired by other mechanisms in the Bill, how are they to be dealt with and properly handled? Therefore, as we have stressed throughout, the Bill should be easy to understand, and should clarify what is permitted and what is not. We should not provide a mechanism whereby we rubber stamp practices that were never previously debated.

Again, the offline analogy is instructive. If we were asked by the state to deposit our membership forms for various organisations—political parties, campaign groups, golf clubs—or forms with our direct debit details, health records and other such bulk information into a big safe—then we would rightly baulk at such a proposal. Just because such a system is being proposed online and without the consent of the individuals concerned does not make it acceptable—in many ways, it makes it much worse. I hope the Minister will address that comparison.

Mr John Hayes: I say this to be helpful to the hon. Lady. I fear that the debate has moved on and she has not. The truth of the matter is that the bulk powers she describes were considered by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). It established that there was both validity and necessity. She is arguing a general case on bulk rather than the case for safeguards. The debate we ought to be having is about safeguards, is it not?

Anne McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that advice and will pass it on to my constituents, who have the same concerns as I do and whose concerns I am expressing.

As we know, the Bill is supposed to be a basis for the use of those techniques for quite some time, and we are not future-proofing the Bill if we say that it is absolutely fine to have intrusive bulk techniques because now, in 2016, we do not have the technical capabilities to analyse all the data. Some present-day practices are reliant on 32-year-old laws—they date back to 1984, of all years. If we get the measure wrong, there is every possibility that we will enshrine in law invasive practices that will become feasible only at some point in the next 32 years. Perhaps the most worrying powers of part 6 refer to bulk equipment interference, which the Government helpfully outline as follows:

"bulk equipment interference is not targeted against particular person(s), organisation(s) or location(s) or against equipment that is being used for particular activities".

It is not that the Government are not aware of the problems they are creating. The principles of targeting and specific warranting appear in various guises throughout the Bill. The Government need to fully embrace both principles and apply them to the collection, storage and analysis of data. If they fail to do so—and so far they have failed—and if they still cannot prove the operational necessity of these intrusions into the private lives of everyday citizens—and so far they have not proven that—then they should not expect the support of this House for those measures. It is not acceptable, or it should not be acceptable, for any Government to ask for proposed legislation that is about to be reviewed to be nodded through.

Every year in this and the other place, these Houses play out, in all their finery, the historic role of Parliament in limiting the powers of the Executive. Let us remember that role when we vote on the unprecedented extension of powers in the Bill.
Mr Grieve: It is a pleasure to be able to participate in today’s debate. I will move the amendments standing in the name of the Intelligence and Security Committee in a moment. I would not wish to detain the House this afternoon’s debate, on a matter of great and legitimate public interest and importance, if I were not to seek briefly to respond to the perfectly reasonable fears expressed by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin).

Those fears highlight the difficulty we have in this country—certainly for Members of Parliament, but I dare say also for members of the public and certainly for non-governmental organisations interested in civil liberties—in reconciling an assessment of what the agencies may be doing in relation to bulk powers, with what those of us who have become privy to classified information by virtue of our work actually see is happening in reality. I am not sure that this is a gap that is very easy to bridge. I can only do my best to explain to the House and to the hon. Lady how I see the system working.

In an ideal world, it would always be better if we used targeted interception. If we know what it is we are trying to intercept and have reasonable grounds that are necessary and proportionate for doing so, then clearly that is what we should be aiming to do. The reality, however, is that the use of the internet today, in respect of the transfer of information, is of such an order that if there were not bulk powers to enable the agencies to look to intercept bulk and then search it to find what they are looking for, it would in practice be very difficult for the agencies to defend our security against espionage and, in particular, terrorism. That is the reality.

That point has been made repeatedly, including in public by agency heads. When Sir Iain Lobban gave evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee, the only time it held a public hearing, he explained that the idea that there is bulk harvesting of data in order to carry out a detailed examination of them is, in fact, fanciful. That is not what is happening. What is happening is that there may be the retention of a bulk group of data in which in reality the vast majority—in fact, probably over 99%—will never be looked at, except in so far as it exists as a few digits on a screen. Ultimately, the agencies are interested in the nugget—or, as he described it, the needle in the haystack—that they are actually looking for. The idea that the privacy of an individual will be compromised if it just so happens that their internet traffic is caught in that particular net is simply not real. That is the reality of what goes on.

If I may say so to the hon. Lady and to the House, I do not really think that that is very different from what was probably going on 100 years ago when somebody suspected there might be a letter in a mailbag coming down from Glasgow to London. They could identify some of the markers on it and the handwriting, so they took an entire mailbag, tipped it out and looked to see if they could find the letter they were looking for. They then put all the other letters back in the mailbag and sent it on. The only realistic difference is that at the moment we do not have to stop the mailbag, because the mail can be transferred and we can simply retain the data somewhere else.

I appreciate that this is an area where people will legitimately be anxious that this could be capable of misuse. Of course, the hon. Lady is right that it could be capable of misuse. Anybody in this House who wants to raise concerns about misuse is raising a perfectly legitimate point. The question is what safeguards we can properly put in legislation, and through the framework we create in a democratic and free society, to try to ensure that that misuse will not and does not occur. The Intelligence and Security Committee, of which I am the Chairman, is part of the process of trying to ensure that there is no such misuse.

Joanna Cherry: I am listening very carefully to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, because he is very knowledgeable in these areas. Is he aware that during the currency of the Public Bill Committee, The Guardian published an internal newsletter from MI6 from September 2011, which said that individuals within MI6 had been “crossing the line with their database use...looking up addresses in order to send birthday cards, checking passport details to organise personal travel, checking details of family members for personal convenience...check the personal details of colleagues when filling out service forms on their behalf”?

Is he aware that there is internal recognition of misuse of data within the security services?

Mr Grieve: Yes, I was aware of that. That has, I think, been public knowledge for some time. So far as I am concerned, as the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, we take that very seriously. Indeed, I believe the agencies took the matter very seriously as well, and that those involved were disciplined. The point was made that however innocent the activity of looking up one’s friend’s address might appear, it was not an acceptable thing to do. I certainly agree. That was one reason why, yesterday, I highlighted the issue of offences and was pleased to get the response from my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that they were taking this issue seriously. I worry that the penalties attached to some of the potential offences appear to be insufficient. I fully understand the point the hon. Lady makes, but we must be a bit careful before we translate what appears to have happened in such cases into a belief that there is systematic abuse of the data sets that may be held—that is what we are talking about—by agencies, and that the material in them is being misused or put to some nefarious purpose that is not legitimate for the purposes of national security.

James Cleverly (Br.antree) (Con): Is it not the case that there are many things in public life—the police, computers, firearms and so on—that have the potential for misuse, but that the potential for misuse is not a reason to eradicate them from public life? It is a reason to ensure there is a robust framework and—this is the point my right hon. and learned Friend is making—a proper system of penalties for misuse, rather than just scrapping a whole capability because of potential future misuse.

Mr Grieve: Yes, I agree entirely. I am afraid that, because human society is not perfect, eradicating every instance of misconduct by public servants is likely to be impossible. We therefore have to ensure proper safeguards and ethics. Here I simply repeat what I said before. My own experience is that the ethical standards of the agencies are very high; that is not to say that one does not have to be vigilant about maintaining those standards, or that there might not have been instances where their ethical standards slipped, but everything I and, I think,
my fellow members of the ISC have seen has constantly reassured us that those ethical standards are at the heart of what they do. I recollect Sir Iain Lobban saying that if he had asked his staff at GCHQ to do something unethical, they simply would not have done it. He said they would have refused, had he made the request of them.

I simply say that about the framework. I now turn to our amendments, the first group of which consists of amendments 9 to 12 and deals with an issue that goes to the heart of bulk powers: operational purposes. In the ISC’s report on the draft Bill, we were critical of what appeared to us to be the lack of transparency around operational purposes, which are of the utmost importance — this picks up on what the hon. Member for Glasgow North East said — as they provide the justification for examining material collected using bulk powers. If it falls outside legitimate operational purposes, one cannot examine it. We therefore recommended that in some form and in a manner consistent with safeguarding security — the two things are often difficult to reconcile — the list ought, so far as possible, to be published. We also recommended that the ISC have a role on behalf of Parliament in scrutinising the full classified list of operational purposes.

We were also concerned, when we investigated the matter further, that in some cases the nature of the list of operational purposes lacked clarity, as did the procedures for managing it, which seemed largely informal, particularly those for adding an operational purpose to the list. As matters stand now, that can effectively be done by a senior officer in the organisation. Our amendments are therefore intended to give effect to our original recommendations for greater scrutiny and transparency, while also trying to create a formal mechanism for the establishment, management, modification and review of the list of operational purposes.

Mr John Hayes: I anticipated that my right hon. and learned Friend would raise this matter, given that he puts such emphasis on his report. I am absolutely committed to considering the matter in the way he describes, and I am prepared to say now that we will go away and consider his amendments, with a view to introducing further amendments to the Bill to satisfy him and his Committee on this issue.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister and will keep that in mind, but so that the House might understand, I will just take it through what we proposed.

Amendment 9 sets out:

“The operational purposes specified in the warrant must be ones specified, in a list maintained by the heads of the intelligence services, as purposes which they consider are operational purposes for which intercepted content or secondary data obtained under bulk interception warrants may be selected for examination.”

That is to formalise the process, which at the moment we think is too informal. Under amendment 10, an “operational purpose may be specified in the list … only with the approval of the Secretary of State.”

We think that when an operational purpose is added to the list, it should go through the Secretary of State and be signed off by her. My understanding — I hope that the Minister will confirm this in due course — is that the Government do not see any significant problem with introducing such a system.

Mr Hayes indicated assent.

Mr Grieve: I see the Minister nodding; I am grateful to him.

Amendment 10 also states:

“The Secretary of State may give such approval only if satisfied that the operational purpose is specified in a greater level of detail than the descriptions contained in section 121.”

That is to ensure that the Minister understands what the agency is asking for in adding an operational purpose to its list.

1.45 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Going back to amendment 9, is the right hon. and learned Member confident that the list will not be too prescriptive — in other words, that those who want to find a way around it, will be able to do so?

Mr Grieve: I do not think the list should be too prescriptive. It will clearly be flexible. From my understanding of the list and what I know about the existing lists, they do have flexibility and can be added to and subtracted from. They are the day-to-day operational purposes for examining bulk data. That is what should be there. At the moment, it is something of an informal process; there is no suggestion that it is not being followed properly, but I think it needs to be formalised a bit more, which is what the amendments are intended to do. Amendment 11 states:

“The list of operational purposes … must be reviewed at least annually by the Prime Minister.”

Amendment 12, which has caused the Government greater — and understandable — difficulty, would put in place the following requirement:

“The Investigatory Powers Commissioner and Intelligence and Security Committee”—

that is us—

“will be kept informed of any changes to the list of Operational Purposes in a timely manner.”

I always stress that the Committee is not there to monitor the activities of the intelligence agencies in real time; it is outside our remit to do so, as the Executive has to get on with its decision making, but we have the power to look at virtually everything we want — unless the Prime Minister denies us access, which has never happened in my time as Chairman — and the right to ask for material and to be briefed on what has happened in the past.

My impression is that the Government have no great objection to letting us see, on an annual basis, how the list has been reviewed, but we took the view that “timely” meant a bit more frequently than that. To make our position clear to the Minister and the Treasury Bench, we think that we ought to be kept informed of any changes not necessarily the day after they happen but certainly within a reasonable timeframe so that we might follow the changes that take place. The merit is that because we can, if necessary, call an evidence session and ask the head of an agency to come and explain to us what has been going on, we could provide
reassurance to the House that the system was being operated correctly. I want to emphasise that that is the purpose of the amendment.

I do not expect the Minister to give me a completely positive response to amendment 12 today—he has kindly intervened already—but I would like him to provide an assurance that the Government will give this careful consideration and come up with a solution that enables the ISC to do its job. If he cannot, I might have to press the amendment to a vote, which I do not particularly want to do.

Mr John Hayes: My right hon. and learned Friend is right to anticipate that this is the issue that has troubled us most of all his Committee’s many sensible proposals. From what he has said, I know he will understand that the balance to be struck is between that kind of proper scrutiny and ongoing security operations, which clearly require that consideration of operational purposes be a dynamic matter. It is critical that we strike that balance, but I hear the tone and tenor of his remarks and I am happy to say that the Government will consider the matter carefully and continue our discussions with him.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister. On that basis, I think that these will be probing amendments, but I hope the matter can be properly resolved as the Bill goes through another place.

Amendment 12 states that the “Investigatory Powers Commissioner must include in his Annual Report a summary of those Operational Purposes”.

Those would likely be more limited than the full list, but it would help to have some broad understanding.

I must take a moment on new clause 3, given that it deals with such an important matter. In the ISC’s report, we recommended that class bulk personal dataset warrants be removed from the Bill on the basis that the potential intrusion into privacy was sufficient to require that each distinct dataset should require specific approval by Ministers. However, we then had further evidence—as has happened in the dialogue with the Government and the agencies—in particular from the Secret Intelligence Service, about the rationale for retaining class warrants in the Bill. In particular, the evidence highlighted the fact that many of these datasets covered the same information or type of information. In those circumstances, we considered that a class warrant would be appropriate, as the privacy considerations were identical.

However, were we to accept class warrants for bulk personal datasets, we would need safeguards to ensure that their use was limited. We therefore proposed three restrictions. The first relates to the most sensitive personal data, using the definitions in the Data Protection Act 1998, and would prohibit the retention of any dataset containing a significant quantity of data relating to a person’s race, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, physical or mental health, or sexual life. The second restriction relates to bulk personal datasets that are somehow novel or out of the ordinary. In those circumstances, we would not consider a class warrant to be appropriate, so subsection (1)(b) of new clause 3 is designed to ensure that such cases will be referred to the Secretary of State and the commissioners by way of a specific warrant.

Finally, we express concern that we should not end up with bulk personal dataset inflation and have suggested that bulk personal dataset warrants should be limited to 20 individual datasets. I emphasise to the House that that is a completely arbitrary figure in many ways. If the Government have an alternative approach, I am more than happy to listen. I accept that if we impose a limit of 20, it is possible that the Home Secretary might be asked to sign two identical bulk personal dataset warrants in one go, if they are expecting to pick up 40. However, it seems to me that there needs to be some numerical cap, above all to ensure that the Home Secretary or Foreign Secretary, depending on who it is, is aware of what is being collected.

I would emphasise that we have seen the entire list of bulk personal datasets and we have never been of the opinion that anything is being collected that is not legitimate, and some of it, I can tell the House, is pretty mundane as well. That said, it is right that the House should exercise some caution about the expansion of those datasets, because one can see that in some circumstances they could touch upon information that is regarded as highly sensitive.

Mr Hayes: I hesitate to intervene again, but I hope these exchanges are proving helpful to the House, as well as to my right hon. and learned Friend and me—and to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My right hon. and learned Friend touches on an important issue. I think he will acknowledge that it would be undesirable to set an arbitrary figure, but it is certainly the case that the Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary would want to take into account the numbers. It seems to me that the numerical case that my right hon. and learned Friend is making is not without merit. I am not sure that this is a matter to be dealt with on the face of the Bill, but it certainly should be dealt with.

Mr Grieve: I am again most grateful to the Minister. I entirely accept that if he can produce, for example, an assurance before the passage of this Bill through Parliament that there will be a protocol in place—which we, for example, have access to—that sets out exactly how the process will be managed in practice and that we can provide the House with the reassurance that that is being followed, that would satisfy my concerns.

However, I do think there is an issue here, because frankly the world is made up of more and more bulk personal datasets, largely being collected in digital form, and there needs to be a process in place to ensure that what is there is legitimately held and is not just being added to in a way that could be outside Ministers’ line of vision altogether, unless they specifically started asking questions. That is the sort of approach I am talking about, so on that basis I am happy to accept the Minister’s assurance.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I am less perplexed by the arbitrary nature of subsection (1)(b) of new clause 3 and more interested in subsection (1)(a). What is meant or intended by the word “large”? Can the right hon. hon. and learned Gentleman say what proportion or quantum would be considered large when considering a personal dataset? There may be some helpful read-across...
from the 1998 Act, but it would be useful in considering this amendment to know what is intended by that entirely non-arbitrary and open suggestion?

**Mr Grieve:** Like everything else, I tend usually to say that we give the word its ordinary English meaning. I can accept that one may collect a dataset whose content is entirely innocuous and not really sensitive personal data at all, but which for some reason might contain a nugget of sensitive personal data that has crept in in some strange and perhaps unintended way. I accept that in those circumstances the protections we introduce are unnecessary; indeed, the truth is that the agencies would not even know that that information was there at the time they were acquiring it.

However, if we focus on the points I raised earlier—the Data Protection Act describes sensitive personal data as relating to a person’s race, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, physical or mental health, or sexual life—we are probably in quite a good place. I do not think a court would have too much difficulty being able to tell what falls one side of the line and what falls the other. However, like everything else, it is all open to a degree of interpretation, so I do not offer that to the hon. Gentleman as 100% perfection, although it is a good way forward and I think most of us would understand what sort of collected bulk data are likely to contain that sort of material.

Amendment 24 concerns specific warrants for bulk personal datasets. We are far less concerned about these, but again this provision would cover data relating to a person’s race, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, physical or mental health, or sexual life, and would ensure that the Secretary of State authorising the warrant would have the sensitivity of the data highlighted for them as part of their overall consideration of the necessity and proportionality of retaining and examining the dataset. I believe this may well be completely acceptable to the Government. Amendment 24 would mean that if there was an intention, for example, to acquire a dataset that clearly contained a great deal of information about people’s religious or political opinions, that would be specifically drawn to the Secretary of State’s attention in asking her or him to sign off the warrant, so that they were aware that that was being sought.

Finally in this list, I want to mention amendments 22 and 23, which are really carryovers from yesterday and concern the renewal of warrants to prevent two warrants from extending over a 12-month period, which I believe the Government have accepted, although that could not be considered yesterday.

I apologise for taking up so much of the House’s time, but I hope these amendments may help to clarify some of these areas of the Bill.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): We made good progress in the House yesterday. We now have clarity about the terms of the independent review made good progress in the House yesterday. We now have clarity about the terms of the independent review and other provisions in the Bill. That, I think, would be a helpful extension of the safeguards relating to bulk powers.

**Gavin Robinson**

One of the amendments made to the Bill yesterday concerned the requirement for judicial commissioners to consider necessity and proportionality with a sufficient degree of care to ensure that they comply with the general duties in relation to privacy—this is the tighter judicial review test. That amendment was made to clause 21, which relates to intercept warrants. Today we are dealing with bulk powers. The judicial commissioners have an important role in relation to bulk powers and are an important safeguard in respect of warrants involving bulk powers. It is therefore important that we have clarity in the House today that the tighter scrutiny that is now in clause 21 applies equally to all other exercises of authorisation or approval carried out by judicial commissioners, including where they are exercising their powers in relation to bulk warrants. I think that otherwise there will be a risk of two tests, one under clause 21 and one under the other clauses applying to bulk powers. There is a real danger relating to combined warrants, in respect of which judicial commissioners would be asked to carry out different tests. It is important for the bulk powers to be scrutinised every bit as closely as the intercept warrants. Perhaps, in his response, the Minister will make it clear that the test applies generally across all the functions of the judicial commissioners, whether in respect of the specific warrants referred to clause 21 or in respect of the warrants relating to bulk powers and other provisions in the Bill. That, I think, would be entirely non-arbitrary and open suggestion?

One of the amendments made to the Bill yesterday concerned the requirement for judicial commissioners to consider necessity and proportionality with a sufficient degree of care to ensure that they comply with the general duties in relation to privacy—this is the tighter judicial review test. That amendment was made to clause 21, which relates to intercept warrants. Today we are dealing with bulk powers. The judicial commissioners have an important role in relation to bulk powers and are an important safeguard in respect of warrants involving bulk powers. It is therefore important that we have clarity in the House today that the tighter scrutiny that is now in clause 21 applies equally to all other exercises of authorisation or approval carried out by judicial commissioners, including where they are exercising their powers in relation to bulk warrants. I think that otherwise there will be a risk of two tests, one under clause 21 and one under the other clauses applying to bulk powers. There is a real danger relating to combined warrants, in respect of which judicial commissioners would be asked to carry out different tests. It is important for the bulk powers to be scrutinised every bit as closely as the intercept warrants. Perhaps, in his response, the Minister will make it clear that the test applies generally across all the functions of the judicial commissioners, whether in respect of the specific warrants referred to clause 21 or in respect of the warrants relating to bulk powers and other provisions in the Bill. That, I think, would be a helpful extension of the safeguards relating to bulk powers.

2 pm

Let me now deal with the bulk powers themselves. As has been pointed out by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), they are very wide. What concerns her constituents and mine—and, indeed, many other constituents—is that inevitably the bulk powers will be applied to, and will have an impact on, people who are not themselves suspected of any wrongdoing. That worries everyone who has spoken to me, and I am sure that it worries members of the public who have spoken to many other MPs.

**Mr John Hayes:** I sense that the hon. and learned Gentleman is about to move on to wider issues. Before he does so, let me deal with the issue of the application of the content of the manuscript amendment, which, as he said, specified a part of the Bill. He is right to say that the principles that underpin the amendment should apply to the whole Bill, and I will ensure, as the Bill proceeds, that that is the case legislatively. If we need to table further amendments to make the position categorically clear, we will do so.

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying the position, because that is an important additional measure in relation to bulk powers. We will, of course, support whatever amendments are necessary to achieve that end.

As I have said, the bulk powers are very wide. They will inevitably have an impact on people who are not suspected of doing anything wrong, and they will inevitably have an impact—or, at least, it is impossible to ensure
that they will not—on legally privileged material, or material that involves journalistic material or journalistic sources, or, indeed, MPs’ correspondence. It would be good if a way could be found of excluding such material from the operation of bulk powers, but it is not possible to do so, and that is why there is concern about bulk powers. [ Interruption. ] I will give way to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) in a moment.

Bulk powers involve ordinary members of the public who have never done anything wrong, and they involve the potential to capture legally privileged material, journalistic material and MPs’ correspondence. I shall come on to the safeguards, but it is important to understand first why there is that concern about the bulk powers.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)  

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I know that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) is very good at whistling, but I am sure that shadow Ministers do not respond to whistles, and that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) wanted to give way to him anyway.

Mr Davis: I was not intending to be discourteous, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The hon. and learned Gentleman said that it was not possible to screen out the correspondence of the various privileged groups he described. The issue arose at the Investigatory Powers Tribunal in respect of one of the Wilson doctrine cases, and that was the assertion made by the Government barrister at the time. However, I consulted a number of experts, including Ross Anderson at Cambridge, and they said that it was perfectly possible. A great deal of screening is already done to take out dross—issues such as pornography—and it is perfectly possible to screen out targeted groups as well.

Keir Starmer: Obviously, I should be very interested to hear how that could be done at the outset, and I am sure that the Minister would as well.

Let me make two points to emphasise why there is such concern about bulk powers. It may well be possible, depending on the parameters that are set, to reduce the likelihood of obtaining through bulk powers material that is sensitive in one shape or form, but I do not think it is possible to eliminate it. It may well be that most of that is done at the filtering stage, rather than at the stage of the initial exercise of the bulk power. I am not seeking to explain why bulk powers inevitably capture such information, or to justify that; I am simply explaining why I think so many people are concerned about the bulk powers. That is why Labour has made it clear that, given the breadth of the powers, the operational case for them must be properly made and properly reviewed, and that is why the safeguards must be reviewed.

The issue of the safeguards may need to be revisited when the Bill is in the other place. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden knows, the Tom Watson and David Davis case is currently midway between the Court of Justice of the European Union and the Court of Appeal. Although it touches on existing legislation and retention powers, it may have implications in relation to the Bill when it is given further consideration, and will certainly be important when it comes to consideration of safeguards. Let me also, in passing, echo the concern expressed by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) in relation to operational purposes, an issue which also arose in Committee.

As for the review, the first stage is to ask whether the operational case has been made. I referred yesterday to an exchange of letters between the Minister and me. I hope that copies of the letters have been made available; I think that they have been made available to the House, and that every Member has them. However, I want to put on record what was being asked for, and what the response was. Let me say at the outset that this was a constructive exchange, which moved a significant issue significantly further forward.

I wrote to the Minister that the review to be carried out by David Anderson should be “supported by a security cleared barrister, a technical expert and a person with experience of covert investigations”, that it should “Examine the operational case for the bulk powers in the Bill, not merely in respect of the utility of the powers, but also their necessity”, that it should “Have access to all necessary information as is needed to undertake the review effectively, including all information provided to the Intelligence and Security Committee”, and that it should “Take about three months to complete and...report to the Prime Minister in time for the findings to inform Lords Committee considerations of Parts 6 and 7 of the Bill.”

The Minister’s reply is important, as Members who have had an opportunity to read it will appreciate. He wrote:

“I can confirm that the basic framework for the review will be as set out in your letter...David Anderson has hand-picked this team and we are confident that together they have the range and depth of knowledge needed to undertake a comprehensive review.”

I was very anxious that David Anderson should pick as members of his team people whom he considered to have the necessary competences to help him with the review that he has been asked to carry out independently, and I am pleased that he has done so. I have been assured by him that he is very happy with his choices, and with the skills from which he will benefit as a result of that exercise.

The Minister’s letter continues:

“In relation to your second point”—this is really important—“it is absolutely the case that this review will be assessing the specific question of whether the bulk capabilities provided for in the Bill are necessary. The review team will critically appraise the need for bulk capabilities, which will include an assessment of whether the same result could have been achieved through alternative investigative methods.”

That goes to the heart of the issue. If that is the focus of the review, it will give comfort to the Labour team—and, no doubt, to members of the Scottish National party, notwithstanding their concerns—and to all our constituents as well.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the timetable for the independent review is such that, whereas the House of Lords will have time to scrutinise and debate it, the House of Commons will not? Does he agree that that is not acceptable in a democracy?
Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. I have been asking for the review for some time and my preference was always that it should have been earlier and available to us now. In fairness, and in keeping with what I said yesterday about the exercise that we have been conducting, I recognise that it was a big ask of the Government at this stage, particularly in light of the pre-legislative scrutiny. I am always inclined to look on the positive side and the fact that there is a review, under the terms for which we asked, is important. Of course, when one looks back at anything, one can always make the argument that it should have been done earlier and, usually, differently. I accept that it would have been good if we had had the review by this stage, which is why I put forward my argument as I did before, but I emphasise just how significant this is and what a significant change of position it is for the Government. It is constructive and positive, for which we are grateful.

Mr David Davis: The powers mostly already exist and this is an avowal of existing powers, so in some sense the question of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) is different from what it would normally be. We have powers and may not change them as result of the delay, but there is an implication for how soon we review the whole package and how soon we come back and re-legislate. It has long seemed to me that this is a piece of legislation that lends itself to almost annual review, renewal and reform. The way to deal with the problem may be to ensure that we get a relatively rapid review and reform of the legislation in another part of this business.

Keir Starmer: There is a case for frequent review, but what form that would take is a matter for us to discuss during the debate on the next group of amendments. I take the point that, in many senses, most of the bulk powers are currently available and being used. As I said yesterday, however, that does not mean that we should not scrutinise them now through the passage of the Bill. This is the first time that Parliament has had the chance to examine and scrutinise the provisions, because they simply were not avowed. The change of position on the avowal of the powers over the past three or four years and the fact that they are in statute are quite extraordinary. It would be wrong to say that as they existed and were used under more general provisions in the past, we should not ask for the operational case to be made now and have that properly scrutinised. This is the right way of doing things, even though one might say that it should have been done five, 10 or 15 years ago when things were different.

Mr John Hayes: That is why the focus on necessity and not merely utility is so important. It would have been easy to have focused on utility. As the hon. and learned Gentleman emphasised earlier, this is about establishing to the satisfaction of independent people that the powers are necessary.

Keir Starmer: That word necessary is important in all of this. As I say, the review team’s ability to assess whether the same result could have been achieved through alternative investigative methods is important to that exercise and the confidence that we can have in the outcome.

Pressing on, the letter goes on to say that “all necessary information, access and assistance as is needed for the review” will be provided. It then states: “We are absolutely clear that there is nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, by in any way restricting the review team’s access to sensitive and classified material where this is necessary to inform the review process.”

On timing, it states “you are correct that the review will be concluded in time to inform Parliament’s consideration of Parts 6 and 7 of the Bill at the Lords Committee.” There is a complete and instructive response to the request in my letter and that will help a great deal in how the review is received.

The review is important. It is not just an exercise for us in this House or those in the other place; it is for the public. As the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield said, some Members of this House have had access to some of the powers and have seen them in operation either in previous roles or in briefings to the members of various Committees. However, it is no longer enough, nor should it be, for members of the public for politicians to stand up and say, “I have had it demonstrated to me that these powers are necessary or have been used in a particular way.” They have the right to as much information as possible to make decisions for themselves.

Anne McLaughlin: If the review comes back and says that the bulk powers are not necessary, what will the Labour party do then?

Keir Starmer: I will assess that at the time. It depends on what the report says, because if it calls any of the powers into question or makes any recommendations about their exercise, we would all want to consider that. It would be difficult for anybody in this House or the other place to make a case for a bulk power that an independent review has deemed unnecessary. Let us wait until we get to that stage and let us see what the review actually says.

As for confidence in the review, there is a question of publication. It is important that the review’s report is publicly available. I obviously understand that David Anderson and his team will see highly sensitive material, to which they will have unrestricted access, so the detail that can be put in any public report will inevitably be limited. I think everybody understands that. It is important that the report is published in some form, as most of David Anderson’s report have been, so that they can be read not only by Members of this House and of the other place, but by members of the public seeking assurances about and confidence in the review.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab) This issue goes to the heart of one reason why the Bill is particularly difficult. This House depends on the members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, who find out in private sessions how the powers are being used, to report back to the House, in a way that ends up being redacted, about their confidence in the powers. We have a duty to ensure that the public are as well informed as possible, in concert with our need to protect national
security, about how these things work. That is the challenge and is one reason why the House has found the Bill quite difficult to deal with.

Keir Starmer: I agree with those sentiments. Conventions and attitudes change. To take an example from my past, it was once a convention that a prosecuting authority would not give reasons for its decisions, but that has changed and for the better. The days of politicians with access to particular information assuring the public simply by saying that they have had access and that they are satisfied are well and truly over. That presents problems and difficulties in relation to what must be put in the public domain.

Mr John Hayes: The intervention of the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) has been helpful in aiding me to frame my own. She is right that operational concerns are sensitive, delicate and, of course, secret matters. The hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) is absolutely right that we should put as much information as possible in the report. He is also right that there will be access to security-cleared information of a highly sensitive nature, but that should not prevent us from being as clear as we can to this House, and more widely, about why it has been decided whether certain powers are necessary.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, which I will take in the spirit with which it was put forward. We want maximum publicity within the constraints that apply when highly sensitive information is considered. The first point of the review is to inform their lordships so that they can perform their scrutiny function, but they will be unable to do that if the report is not available to assist them in their deliberations. The review and its terms are a material and important step forward. We want maximum publicity within the constraints which I will take in the spirit with which it was put forward. I agree with the approach of the SNP, which we have heard since Second Reading—it was certainly a golden thread running through Committee—is one of serious annoyance to me, as I am pretty certain it is to colleagues. I am absolutely certain it is of huge anxiety to our constituents. The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) obviously has constituents who are very different from mine. She and I served on the Immigration Bill Committee, as did the shadow Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). On the latter point, I concur and support what he said entirely, but the approach of the SNP, which we have heard since Second Reading—it is certainly a golden thread running through Committee—is one of serious annoyance to me, as I am pretty certain it is to colleagues. I am absolutely certain it is of huge anxiety to our constituents. The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) obviously has constituents who are very different from mine. She and I served on the Immigration Bill Committee, as did the shadow Minister, some little while ago. According to her, no constituent of hers had ever raised the issue of immigration, yet all constituents have raised with her these huge Glasgow concerns about bulk powers.

Anne McLaughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman take an intervention?

Simon Hoare: In a moment, because I want to give the hon. Lady the benefit of the words of Rudyard Kipling. I do not personalise this to her; rather I make it as a general point to her party. The SNP has demonstrated: “Power without responsibility—the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.”

The SNP is using a position of power to malign and undermine, as it has continually sought to do, the confidence of this House and of the country in the robustness and ethics of those in our security services, who, day in, day out, seek to use—I agree with the point made by the shadow Minister that they also require this—the public confidence that they have in order to make sure they have the right skills and tools to keep our constituents safe.

Joanna Cherry: I very much resent what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Is he aware that one of the founding members of the SNP, Sir Compton Mackenzie, was a member of the British security services? Is he aware that in Scotland we have one of the best records of crime prevention in the world? Is he aware that we have responsibility in Scotland—we run the Scottish Government...
and are now into a successful third term? Will he please reconsider his remarks, which SNP Members and most people in Scotland will find deeply offensive?

Simon Hoare: All I will say to the hon. and learned Lady, once she has calmed down from her faux anxiety, is that Compton Mackenzie must be turning in his grave, because there is a significant dereliction of duty here. One would think—this may be the case in Scotland, and if so, SNP Members must forgive my ignorance—that there is no organised crime, and that there are no paedophiles, people traffickers, terrorists and drug dealers. One would think there are no people who are trying to do us ill. Perhaps, to use the analogy of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), it is the view of the SNP that a quick rifle through a mail sack and the identification of a particular hand in a quill pen will be sufficient to interrupt some terrible deed. That may very well be, and SNP Members may be right that that will satisfy their constituents. I can tell them that it will not satisfy mine. My constituents look for the Government of the day, irrespective of the stripe, to carry out with seriousness and with democratic accountability the first duty of the state, which is to protect the realm and its citizens.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I hold no brief for the SNP—I struggle on many days to hold any affection for it. But may I offer him the opportunity to reflect on what he has said about the duty of the SNP Members and others of us, including a substantial number on his Benches? None of us would seek to undermine the work of the security services, but it is our duty to ensure that the powers given to them by this House are necessary and proportionate. That is the work in which we are engaged here, and if we are talking about a breach of duty, it would be a breach of our duty if we were not to do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The right hon. Gentleman wishes to catch my eye very shortly, and of course I want to hear him speak, but I do not want to hear the speech twice. We need short interventions.

Simon Hoare: The right hon. Gentleman has offered me an invitation and I hope he will not be offended if I do not accept it. I do not wish to reflect on or reconsider how I have positioned this. Everyone in this House has to be incredibly careful not only what we say and how we say it, but how it can be understood or construed. Everyone in this House has looked at the matter. The Bill was a very constructive exercise by the SNP. SNP Members took different approaches on issues to us, but to suggest that they have not played an important part in this is not to reflect the views at the end of the Committee stage.

Simon Hoare: I am inclined to agree with the latter point, but at every step and turn, every SNP amendment, on my reading and on my hearing and my understanding, has been designed to delay and frustrate. We have had the canard that has run through the debate that we have not had adequate time to debate and discuss these issues. I will not rehearse the times, Mr Deputy Speaker, because you know them. You know how many Committees of this House have looked at the matter. The Bill Committee stood for a long period of time. We had a long debate on Second Reading. The Government, and the Ministers in particular, have bent over backwards to ensure that they can land this Bill in a shape and form that is acceptable to the vast majority of Members of this House and, one would hope, of the other place.

Joanna Cherry: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that all the amendments laid by the SNP were designed to delay or frustrate the Bill, how does he explain why his own Government accepted new clause 6 on “Civil liability for certain unlawful interceptions”—I do not know whether he was in the Chamber yesterday—which was an amendment tabled by me on behalf of the Scottish National party? I say again, perhaps he would like to reconsider his comments carefully.

Simon Hoare: Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents. Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is marvellous news that there has been one amendment out of about 127,000 amendments that the SNP has tabled throughout this process that has been acceptable to Her Majesty’s Government. [Interruption.] Oh, it was just 1,000. It felt like 127,000. Forgive me. This is the fundamental point. The hon. and learned Lady is right, and that is why I find it surprising. The SNP is clearly a grown-up and mature party. It is now in its third term of government in Edinburgh. It will be discharging some of these duties. It will be consulted on different things by Ministers and by those responsible for appointing commissioners and all the rest of it. There seems to be a rather peculiar disconnect between the seriousness with which the SNP takes the duties of governance north of the border and this impression of flippancy it gives when it comes to national security.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I just help the hon. Gentleman? I know that he likes to bring the Chamber alive, but he needs to start to speak to the amendments. We have heard his antagonistic bits. Now I want to hear something about the amendment, because I also want to hear his colleagues, and I am sure that he does too.

Simon Hoare: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are absolutely right. I hope that I continue to be in order—
Mr Deputy Speaker: Let me reassure you that you were not in order, which is why I want you to be in order.

Simon Hoare: Let me reiterate something that might have got lost in some of the steam. I am speaking because I oppose the amendment that has been tabled.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I really do not need much advice. In fact, I will give a little bit of advice, which is that we speak to the amendment—we do not speak around it or leading up to it. It is the detail of the amendment that we want. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wants to be back on track, and I welcome that.

Simon Hoare: I oppose the amendments because they would delete very significant powers that are required. I have—as I believe the Government have—confidence in our services to deploy in an accountable way. If the hon. Member for Glasgow North East presses her amendment, I might have regretted that as well.

There are a number of matters on which I wish to touch today. I should like to speak first of all in relation to the review, which has formed so much of today's debate. I very much welcome the appointment of David Anderson, QC. He commands respect and confidence in all parts of the House. As the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said earlier, it is significant and important that, first of all, he has a remit that looks at the necessity of these provisions and also that he has been able to select for himself the team with which he will be working.

I very much hope that the report will be produced in time for the Bill to be given the benefit of it when it is considered in the other place. I say to the Minister that if it is a question of a week or two here or there, notwithstanding the deadlines to which we are all working, it would be proper for the Government to take the view that it is best to get this report right rather than to get it out quickly. For my part, I am disinclined to think that David Anderson would have taken on this job if he were not able to do it in the time that is allowed to him, but, as we all know with these matters, sometimes the unexpected happens and sometimes it is not always easy to get to the truth of things. I do hope that there will be a degree of flexibility among the Government's business managers, not least if we need a Government day to debate the report, so that the House has its voice heard.

Mr John Hayes: I will, if I may, suggest to the right hon. Gentleman, whom I worked with in government and whom I know very well, that the scope of the report should be a matter for David Anderson. For example, if he were to want to take into account the experience of other countries—this is something that the right hon. Gentleman and the SNP spokesperson called for—that would be a matter for David Anderson. We are not attempting to tie his hands in any way. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, it is my view that we need to get this review completed, so that we do not pass something into legislation without the information that emanates from it.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to the Minister for that. We are now best served by allowing Mr Anderson to get on and do the job that we have given him. I merely say in passing that it would have been better if we had given him that job some time ago, so that this House might have had the benefit of his conclusions when debating this whole matter. None the less, I welcome the conversion of the Government, however late in the day it may have come, to the need and to the acceptance of what even the Labour party has said, which is that the operational case for the extent of the bulk powers that the Government have sought to introduce in this Bill has not yet been made. The operational case that they have published has been vague, to be kind to it, and it has certainly been lacking in any persuasiveness.

We will look very closely at David Anderson's conclusion with regard to the necessity of these powers, because that should have been the first test that was set and that was required to be met. I take very little issue with the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), or indeed the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras, when they talk about the protections that they think should be built into the Bill. Protections are necessary only if the powers are first judged to be necessary, which comes to the very heart of the points made by the hon. Member for North Dorset. The Bill has very much been a work in progress and I wonder whether we would have had the 104 Government amendments we had yesterday and the 20 that we have today, never mind those tabled by the Intelligence and Security Committee, by those on the Opposition Front Bench and by the Scottish National party, if the House had taken the approach to the Bill and its scrutiny that was being urged on us a few minutes ago.

On the question of bulk personal datasets, I share the substantial concerns that have already been expressed. That brings me back to the objection that I have already spoken about—to the operational case. That is another aspect of the Bill that the Government have failed to explain. The operational case is perhaps even more opaque than anything else in the Bill. Although the abuses—let us use that term—outlined by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and acknowledged by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield might be at the lower end of the scale, I have a strong suspicion that it was because they were at the lower end of the scale that they came into the public domain in the first place. When we are dealing with something that strikes in such a fundamental way at the relationship between the citizen and the state, there is, frankly, no such thing as a trivial abuse. Any abuse is serious, any abuse is to be taken seriously, and that is why I thought that the hon. and learned Lady was right to bring them to the House's attention.

Joanna Cherry: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generous and measured comments earlier about the SNP's role in the Bill. To pick up on his point, is not the
problem that once the warrants have allowed bulk data to be scooped up there is no legal regulation of how it is analysed, which is why these individuals within the security services were able to break the rules—there are no warrants; it is about internal regulation?"

Mr Carmichael: The hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right, and I draw on my own experience when I say that in giving power to public authority in this way it is important that we should be as specific and prescribed as possible.

To draw on my experience, I recall the passage of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. At that time, I was a procurator fiscal depute in Aberdeen and one of the innovations introduced in the Act was the ability of a prosecutor to comment on previous convictions before a jury in Scotland. I have no doubt that at that time all sorts of undertakings were given at the Dispatch Box, but when we as prosecutors—and, I like to think, fairly measured prosecutors in the public interest—saw that provision, the discussion did not centre around how the undertakings had been given at the Dispatch Box but how we could use it, its extent, where the boundaries would lie and what would constitute a step over the line and a step just inside it. There were always some in the office who were quite keen for the line to be a little bit elastic.

That is a much more trivial example, because of course it was a measure for which there would have been obvious and immediate judicial scrutiny. If any depute were to overstep the mark in court, it would be immediately obvious and they would be pulled up on it. There will not be the same scrutiny, there is not the same oversight and we ask a great deal of those who serve in our security services if we give them such a wide range of powers with so little definition. The lack of definition, the lack of proportionality and the lack of necessity underpin my concerns, which, I think, are shared in other parts of the House.

2.45 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a privilege to speak on the second day of consideration of this very important Bill and to follow hon. and right hon. Friends and colleagues, as well as the many learned friends and colleagues—[Interruption.] I did not quite expect to hear that noise from the skies during my opening comments; I do not normally have this sort of impact.

I do not wish to disappoint people, but unlike my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) I sought neither inspiration nor cake from Kipling. Instead, I turned to the American scientist and author Neil deGrasse Tyson, who wrote very perceptively:

“Any time scientists disagree, it’s because we have insufficient data. Then we can agree on what kind of data to get; we get the data; and the data solves the problem. Either I’m right, or you’re right, or we’re both wrong. And we move on. That kind of conflict resolution does not exist in politics or religion.”

Very wise words, I think.

I believe that the advantage scientists have over the rest of us who base our judgments on instinct or hope should also be available to the people who keep us safe, our security personnel and the agencies in which they so importantly serve. I appreciate the sensitivities and difficulties with this topic of bulk powers, but I feel that the Bill has had a lot of scrutiny. It has been a long time in gestation, and rightly so.

Our security services need data, the raw information—perhaps from dozens of sources. They need the hundreds, perhaps thousands of pieces with which to build a picture of the threats that face us, and they then have the knowledge to take the right action against them. In today’s world in which data are all around us, our security personnel need to be able to collect them and to have the right, with safeguards, of course, to pull them all together.

There was a good deal of discussion on Second Reading, in Committee and now on Report on the nature of bulk powers and bulk review. It saddens me that a notion seems to have developed among some that the security services, given the chance, will use new powers to hoover up all the information on us all without any control at all. I think that that perception is false. Why? As we have been told, the bulk powers referred to in this Bill are already provided for in existing legislation. The Bill brings them together and, importantly, makes them subject to robust statutory safeguards.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that, as mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), having one Bill that brings consistent tests to this area and to the use of this power makes eminent sense and that that is why it should be supported?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. He is absolutely right; it makes sense to bring these powers together and, while doing that, to consider the safeguards.

Yes, the Bill provides our security and intelligence agencies with the ability to obtain data in bulk in order to identify new threats and to learn more about existing threats, but I feel that it does not confer on them new and sweeping powers. Our intelligence agencies have bulk collection powers but they do not conduct analysis of the data in an indiscriminate manner without reasonable suspicion—it would not be lawful for them to do so. In the modern world these powers, which already exist, are crucial. Bulk capabilities are crucial.

To investigate a target, our agents need to be able to acquire its communications in the first place. When a target is overseas, bulk interception is one of the key means, and may be the only means, by which we can obtain communications that would otherwise not be available. This is especially so if that potential threat is operating in an area where we have no strong diplomatic link or where the governing authority is not in control of all its own territory. We know from yesterday’s debate that bulk powers and their use have been instrumental in keeping us safe from threats abroad and, indeed, at home. It is worth noting that the bulk powers in the Bill have already played a significant part in every major counter-terrorism investigation of the last decade, including in each of the seven terrorist attack plots disrupted since November 2014. They have been essential in identifying 95% of the cyber-attacks...
on people and businesses in the UK discovered by the security and intelligence agencies over six months. Here at home the existing powers have been used to identify serious criminals who were seeking to evade detection online and could not be pursued by conventional means, supporting the disruption of more than 50 paedophiles in the UK in the past three years. I would like to quote the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who is no longer in his place but who has been contributing to today’s debate. He is a former Attorney General and not, if I may say so, a man who lightly allows liberties to be chipped away. He said of the Bill:

“The present Committee and its predecessor are satisfied that the Government are justified in coming to Parliament to seek in broad terms the powers that the Bill contains. None of the categories of powers in the Bill—including the principle of having powers of bulk collection of data, which has given rise to controversy in recent years—is unnecessary or disproportionate to what we need to protect ourselves.”—[Official Report, 15 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 836.]

Of course, some will disagree with the former Attorney General and they rightly have the opportunity to do so, but I happen to agree with him on those points.

Finally, I want to touch on calls from Labour and the SNP on Second Reading and in the Public Bill Committee for independent validation of the operational case. We should recognise that the Government have listened and, in response to those calls, have confirmed that David Anderson QC will undertake a review to inform the passage of the Bill through the House of Lords. Parliament will then be able to decide.

I will support this Bill as one that codifies the law as much as it extends it, and that builds robust safeguards against intrusion while at the same time safeguarding the public. I believe that it is an extremely important Bill—important to our country, important to the people of our country, and important to our constituents.

Gavin Robinson: It is great to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who made a powerful speech and a lightening-inducing one, it seems, to judge from the weather outside.

Wendy Morton: Not for the first time.

Gavin Robinson: Indeed.

I commented in the Tea Room earlier that I probably would not get the opportunity to contribute on Third Reading because the debate yesterday and today has been dominated by heavyweights. When I said that to a Government Member, he looked oddly surprised that I would not satisfy that criterion. I am pleased to have the opportunity not only to speak at this point on consideration, but to make the point that it would have been wholly worthwhile to have had just one Northern Ireland voice on the Bill Committee.

Members will have recognised just how considered and detailed the process has been. On Second Reading I focused my remarks solely on the prison officer, Adrian Ismay, who had been murdered in my constituency and died that very day. I made the point that we cannot continue to have abstract conversations about the impact of terrorism or about the protection that we as a state need on national security grounds, because in the here and now it is a matter of protecting us today, tomorrow and for every day to come.

I pay tribute to the Security Minister, the Solicitor General and all those Members who have so collegiately engaged in making sure that what, in years gone by, was a difficult process with the Draft Communications Data Bill—the snoopers charter—has been set aside during what I believe has been a very encouraging debate and thoughtful consideration of the Bill. Credit is due to the Minister and his team.

A point was made by the shadow Home Affairs Minister in arguing for amendments 303 to 305, and I would be grateful if the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) considered this issue. We have had contributions from the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) on new clause 3 and he made the point that it would not be appropriate to retain the datasets—personal data—that engage mental or physical health issues. In the light of that, I would be keen to hear from the shadow Minister on how he believes that deals with amendments 303 to 305. If new clause 3 were passed, would those amendments be necessary?

I understand that it may not be possible for the shadow Minister to respond, although I am happy to give way. It would be useful to know whether those three amendments are likely to be pressed to a Division or whether he believes that new clause 3 deals adequately with the protections for personal health data.

Keir Starmer: I hope I made it clear that I will not press those amendments to a vote because of the new clause tabled by the Government in relation to health records, which covers the same categories of data. I am sure that that will be dealt with by the Minister when he responds.

Gavin Robinson: I am grateful to the shadow Minister for that clarification, which is very helpful.

On bulk data collection generally, the correspondence that was shared yesterday was incredibly useful. I do not recall getting correspondence between a shadow Minister and the Minister, which was shared with us all and made available in the Vote Office so quickly. It was useful and defused many of the fears and concerns that had been raised with Members of Parliament about the consequences of passing the Bill. It is important, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said, that we let that process commence and that we engage in it thoughtfully.

Having made the point that there was no Northern Ireland representation during scrutiny of the Bill in Committee, I hope there is a mechanism whereby Members, be they Democratic Unionists, Ulster Unionists, Social Democratic and Labour party Members or others, get the opportunity to engage thoughtfully and purposefully in the conversation because, as we all know in the House, the history and legacy of Northern Ireland means that these are acutely live issues for us daily.

Mr John Hayes: Just before the hon. Gentleman finishes, I am more than happy to give him the assurance that my door is open to him, his colleagues and other parties during the whole passage of the legislation.
[Mr John Hayes]

When it leaves this House it will go to the other place, but I will continue to be engaged and involved with all parties who want to contribute in the way that he has described, and I thank him for it.

Gavin Robinson: I am extremely grateful to the Minister. With that—

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Gavin Robinson: Of course.

Ian Paisley: I want to follow up on what the Minister said. He made the point that his door is always open and we appreciate that. That has always been the case, but it probably has more to do with the personal relationships that he has built over decades in this place with Unionists, and it is highly regarded on the Ulster Bench, if I can put it that way. However, there will come a time when members of this party and Members on this Bench should be considered all the time when it comes to selecting Members for Public Bill Committees, and it should not be matter on which we need a private arrangement.

Gavin Robinson: I am very grateful for that. No more interventions.

Seema Kennedy: It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson).

Many right hon. and hon. Members have spoken with great experience and expertise through the various stages of the Bill. Listening to the high quality of debate, especially yesterday, I was struck by the thought that if we conducted all our business in this Chamber in this manner, our stock and our currency as Members of Parliament might rise a little with our constituents and other members of the public.

I feel humbled to speak on this crucial piece of legislation and, specifically, against the amendments tabled by the SNP. This Bill is designed above all to keep our constituents safe from harm. Some hon. Members may know that I grew up in the Tehran of the 1970s. Though now fondly remembered for its nightclubs and miniskirts, it was a city pervaded by the fear of SAVAK, the brutal secret police whose agents infiltrated every factory, every school and every park, so I am compelled to say that I have witnessed, and my family has witnessed, mass surveillance, and this is not it.

The effectiveness of collecting bulk data is borne out by the fact that it has been used in every major counter-terrorism operation in the past decade. It has prevented 95% of cyber-attacks and disrupted 50 paedophiles. It is clear that the UK does not undertake mass surveillance, first because of the existing legal framework in which the intelligence services operate, and secondly because of the operational necessity of bulk data collection.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an extremely powerfully argument. Of course, one of the elements we constantly remind ourselves of when looking for terrorism or for these forms of abuse is that we are looking for a needle in a haystack. That is true, but without the haystack there is no possibility of even starting the search. These bulk powers are essential for building up that network in order to be able to search.

Seema Kennedy: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; he speaks with great experience.

Bulk powers are not novel. The powers already exist, but they are being given better oversight, scrutiny and transparency here. Some Opposition Members have spoken about the lack of necessity for these powers, but the necessity arises from an absolute obligation on our intelligence services to be as flexible and nimble as our enemies. Other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Joanna Cherry) referred. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) quite rightly said that if we worried about the wrong hands everywhere, we would never pass any legislation. Only the security and intelligence agencies will be given the powers set out in the Bill. Those are people who have an interest in disrupting plots and bringing suspects to justice. Very little evidence is being brought forward to suggest that they are motivated by prying into innocent citizens’ private lives or that they are using information wrongly. Millions of us, including all of us sitting here, handle sensitive data every day and are subject to rules, and to a large extent we obey that. Are we honestly saying that intelligence agents, having gone
through rigorous vetting and appraisal, are less trustworthy than our bank managers, our GPs’ receptionists and our council officials?

The safeguards in the Bill pertaining to bulk powers are manifold and robust: the Secretary of State has to authorise bulk warrants; there is a double-lock authorisation procedure; the warrants are time-limited; there is a code of practice for the security and intelligence agencies on handling the data; and of course there is the review, which right hon. and hon. Members have expanded on at great length.

In conclusion, the proposed amendments would remove from the Bill the powers that are necessary for our security services to react to the evolving dangers that face our constituents today, here and now. Our security services do that while respecting our nation’s values. For that reason, I will oppose the amendments.

Tom Elliott: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy). I fully support this legislation. If anything, I am beginning to worry that it is already being watered down. I want to make it even stronger. That is why I oppose the Scottish National party’s amendments. I heard the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) about health records; I appreciate that thought process and will support it if relevant amendments are proposed.

I have to say that I and some of my colleagues from Northern Ireland, and indeed on other Benches, have lived through the troubles and seen what terrorism has done. But we face a different type of terrorism now, and a different type of world criminality, much of which is conducted through technology—for example, via mobile phone signals and satellites and on the internet. We now have a totally different perspective. We therefore need a different mechanism, and we need it to be proactive, which is what I believe the Bill will do. It is about being much more proactive.

With regard to bulk capabilities, I do not see what the problem is. We have to have trust and faith in the people doing that surveillance and collecting that intelligence. If we do not have trust and faith in them to have the bulk capabilities, why do we have trust and faith in them to do other things? I think there is a real challenge out there for the wider public to realise what is actually going on in society. I do not realise everything that is happening, and I know that the wider public do not. That is why I have to have trust in those people who are carrying out these actions.

I am also aware that there needs to be a balance; I accept that. There needs to be a balance for the public, to avoid snooping and going into too much detail with these investigatory powers. However, that must be balanced against the wider public information that is required to deal with terrorism, criminality and the fraudsters in our society. For me, the priority in that balance is to deal with those people effectively. If that means people using those investigatory measures to look into some of my details, so be it. If I have nothing to hide, then I have nothing to fear. I have no difficulty with people looking at the details that are held on me, and that should be the same for the wider public if they have nothing to hide. There must be real opportunities here for the Government and the people who are carrying out the investigatory work to deal with those details. That is why I think the amendments we are debating overstep the mark and would reduce the effectiveness of the people dealing with those causes. My speech has been brief, but I think that it has dealt with the amendments succinctly.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, and indeed have participated in the Committees that have considered the Bill: I was a member of the Joint Committee that scrutinised the draft Bill in February, and I was also a member of the Bill Committee earlier this year. I want to put on the record my appreciation of the Labour party’s constructive and fruitful contributions. This vital legislation has come forward since its first iteration. It is an example of cross-party collaboration, so I am glad that party politics has been put aside in the name of national security. I urge all Members of the House to act in such a manner when we go through the Lobbies later today. However, judging by the words of the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), I do not think that will be the case.

I rise to speak against amendment 309 and the others relating to bulk powers. The Scottish National party Members say that those powers are disproportionate, that they have no utility and that they are therefore unlawful. The amendments propose removing most of parts 6 and 7, from clause 119 onwards, and with them the three types of bulk power afforded to our security and intelligence services—bulk interception, bulk acquisition of communications data and bulk equipment interference. Those powers allow for the collection of large volumes of data and are set out in clause 119 onwards. Further warrants are required before those data can be examined. The purposes of such examination, which are set out in the Bill, may be to pursue more information about known suspects and their associates or to look for patterns of activity that may identify new suspects. Crucially, those powers are not afforded to law enforcement services.

I have a few points to make. First, these powers are founded on a clear and robust legal basis. They are all available to the agencies in existing legislation. Bulk interception is covered in section 20 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. Bulk communications data are covered in section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. Bulk equipment interference is covered in sections 5 and 7 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994. If amendment 309 and the others were passed today, we would remove the vital powers on which our agencies rely to do their jobs and we would prevent them from acting on those powers.

Secondly, these powers are not novel or a quirk of the modern age; they have been around for decades. Back in world war one, our intelligence services tracked the worldwide network of German cables under the sea by using secret sensors. They were able to intercept telegram messages on a bulk basis, looking for patterns in communications and signals from the enemy.

When cables ended, radio surveillance was necessary to break codes during world war two. That required bulk interception of data by hand. That work was famously based at room 40 of the Admiralty. Alan Turing and his team at Bletchley Park would never have cracked Enigma were it not for the bulk interception of...
cyphers. That advanced cryptanalysis changed the course of history by enabling the allies to pre-empt enemy planning, saving countless lives and shortening the war.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. Lady agree that the difference is that, in the days of Bletchley Park, we were at war? We are not at war now. What we are concerned to do here is not to assist this country’s enemies, but to protect the privacy of the people who live here, who include her constituents.

Suella Fernandes: I am astonished by the hon. and learned Lady’s suggestion that we are not at war. Paris, Brussels, Jakarta—I do not need to go on. We are engaged in a worldwide conflict against Daesh, and it is a threat to our security every day and every night.

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the terrorists, but let us not forget those who wish to wage war on the safety of our children through paedophilia and those who wish to wage war on the safety of women through people and sex trafficking. Those important elements are at the nub of the Bill, alongside terrorism, and we should not forget them.

Suella Fernandes: I totally agree. We are waging a foreign policy and international security war, but we are also waging war on the online fraudsters and the paedophiles. We are in a constant state of threat, and it is easy to delude ourselves if we do not face that threat directly.

Big data are presented to us as a modern phenomenon, but they are actually something that has been used before and that is quite old, and they lie at the heart of our heritage on national security.

Thirdly, the utility of bulk powers is clear. In its report, the Joint Committee made that clear after taking extensive evidence. At paragraph 340, we reported:

“We are aware that the bulk powers are not a substitute for targeted intelligence, but believe that they are an additional resource. Furthermore, we believe that the security and intelligence agencies would not seek these powers if they did not believe they would be effective and that the fact that they have been operating for some time would give them the confidence to assess their merits.”

The Committee concluded:

“we are content that the safeguards proposed by the Home Office, buttressed by authorisation by Judicial Commissioners and oversight from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner will be sufficient to ensure that the bulk powers are used proportionately.”

Therefore, after taking evidence from all sides of the debate, and from all the coalitions involved in this discussion, that was the considered conclusion of the cross-party Committee.

3.15 pm

The operational case was clearly made by the Government, who put forward clear examples of the utility of bulk powers. In 2014, analysis of bulk data uncovered a previously unknown individual who was in contact with Daesh-affiliated extremists in Syria. The investigation allowed our agents to identify that he was based overseas, which meant that they would have been unlikely to identify his patterns of movement without bulk information. They saw that he had recently travelled to a European country and that he was planning an attack. That led to their being able to disrupt that attack.

In 2013, our agents used analysis of patterns of behaviour among paedophiles online. Our agents identified a UK national who had been visiting a website that sold images of child sexual exploitation. That website was hosted in a country that rarely co-operated with UK law enforcement agencies, rendering bulk powers absolutely essential in that investigation too. That individual was prosecuted and sentenced.

Lastly, bulk interception has been used to detect cyber-attacks against the UK, including large-scale thefts of data and serious fraud by cyber-criminals and hostile individuals. That was done using electronic signatures, which are similar to electronic fingerprints. Using those signatures, the agencies can scan the technical detail of internet communications for evidence of incoming attacks on the UK. They have been able to identify known forms of computer malware and new forms of cyber-attack. Cyberspace is so large, and technological change is so rapid, that bulk interception is the only way that our professionals are able to monitor them.

In conclusion, the terrorists, the paedophiles and the serious fraudsters all scheme in cyberspace these days. Technology that empowers us also, sadly, empowers them. Yes, we want world-class encryption and privacy, but we also want world-class security. We should trust the skill and restraint of those unsung heroes—the analysts, the cryptographers, the mathematicians and the codebreakers—who have used their genius to safeguard our security and who have maintained confidence and discretion in relation to the secrets they have seen. We, as elected Members, have a duty to explain their role to the public, but we must also trust their judgment, which is subject to weighty safeguards, checks and balances. These people have proved their heroism in our moments of need throughout history. Let us not further tie their hands and just hope that our enemies, who are plotting night and day to destroy our societies, do not, by chance, hit us; instead, let us empower our agencies. That is why I will be voting against the amendments.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Like yesterday, I want to make my usual declaration that I am not a lawyer. It is always dangerous to follow lawyers, particularly the excellent contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes).

The amendments are clear, and I approach them from the same point of view of economic cybercrime and the importance of bulk data which I took in my comments on Second Reading and yesterday.

Understandably, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) raised concerns. I understand the resolve of her and her party on the central point about potentially using less targeted and less intrusive means, rather than bulk data. However, the Minister rightly made the point that there is a review, and he mentioned not only the necessity of the review, but that it would look at the necessity of these powers. If we consider the bulk powers in relation to economic cybercrime, their necessity becomes increasingly clear.

Over the past few years, our economy has been transformed by advances in technology, backed by encryption, with huge changes in how business is conducted.
E-commerce is a reality not for the few but for the many. Given the parcels that arrive on my doorstep from my daughter every day, it is a huge thing that has reached everyone. More than that, there are new business opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities.

Equally, these opportunities are extended to economic cyber-criminals and terrorists. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) spoke about 95 cyber-attacks that have been identified through the use of bulk data. To choose one specific example, Apple has publicly accepted that the existing bulk data powers detected a vulnerability in its operating systems that, had it been exploited, would have affected the modification of the software being used on iPads and iPhones. It might have been used for all sorts of purposes, but one purpose could well have been the removal of data about bank accounts and other personal data. In the open world that we see at the moment, there are myriad threats, particularly in the dark web through password-protected information. Much of what happens is valid.

The existence of encryption and anonymity protocols is a huge benefit to people, but criminals and terrorists have embraced this dark world as well. The power to acquire and analyse bulk data is therefore essential. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) said that we have to trust our security services. Those who have some experience have very clearly made the case that we should look at the whole issue of the existence of data harvesting.

I believe that the bulk data powers are essential because they allow for intelligence-gathering on overseas subjects of interest. They identify the “needle in the haystack” threats that my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) talked about by identifying small displaced fragments of information, establishing the investigation of links between subjects of interest, understanding patterns of behaviour and communication methods, and looking at pieces of information that are acquired through new and varying sources. Bulk interception focuses on foreign intelligence. Criminality and terrorism is international, and it is therefore only right that we should have access to the data so that we can detect aspects of that criminality. The importance of bulk data acquisition is clear. Detailed and directed searches of bulk data communications can establish the fact that there is communications content between subjects of interest and reveal where attacks are planned. Bulk acquisition can help to direct where a warrant for more individual targeted data, such as interception, is essential and complementary. It also allows for searches of traces of activity where previously unknown suspects may be taking part in patterns of behaviour that are well known but not yet identified.

The Bill codifies and pulls together the powers that are already in place and puts in place some consistent safeguards. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said, none of these powers is unnecessary or disproportionate. They are new business opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities for the growing IT sector.

The Bill codifies and pulls together the powers that are already in place and puts in place some consistent safeguards. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said, none of these powers is unnecessary or disproportionate. They are new business opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities for the growing IT sector. The use of big data, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham discussed in an historical context, is becoming increasingly evident in the context of the internet economy in looking at patterns of behaviour to determine new product design and identify new customer opportunities for the growing IT sector.

However, the Bill also provides a framework. The legislation that already regulates much of this activity is from an era well before smartphones and the idea that a phone could do anything other than take a phone call. This Bill provides a much more modern piece of legislation, subject to clear safeguards.

While I appreciate the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott), I would always be tentative about using the argument, “If you have nothing to hide, you should have nothing to worry about.” I understand his point of view, certainly in terms of the bulk data powers, but we should always be rather careful about that being an argument for absolutely anyone being under surveillance at any time. That is not what is proposed in this Bill or these powers, given that there would need to be a warrant concerning how information is gathered.

It has been a pleasure to sit through the debate this afternoon, which has convinced me that the amendments are not justified and should be opposed. The speech given by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) was thoughtful. He adopted a responsible position, as a member of the Opposition, in teasing out some of the legitimate concerns about the Bill and making some genuine progress in getting reassurances from the Minister. It was encouraging to see that level of exchange on things that genuinely cause some concern.

3.30 pm
I did not find allusions to the idea that we will take every letter from the Post Office particularly helpful or constructive. Neither did I find helpful the suggestion that if the police kick a door in, it will no longer be secure. When the police conduct a raid, they secure the property again afterwards, so that was not a particularly good analogy. I would never cast aspersions on any area of the country in particular, but it was a novelty to get a lecture on heckling from SNP Members, who regularly give me a good old heckle during my speeches. It is quite strange to be talking without being heckled, although
perhaps that will change at any moment. [Interjection.] Absolutely; I am only too happy to have it all the time. To be fair, some legitimate points have come out of one or two interventions, and we will need to work with Scottish law enforcement authorities on many of the powers that are exercised at a UK level.

A balance has to be struck. If we accept the amendments, we will remove the proposed powers completely. We will not modify them, make them slightly more secure or include extra protection. We will remove them completely, and I do not think that that is an appropriate step to take.

Anne McLaughlin: If the review shows that the bulk powers are not necessary, as the reviews in the USA showed, would the hon. Gentleman expect the powers to be taken out of the Bill?

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Lady for that helpful and interesting intervention. First of all, I would not want to prejudge the review. In addition, if the review came back to us and said that these powers were absolutely right, and that they were vital for national security, I hope that we could look forward to the SNP’s immediate and wholehearted support. I have a funny feeling that we might not, however.

Let us not prejudge the review. As the Front-Bench spokesmen touched on in their exchange at the Dispatch Box, it is highly unlikely that if the review stated that something specific was not needed, such a measure would be proceeded with. How do we know what an independent review will come back with? If I knew, and I stood here and said so, the next accusation would be that the review was not independent because we already knew what it would come out with. That point does not support making the amendments, which remove these powers completely.

I have been satisfied by the changes that have been made throughout the process, as the Bill has come out of Committee into Report. Judicial safeguards have been strengthened, and there is now a stronger and more consistent judicial test for review of these warrants. Powers have been increased, as have the offences that apply if someone misuses data. The Government are striking the right balance between what we need in order to get hold of data that could keep our country safe, and the legitimate expectation of privacy. If data have been collected that are of no use, they can be removed and they will not be used for purposes beyond the original basis of the warrant.

Ultimately, in any unjustified use of a warrant, the Secretary of State remains answerable to this Parliament. If, for example, someone decided for some unknown reason that it would make sense to go into detail about political or trade union affiliation, they would be answerable to this House, and a Secretary of State would be most unlikely to survive that.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Secretary of State would be answerable to the House only if such activity came to light? It might not come to light.

Kevin Foster: I take on board the point that the hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) mentioned, the Intelligence and Security Committee would almost certainly oversee what was happening. As was touched on with the Minister, although the Committee is not involved in live intelligence work, it carries out reviews and, as discussed in relation to one of the probing amendments tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend, there is an understanding of an exchange of information. I think it is highly likely that such activity would come to light eventually. Clearly, a Secretary of State who had sanctioned that would know that, bluntly, their job was over.

The powers in the Bill are proportionate to their aims. They have appropriate safeguards, and more work will be done following the review. It is wrong to prejudge an independent review by constantly asking, “What happens if they say no?” To put it the other way around, what happens if they say yes? I do not think that the amendments are right at this stage. It is appropriate to retain these parts of the Bill, and that is certainly what I will vote to do.

Lucy Frazer: I am honoured to take part in this debate, as I was to serve on the Bill Committee. I waited with much anticipation to hear my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) quote Rudyard Kipling, but I am not sure that the quote was forthcoming. At first, I thought he might say, as Kipling did:

“A woman’s guess is much more accurate than a man’s certainty.”

On reflection, I thought perhaps he would say that, “words are...the most powerful drug used by mankind.”

That would have been an apt quote in the context of the Bill, because communication can be revolutionary. We saw that with printing. Printing established the first mass medium for transmitting information, and some historians said that it played a role in the unrest that characterised the devastating thirty years war. They said that because although the doctrines set out by Luther in the 16th century were formulated two centuries earlier, they did not spread until the printing revolution.

We are now in the midst of a technological revolution. It has never been easier for terrorists to spread hatred and devastation across continents and recruit others to do so. Our security services need the tools to keep up with the technological developments.

I will deal with two matters: first, the background to the bulk powers and the reasons we need them; and secondly, the safeguards that exist in the Bill in respect of bulk powers.

The threats that we face are real. MI5 has said that the number of terrorism offences has risen by 35% since 2010. David Anderson, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, has said that at the time of his report, MI5 explained to him that it had “disrupted two...plots by lone actors in the past nine months”. It explained to him that, “identifying such individuals is increasingly challenging, exacerbated by the current limitations in their technical capabilities”.

David Anderson was saying the same thing as the director of Europol, who in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee in January 2015 said:

“Given that a majority of those communications run by these networks are moving online, there is a security gap there.”

He thinks that that is “one of the most pressing problems that police face across Europe.”
The bulk powers are an important part of our toolkit. The Home Office has said that the bulk capability has “played a significant part in every major counter terrorism investigation of the last decade, including in each of the seven terrorist attack plots disrupted since…2014.”

There are safeguards in the Bill. I have counted at least seven in relation to bulk interception. Bulk interception relates only to overseas communications; it needs to be activated in the interests of national security, in cases of serious crime or in the interests of the economic wellbeing of the UK; a warrant can be issued only by the Secretary of State; it can be issued only if the action is necessary and proportionate; the action of the Secretary of State is reviewed by a judge; there are restrictions on copying, disseminating and retaining the material that is collected; and there is a panoply of offences for cases of misuse.

During the Bill’s passage we have heard about additional safeguards. The Home Secretary has committed to providing a further operational case for bulk powers. We saw yesterday, with the passing of new clause 5, that the decision on whether a bulk power is allowed will be subject to the additional safeguard of a test of whether the result could be achieved by less intrusive means.

Like printing, the internet is improving our ability to communicate. We need to give our security forces the means to keep pace with these developments, because a country that cannot protect its citizens provides no freedom at all.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I will speak to the amendments that stand in my name, amendments 153 to 160, which would remove clauses throughout the Bill that allow for the modification of bulk warrants. I will not press them because, like the rest of my amendments, they are probing amendments designed to tease out information from Ministers and ensure that there is further debate in the other place.

As I said in yesterday’s debate, I am not a lawyer, but in my humble opinion, major modifications of a warrant have the potential to completely change the key components of that warrant. I would like to understand at what point it becomes reasonable for a new warrant to be drafted.

I listened carefully to the Minister for Security yesterday and he said clearly to the House:

“I entirely accept the point that it would be completely unacceptable to have a robust system for issuing warrants and a less robust system for modifying them. Warranting has to be consistent throughout, and there can be no back-door way of weakening the system for modifying them. Warranting has to be consistent.”—[Official Report, 6 June 2016, Vol. 611, c. 982.]

That is very reassuring and greatly welcome. I look forward to seeing how the robust system for modifications will be introduced as the Bill progresses. I accept that the Government have tabled a number of amendments to try to help in this area and, as I said, I will not press any of my amendments to a vote.

On a final point, I am not a particular fan of the bulk powers in the Bill. I have listened with great interest to the debates today and yesterday, and to the points that the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee has made about how bulk powers are used at the moment. In my view, surveillance should be targeted and the subjects of that activity clearly identified. That may well be naive in some senses, and I appreciate that there may be some areas where we require bulk powers, to identify the haystack, as has been said. But the carte blanche on bulk powers should not be the first resort; it should always be the last resort.

There has been a lot of talk about postbags, and whether the country is at war and so on. The debate in general has been very conciliatory and Members on all sides have tried to get a Bill that, at the start of this Parliament, was very difficult to a place where most people can stomach most elements of it. I am still not in a position where I feel I can support it, but, realistically, a lot of people now feel it has been greatly improved and there is a lot of trust in the Minister for Security and the Solicitor General because of their work in listening to people and accepting amendments.

I am also very grateful that the Home Secretary has tried to alleviate concerns and agreed to an independent review of the bulk powers in the Bill, led by David Anderson, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. I look forward to his recommendations and what comes forward from them.

Tom Tugendhat: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker, particularly as you are appropriately attired in something that may indeed be collecting bulk data.

We are talking about amendments that would fundamentally undermine the very Bill that we have come to support, and would change the very tone of the debate. I speak very much in support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has gone through various aspects in quite significant detail, explaining to us time and again why the controls over the collection of bulk data are entirely appropriate. I also speak in support of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who has been through the Bill with the eye he has as a former Director of Public Prosecutions, seeing both the loopholes and the potential abuses, and covering them off.

I also speak in support of the Solicitor General, who has done exactly the same for us, and the Minister for Security, who has brought forward a Bill that answers the very questions that this state must always ask itself: how we guard our citizens and keep them safe while also keeping them free. This Bill does exactly that.

My first encounter with bulk data collection came in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, where the Defence School of Languages was sited. I was going through vast amounts of Arabic text. Although I was doing so in a most junior and rather ineffective manner, I learned how it was done properly. I was only a student; the masters have learned from that great Scots mathematician John Napier, who in the 17th century developed the logarithm, and whose lesson to us all, through mathematics, is how to build the pattern, understand the shape and break the code. That is why bulk data matter. We cannot build patterns without data and without volume, and we cannot make shapes without substance.

The bulk data are not themselves intelligence. As an intelligence officer in Her Majesty’s armed forces, I was very proud to work on intelligence; it is not the raw product. It is what is analysed, what is useful and what decisions can be made from. That is not the bulk or the mass—the intelligence is the product. I am sorry to say...
that there appears to be a slight misunderstanding as to what is the intrusion. The intrusion is surely not the clay from which the form is made, but only the detail on the individual that could be used against them. The Bill does not allow that without the tightest of safeguards, both from former judges and from serving Ministers.

Joanna Cherry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that once the bulk data are collected by warrant there is an intermediate stage in which they are analysed in the way that he describes, but there is absolutely no legal regulation of how that analysis is carried out? That is our objection. How can I make it any clearer?

3.45 pm

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. and learned Lady speaks with her usual eloquence, but I am afraid I am going to refer her to schedule 4, part 1, which is a table containing a list of authorities and officers. The people who analyse are listed there. They are inspectors and superintendents of the Prison Service; lieutenant commanders and commanders of the Royal Navy; majors and, as in my case, very junior lieutenant colonels of the Army; squadron leaders and wing commanders; general duties officers of grade 4 and above; and Secret Intelligence Service officers.

There is a list—a catalogue—in schedule 4 of people in our country, men and women across these islands, whom we have trusted with the intelligence procurement for our nation to keep us safe. It is they who will be doing the analysis, under supervision. It is only when they have got something that is worth taking that they will be allowed to use it. That is the provision we are talking about and the type of supervision. People will not be allowed simply to collect and analyse. They will be allowed to collect and analyse only under warrant. That is absolutely essential.

Joanna Cherry: I repeat again: does the hon. Gentleman accept that no warrant is required to carry out the initial computer analysis? Does he understand that that is what those of us who were on the Bill Committee and who have worked on the Bill for months uncovered? Unlike some of his colleagues, who shout from a sedentary position that we do not understand this, we do understand it—we have been analysing it for months. Does he understand that there is no regulation by warrant of the analysis carried out by the individuals that he describes? That is the nub of the matter.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. and learned Lady is, I am afraid, picking on a hole in the Bill that is simply not there. [Interruption.] It is not there because the collection of bulk data is entirely categorised by the Bill. The Bill supervises entirely the ability to collect bulk data. The analysis is then done by trusted officers of the state. To accuse them of anything other than the highest forms of integrity would be an extraordinary statement to make in the House.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Tugendhat: No, I am afraid I will not. I have given way enough.

It would be baffling to look at that list and accuse people of such integrity of having anything other than the best intentions. The important thing, however, is that we not only trust them, but supervise them. We trust but verify, as the old diplomatic phrase goes. The verification comes from the commissioners, which were listed yesterday, with their explanations, which the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) was talking about yesterday. The supervision also comes from the Minister, and ultimately and eventually from the House.

I am therefore reassured that the Bill is not a snooper charter or a grubby attempt to procure the information of the private citizens of these islands. On the contrary, this is an extremely effective Bill. It has been through months of discussion, and hours of detailed and deliberate interrogation. It has satisfied the extremely demanding standards of the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and the exemplary work of the former Director of Public Prosecutions, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras, whom I am pleased to see on the Opposition Front Bench.

The Bill comes to the House as a nigh-on complete work. Even so, the Government have considered and accepted amendments and further changes. We have not only a final but a polished copy of a Bill that is designed to do exactly what this country vitally needs. It does exactly what the Government are here to do. It keeps the people of these islands safe, whatever their background, origins, occupation or duties.

Fundamentally, it also protects the freedoms that we enjoy. Those freedoms are not, as the Americans put it, free. They are fought for every day, by the people on the list in schedule 4 that I have identified—our armed forces and our intelligence services. That is why I am so proud to be here today to speak up for the intelligence services who have asked for those powers; for the armed forces who require them; for the police who use them; and most importantly for the Government and, in this case, the official Opposition, who have so carefully crafted a legal document that will hold water today and for long into the future.

Mr John Hayes: What an interesting and important debate we have had. This group of amendments addresses bulk powers. It is right that we should consider these matters in considerable detail because, as has been said by Members from across the Chamber, they are matters of profound importance and public concern. The public want to be assured that the safeguards we put in place for these vital powers are right, adequate, properly considered and properly reviewed. Many hon. Members have contributed to the debate. Tellingly, the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) and the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) spoke with personal experience of terror.

We all know the scale and nature of the threat we face, but though we know it, that does not mean that it should not be explored again and again in this House. For to explore it is to realise what we need to counter it. That is precisely what was done in speeches by hon. Members from all sides of the House. The threat is real, imminent and unprecedented in character. Our opponents are increasingly adaptable and flexible. Although their aims may be barbarically archaic, their means are up to date. They are entirely modern. They are prepared to
use every device and every kind of communications medium to go about their wicked work, which is precisely why the Bill does what it does, why bulk powers matter and why the amendments that stand in the name of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), which I will deal with in a moment, are not ones I can accept—that will not come as any surprise to her, by the way.

An argument has been made that the operational case for bulk powers needs to be fleshed out more fully. Hon. Members will know that the Government did just that when they published the operational case for bulk. That informed the Committee consideration, which has been referred to several times during our short debate today, and has been a helpful way of establishing why bulk powers really count.

We are dealing with powers that have played a significant part in every major counter-terrorism investigation over the past decade, including in each of the seven terror attacks disrupted since November 2014. These powers enabled over 90% of the UK’s targeted military operations during the campaign in south Afghanistan, and they have been essential to identifying 95% of the cyberattacks on people and businesses in the UK discovered by the security and intelligence agencies over the past six months. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) is right to say that this is about real life operational necessity. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) on the role she played both on the Joint Committee and the Bill Committee. The threat she described so vividly is, as she said, worldwide and of a kind that would allow us to do nothing other than take the necessary steps to counter it in the defence of our freedoms.

I was perhaps a little unkind to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) who spoke for the Scottish National party, although I make no apology for repriming what I said. Frankly, her contribution missed the point. The point is not whether the powers are necessary; it is whether we can put in place sufficient safeguards to ensure that they are used only when, how and where they should be. That was the point made by the Chair of the ISC and by the ISC when it had the chance to consider these matters. As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), generously said, the review is to be completed in exactly the form that emerged as a result of the discussions between the Opposition and the Government—an illustration of the House behaving at its best. The review, chaired by David Anderson, will be able to look not just at utility—the point I made to the Chair of the ISC—but at necessity, and it will be independent.

Anne McLaughlin: So the Minister is saying that all these counter-terrorism activities were helped by bulk powers, but now we are going to have a review to see whether that is true. As I said, there were two independent reviews in the US. The NSA argued—much as he is arguing now—that all 54 counter-terrorism events had relied on bulk powers, but both independent committees said, “Absolutely not. Not at all. There were other techniques.” What will he do if this review finds the same as the two reviews in the US? Will he then remove the bulk powers from the Bill?

Mr Hayes: It is a bit rich to say, “We want a review and we want the Government to listen and agree”, and then, when they do listen and agree, to say, “You haven’t agreed enough or soon enough.” I accept that the review should be entirely independent—I made that clear in my letter to the shadow Minister. I accept that it will be for David Anderson to decide exactly how he goes about his work. I have further accepted today that he should look at international comparisons, which I think is perfectly reasonable. It will be for David Anderson to decide whether he does that: if he wants to, that will certainly be within his scope. This will be an independent review, with as much information as possible made public, and it will be able to range, in the way the hon. Lady has described, across these powers.

Mr Grieve: I have no doubt at all that the review done by David Anderson will be valuable and I hope it will also inform the House about how bulk powers work. In that context—and because I have picked this up—there has been a suggestion that the examination of material under a bulk warrant is somehow a free-for-all that is course one of them. Secondly, the Government, in wanting to get the Bill right, are prepared to listen and learn, as Governments should be. I have been in the House for a number of years, and there has not been a single piece of legislation that has not been better for having received proper scrutiny, that has not altered during its passage and that has not been a better Act as a result of consideration by the House. We should be proud of that. I was simply saying that to focus on some of the detail around safeguards seems to be absolutely right, whereas the debate about the necessity of the powers has already been had. I think there is a general acceptance that the powers are necessary.

Joanna Cherry: No, it has not.

Mr Hayes: I do not know if the hon. and learned Lady was listening, but I read out three things: 90% of operations in Afghanistan, 95% of cyber-attacks, every single major counter-terrorism investigation over the last decade. I cannot be plainer about the necessity, but because the Government are so determined to ensure adequate safeguards, we have agreed to a further review. As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), generously said, the review is to be completed in exactly the form that emerged as a result of the discussions between the Opposition and the Government—an illustration of the House behaving at its best. The review, chaired by David Anderson, will be able to look not just at utility—the point I made to the Chair of the ISC—but at necessity, and it will be independent.

Anne McLaughlin: So the Minister is saying that all these counter-terrorism activities were helped by bulk powers, but now we are going to have a review to see whether that is true. As I said, there were two independent reviews in the US. The NSA argued—much as he is arguing now—that all 54 counter-terrorism events had relied on bulk powers, but both independent committees said, “Absolutely not. Not at all. There were other techniques.” What will he do if this review finds the same as the two reviews in the US? Will he then remove the bulk powers from the Bill?

Mr Hayes: It is a bit rich to say, “We want a review and we want the Government to listen and agree”, and then, when they do listen and agree, to say, “You haven’t agreed enough or soon enough.” I accept that the review should be entirely independent—I made that clear in my letter to the shadow Minister. I accept that it will be for David Anderson to decide exactly how he goes about his work. I have further accepted today that he should look at international comparisons, which I think is perfectly reasonable. It will be for David Anderson to decide whether he does that: if he wants to, that will certainly be within his scope. This will be an independent review, with as much information as possible made public, and it will be able to range, in the way the hon. Lady has described, across these powers.

4 pm

Mr Grieve: I have no doubt at all that the review done by David Anderson will be valuable and I hope it will also inform the House about how bulk powers work. In that context—and because I have picked this up—there has been a suggestion that the examination of material under a bulk warrant is somehow a free-for-all that is
left to the discretion of the official, and it plainly is not. It is subject to the operational purposes in clause 125, and if they are departed from, the official concerned would be acting unlawfully.

Mr Hayes: My hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) made the point, which my right hon. and learned Friend has now amplified, that these powers are subject to a range of safeguards. Let me be clear: the analysis of data intercepted in bulk is subject to automated filtering to ensure that data not of intelligence value are automatically discarded. This is a safeguard set out in the code of practice. There are rigorous safeguards in the Bill for examination, and the suggestion that there are not is, frankly, simply wrong and based on a confusion between the collection of material, as my right hon. and learned Friend has implied, and its examination.

Lucy Frazer rose—

Mr Hayes: It is right, therefore, that we emphasise—as my hon. and learned Friend, who is about to intervene on me, did—that the safeguards are clearly set out both on the face of the Bill and in the supporting material; and, indeed, that they have evolved as a result of the scrutiny we enjoyed in Committee and through the pre-legislative scrutiny.

Lucy Frazer: My right hon. Friend is responding to a point, which the SNP has made on a number of occasions, about the US. Does he, like me, remember when the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) put that point to David Anderson on the very first day of our Committee? He said:

“It is difficult, of course, to read across from section 215 in the US to what we have here, which is rather different...I cannot speak for the US...different power, different circumstances”. [Official Report, Investigatory Powers Public Bill Committee, 24 March 2016; c. 8, Q7.]

Mr Hayes: My hon. and learned Friend, with an assiduity that is matched by her intellect, has identified the fundamental flaw in the argument of our critics, which is that those who have looked at these matters most carefully have concluded both that these powers are necessary and that the safeguards we are introducing in this Bill—and by the way, these powers have existed for a long time; this is the first chance we have had to debate the legislative safeguards—are not only numerous but rigorous, in the way she has described. That was precisely the point that David Anderson made.

However, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras, in Committee and since, has said we need to do more. There are two ways for Governments to handle Oppositions, just as there are two ways for Oppositions to handle Governments: we can either do it antagonistically or we can do it co-operatively. The way I go about my work is inspired perhaps by Samuel Johnson—the great Dr Johnson, the man who said, by the way, that the devil was the first Whig, and I agree with him on that. Samuel Johnson said:

“Life cannot subsist in society but by reciprocal concessions.”

This Bill has been a model of that kind of reciprocal approach. And by the way, these concessions have not been climbdowns. They have not been given reluctantly, they have not been turnarounds and they have not been in any sense wrung out of the Government. Nevertheless, they have been given on the basis of the proper pressure exerted by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras and other hon. Members for the Government to do more. Good government is about listening and learning, as I said yesterday, and that is precisely what we have done in respect of this review. I look forward to it and I anticipate its outcome with the same kind of interest that I know the hon. and learned Gentleman and others share.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to the Minister, and I feel that I should put on record my gratitude to him for the way in which he has dealt with the demands that I have made on behalf of the Labour party. They have been considerable demands.

Mr Hayes: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his support. I know that the Government Whips will take careful note of it. [Laughter.]

We have listened to the call for independent validation. David Anderson QC will undertake the review, so I will say no more about that.

We have debated at some length, today and previously, the amendments tabled by the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), which contain a number of proposals. I am grateful for his contribution to the debate, generally and, more specifically, today. I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend has explained the purposes behind new clause 3 and amendment 24. The Government certainly accept in principle the argument that we should provide further restrictions on the use of bulk personal dataset warrants. We also accept much of the detail contained in the ISC’s draft clause, including reference to the need for restrictions relating to sensitive personal data.

I have dealt with the issue about which—as my right hon. and learned Friend knows—we are least happy, namely the timescale within which these matters are reported to the ISC. I think that more could be done, and I think that a protocol of the kind that my right hon. and learned Friend described in his brief contribution might provide a way of doing it. We will take that suggestion away and do further work, in the spirit to which he referred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who is no longer present but who is an old friend of mine, raised issues relating to modifications. I want to make it absolutely clear that in all modifications, a warrant will require the same double lock. Yesterday and in Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras argued that a double lock that applies when a warrant is originally sought must apply to modifications. I entirely accept that point. My hon. Friend made it again today, and I can assure him that the double lock will apply to bulk powers as well.

The hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras raised the issue of medical records. It is right for particularly sensitive data to be handled in a particularly sensitive way, and I am pleased that he noted the Government amendment at which, I think, deals with that. We will consider the technical points that he raised about social care and mental health, but I am confident that we can find a way forward.
I do not want to delay the House unduly—as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not my habit, and we have other important matters to consider—but I do want to say that one of my regrets is that we have not had more Proust today, or during our consideration of the Bill more generally. Marcel Proust said:

“The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes”.

The consideration of this Bill has been extensive. Three reports before its publication in draft, three parliamentary Committees once the draft Bill was published, and a very thorough examination in Committee following Second Reading have allowed us to have “new eyes”, and to see more clearly both the need to secure our people and counter the very real threats that we face, and the need to deal with the checks and balances which ensure that the powers we give those who are missioned to keep us safe are used proportionately, and only where necessary. Achieving that balance—a balance that lies at the heart of the Bill—has required the House to take a balanced approach. As I said a few moments ago, Parliament is at its best when it puts national interest beyond party interest, and this is common ground for the common good.

Anne McLaughlin: I have to say that the Minister’s tone does not really reflect that which some of his hon. Friends used when addressing this debate. I have felt completely patronised at times today, because people on the Government Benches have been shouting, “You don’t understand this Bill.” Just because we take a different view or come at things from a different angle does not mean that we do not understand. The right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) shakes his head, but it was offensive to have to listen to that nonsense, particularly when it was directed at my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who is a learned QC and certainly does know what she is talking about.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anne McLaughlin: No, I will not take any interventions—[Interruption.] Okay, patronise away.

Sir Alan Duncan: May I just say—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. We will listen to Sir Alan Duncan.

Sir Alan Duncan: May I just say to the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends that there was no intention whatsoever of patronising, if she wants to take it in that vein, may I apologise and do so graciously? Our view is simply that bulk interception and bulk powers involve a poor use of the word “bulk”. The intrusion on the individual compared with the collective gathering of information is misunderstood in many cases. That is our point, and I hope that she can accept it in that spirit.

Anne McLaughlin: I most certainly will accept the right hon. Gentleman’s apology, but I reiterate that just because we come at this from a different angle does not mean that we are wrong. These are our opinions, and Government Members have their opinions.

I also want to mention the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who was utterly offensive in his suggestion that we in the SNP quarter—[Interruption.] And the Lib Dem quarter, and everybody else on this side. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we do not care about terrorism or about people affected by paedophilia. Of course we care! He suggests that we do not just because we do not believe that this is the way to go about tackling those things, but we are not the only ones who believe that. It was really, truly offensive and below the belt, and I think the hon. Gentleman should apologise. I will accept it in writing if he is not going to do it here.

Simon Hoare: You’ll have a long wait.

Anne McLaughlin: I’ll wait a long time, will I? Okay.

To sum up, we will be pressing the amendment because we have heard nothing today that reassures us. The legislative process in the House of Commons is coming to an end, but how can we be expected to vote when there is to be a review? On that note, I appeal to dear and learned friends in the Labour party to think again about trusting this lot with the review, because not one Government Member—I know that the Labour party has not done this either—will say what they will do if the independent review shows that the bulk powers are unnecessary, as has been shown in the United States—[Interruption.] No, I gave the Minister an opportunity, but instead of answering the question, he took an intervention from the Government Benches. He has not said what the Government will do if the review shows what he is not expecting it to show.

Question put, That the amendment be made.


Division No. 10] [4.13 pm

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmaa
Arnold, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Boswell, Philip
Brake, rh Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Docherthy-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
McNally, John
McCaig, Calum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McCarron, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Patterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Sheppard, Tommy
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Stephens, Chris
Thewlis, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

_Thomson and Marion Fellows_

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benny, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, Mr James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chi, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Therese
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Mims
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evens, Graham
Evens, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Mark
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazier, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garrett, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hall, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hollins, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Mr Bernard
Jenyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kaczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Paul
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, David
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sherryl
Murnison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Nokes, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Premtis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Ronsindell, Andrew
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tohurat, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wishart, Pete
Clause 164

MODIFICATION OF WARRANTS

Amendments made: 127, page 127, line 16, after “modification”, insert “adding or varying any operational purpose”.

This amendment restricts the application of clause 164(4) to cases where a major modification of a bulk equipment interference warrant adds or varies an operational purpose. It is consequential on amendment 128.

Amendment 128, page 127, line 20, at end insert—

“(1) A major modification adding or varying any description of conduct—

(a) must be made by the Secretary of State, and
(b) may be made only if the Secretary of State considers—

(i) that the modification is necessary on any of the grounds on which the Secretary of State considers the warrant to be necessary (see section 156(1)(b)), and

(ii) that the conduct authorised by the modification is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by that conduct.”—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment provides for both a necessity test and a proportionality test to apply in relation to a decision whether to make a major modification of a bulk equipment interference warrant by adding or varying a description of conduct.

Clause 170

SAFEGUARDS RELATING TO EXAMINATION OF MATERIAL ETC.

Amendment made: 129, page 133, line 25, leave out “section” and insert “Part”—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 130.

Clause 173

CHAPTER 3: INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: 130, page 134, line 32, at end insert—

“‘protected material’, in relation to a bulk equipment interference warrant, has the meaning given by section 170(9);”—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment provides for the definition of “protected material” given by clause 170 to apply for the purposes of the Part.

New Clause 14

HEALTH RECORDS

“(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply if—

(a) an application is made by or on behalf of the head of an intelligence service for the issue of a specific BPD warrant,

(b) the purpose, or one of the purposes, of the warrant, is to authorise the retention, or the retention and examination, of health records.

(2) The application must contain a statement that the purpose, or one of the purposes, of the warrant is to authorise the retention, or the retention and examination, of health records.

(3) The Secretary of State may issue the warrant only if the Secretary of State considers that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it necessary to authorise the retention, or the retention and examination, of health records.

(4) Subsection (5) applies if—

(a) an application is made by or on behalf of the head of an intelligence service for a specific BPD warrant,

(b) the head of the intelligence service considers that the bulk personal dataset includes, or is likely to include, health records, and

(c) subsections (2) and (3) do not apply.
(5) The application must contain either—
(a) a statement that the head of the intelligence service considers that the bulk personal dataset includes health records, or
(b) a statement that the head of the intelligence service considers that it is likely that the bulk personal dataset includes health records and an assessment of how likely this is.

(6) In this section, “health record” means a record, or a copy of a record, which—
(a) consists of information relating to the physical or mental health or condition of an individual,
(b) was made by or on behalf of a health professional in connection with the care of that individual, and
(c) was obtained by the intelligence service from a health professional or a health service body or from a person acting on behalf of a health professional or a health service body in relation to the record or the copy.

(7) In subsection (6)—
“health professional” has the same meaning as in the Data Protection Act 1998 (see section 69 of that Act);
“health service body” has the meaning given by section 69(3) of that Act.”—(Mr John Hayes.)

This amendment requires an intelligence service to take special steps when making an application for a specific BPD warrant relating to health records. In addition, where the purpose, or one of the purposes, of the warrant would be to authorise the retention, or the retention and examination, of health records, the Secretary of State may issue the warrant only if he or she considers that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 18

PERSONS WHO MAY APPLY FOR ISSUE OF WARRANT—
“Each of the following organisations may appoint a designated senior officer responsible for applying for a communications data retention warrant—
(a) a police force maintained under section 2 of the Police Act 1996,
(b) the Metropolitan Police Force,
(c) the City of London Police Force,
(d) the Police Service of Scotland,
(e) the Police Service of Northern Ireland,
(f) the British Transport Police Force,
(g) the Ministry of Defence Police,
(h) the Royal Navy Police,
(i) the Royal Military Police,
(j) the Royal Air Force Police,
(k) the Security Service,
(l) the Secret Intelligence Service,
(m) GCHQ, and
(n) the National Crime Agency.”—(Stephen McPartland.)

This new Clause will restrict access to communications data to the Intelligence Agencies and law enforcement only.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Stephen McPartland: I beg to move. That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:
New clause 19—Local authority authorisations: notification of chief executive—

“Where, on an application under sections 66 to 69, the relevant judicial authority approves an authorisation (including a Judicial Commissioner approval by order under section 68), the designated senior officer must notify the chief executive of the local authority, or subscribing authority, of that approval, or those approvals as the case may be, prior to that authorisation taking effect.”

Amendment 320, in clause 53, page 42, leave out lines 14 and 15 and insert
“Subsection (2) applies if a designated senior officer of a relevant public authority considers—
“(a) that a Judicial Commissioner may, on an application made by a designated senior officer at a relevant public authority, issue a communications data access authorisation where the Judicial Commissioner considers—”.

See amendment 327.
Amendment 321, page 42, line 21, leave out paragraph (b)(ii).

See amendment 327.
Amendment 322, page 42, line 26, leave out “The designated senior officer may authorise any officer of the authority” and insert “A communications data access authorisation may authorise the designated senior officer or a telecommunications operator to”. See amendment 327.
Amendment 323, page 42, line 39, leave out “authorised officer” and insert “designated senior officer”. See amendment 327.
Amendment 326, page 43, line 39, after “detecting”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 327, page 43, line 39, after second “preventing”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 324, page 43, line 41, leave out paragraphs (c) to (e).
See amendment 327.
Amendment 328, page 44, line 1, after first “or”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 329, page 44, line 1, after “any”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 330, page 44, line 2, after “any”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 331, page 44, line 2, after third “or”, insert “serious”.

This amendment inserts a higher threshold for accessing communications data.
Amendment 332, page 44, line 13, at end insert—
“(7A) An authorisation may be considered necessary as mentioned in subsection (7)(b) or (7)(f) only where there is a reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been or is likely to be committed.”

See amendment 327.
Amendment 333, page 44, line 18, at end insert—
“(9) Serious crime in subsection (7)(b) above means—
(a) any crime where a person guilty of the offence is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of imprisonment of [a maximum of] 6 months or more; or...
functions of public bodies. It also removes the use of the filter to support the general oversight functions of the Investigatory Powers Commission.

Amendment 162, page 47, line 19, leave out “arrangements” and insert “regulations”.

See amendment 163.

Amendment 163, page 47, line 27, leave out “arrangements” and insert “regulations”.

These amendments would make the filtering arrangements to be governed by a statutory instrument subject to all normal transparency and processes of judicial review.

Amendment 169, page 47, line 32, leave out “must consult” and insert “shall obtain the prior approval of”.

This amendment creates a duty to obtain prior approval from the Commissioner for the filtering system. By asking the Commissioner for prior approval of any plans, the assessment of necessity and proportionality would be much more likely to be robust. Any abuse and expansion of scope and abilities of data mining would be more likely to be restrained. The Commissioner would also have the ability to ensure that requirements they might seek are properly considered at the start.

Amendment 170, page 47, line 35, at end insert—

“(5A) Nothing in this section shall be used in respect of information which can be reasonably obtained by any other means under this Act.”

(5B) Nothing in this section shall be used for the bulk collection of information.

(5C) The powers under this section shall only be used by the Secretary of State when no other power under this Act or other statute can achieve the same objective.”

This amendment restricts the use of the filter to those purposes the government has put forward. Given the lack of clarity on what the filtering arrangements are and whether they will become the normal way to acquire communications data of any type, this amendment seeks to restrain the power so that it is used as narrowly as possible.

Amendment 171, page 47, line 35, at end insert—

“(5A) The Secretary of State shall at least once a year make a report to Parliament detailing the filtering arrangements made under this clause.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to make an annual report to Parliament explaining what the filtering arrangements consisted of and were being used for. This would improve public scrutiny and reinforce the provision in clause 58(4).

Amendment 5, page 47, line 36, leave out clause 59.

Amendment 6, page 48, line 16, leave out clause 60.

Amendment 172, in clause 60, page 49, line 29, at end insert—

“(10) All filtering arrangements under this Act shall not endure more than six months.

(11) The Secretary of State shall not use any power under Part 3 of this Act unless such power cannot be exercised under any other statutory provision.

(12) The Secretary of State shall ensure that the filtering arrangements are always used exceptionally and with regard to privacy rights.

(13) The Secretary of State shall from time to time consider the proportionality and necessity of all filtering arrangements in place.

(14) The Secretary of State shall terminate any filtering arrangements which are not proportionate or necessary.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to make an annual report to Parliament explaining what the filtering arrangements consisted of and were being used for. This would improve public scrutiny and reinforce the provision in clause 58(4).
Amendment 143, in clause 68, page 54, line 14, leave out “not”.
Amendment 144, page 54, line 15, at end insert “unless an application without such notice is required in order to avoid prejudice to the investigation.”
Amendment 145, page 54, line 15, at end insert—
“( ) Schedule 1 to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 shall apply to an application for an order under this section as if it were an application for an order under that Schedule.”
This amendment seeks to ensure that the same level of protection is provided for journalists’ sources under the Bill as is currently provided in PACE.

Government amendments 51 and 52.

Amendment 300, in clause 73, page 58, line 33, at end insert—
“(4) In proceedings against any person for an offence under this section in respect of any disclosure, it is a defence for the person to show that the disclosure was in the public interest.”
An amendment to introduce a public interest defence for disclosures regarding the obtaining of communications data.

Amendment 207, page 205, line 6, leave out schedule 4.

New clause 26—Retention of communications data—

“An operator who has not been designated as the operator of an electronic communications network or service according to section 34 of the Communications Act 2003; or whose service has fewer than 50,000 subscribers, shall not be required to comply with a retention notice under Clause 78.”
The new clause excludes the providers of rural or community access communications services and small service providers from the obligation to collect and retain data, in accordance with policy statements made by the Home Office.

Amendment 328, in clause 78, page 61, line 5, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 329, page 61, line 5, after second “‘notice’”)” insert “on an application made by a designated senior officer at a relevant public authority”.

See amendment 350.

Amendment 330, page 61, line 7, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 331, page 61, line 9, at end insert—
“(1A) A notice may be considered necessary only where there is a reasonable suspicion that a serious criminal offence has been or is likely to be committed in relation to the grounds falling within section 53(7).”

See amendment 350.

Amendment 332, page 61, line 38, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 3, page 62, line 22, leave out “therefore includes, in particular” and insert “does not include”.

Amendment 294, page 62, line 23, at end insert—
“(10) A retention notice must not require any data which is, or can only be obtained by processing, an internet connection record to be retained for any purpose other than the purpose specified in section 54(4).”

An amendment to restrict the retention of internet connection records.

Amendment 333, in clause 79, page 62, line 26, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 334, page 62, line 35, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 336, in clause 80, page 62, line 40, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner” on both occasions.

See amendment 350.

Amendment 337, page 63, line 7, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 338, page 63, line 8, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 339, page 63, line 9, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 340, page 63, line 10, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 341, page 63, line 19, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “designated senior officer at a relevant public authority”.

See amendment 350.

Amendment 342, page 63, line 24, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “designated senior officer at a relevant public authority”.

See amendment 350.

Amendment 343, page 63, line 25, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 470, page 63, line 31, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 471, page 63, line 33, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 344, in clause 83, page 64, line 13, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 345, page 64, line 14, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 468, page 64, line 15, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 346, page 64, line 23, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 347, page 64, line 28, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 348, page 64, line 38, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

See amendment 350.

Amendment 350, page 64, line 40, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “Judicial Commissioner”,

These amendments provide that judicial authorisation is required for retention of communications data. These amendments would require that there is reasonable suspicion of serious crime for a warrant authorising retention of communications data.
Amendment 301, in clause 84, page 65, line 26, at end insert—

“(4A) Subsections (2) and (3) do not apply to a disclosure made in the public interest.”

An amendment to introduce a public interest defence for disclosures regarding the retention of communications data.

New clause 15—Review of operational case for bulk powers—

“(1) The Secretary of State must appoint an independent reviewer of terrorism legislation to review the operational case for the bulk powers contained in Parts 6 and 7 of this Act.

(2) The independent reviewer must, in particular, consider the justification for the powers in the Act relating to—

(a) bulk interception,

(b) bulk acquisition,

(c) bulk equipment interference, and

(d) bulk personal datasets.

(3) The independent reviewer must, so far as reasonably practicable, complete the review before 30 November 2016.

(4) The independent reviewer must send to the Prime Minister a report on the outcome of the review as soon as reasonably practicable after completing the review.

(5) On receiving a report under subsection (4), the Prime Minister must lay a copy of it before Parliament together with a statement as to whether any matter has been excluded from that copy under subsection (6).

(6) If it appears to the Prime Minister that the publication of any matter in a report under subsection (4) would be contrary to the public interest or prejudicial to national security, the Prime Minister may exclude the matter from the copy of the report laid before Parliament.

(7) The Secretary of State may pay to the independent reviewer—

(a) expenses incurred in carrying out the functions of the independent reviewer under this section, and

(b) such allowances as the Secretary of State determines.

(8) The independent reviewer shall complete further reviews on a five-yearly basis and the provisions of this section other than subsection (3) shall apply.

(9) In this section ‘the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation’ means the person appointed under section 36(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006 (and ‘independent reviewer’ is to be read accordingly).”

This new clause provides for an independent review of the operational case for the bulk powers in the Bill, and further periodic reviews, to be undertaken by the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation.

New clause 17—Review of the Operation of this Act—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint an Independent Reviewer to prepare the first report on the operation of this Act within a period of 1 years and 6 months beginning with the end of the initial period.

(2) In subsection (1) ‘the initial period’ is the period of 1 years and 6 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(3) Subsequent reports will be prepared every 2 years after the first report in subsection (1).

(4) A copy of the report is to be laid before Parliament, with provision made for a debate on the floor of both Houses and then approved by resolution of each House.”

Because the Bill deals with National Security and changing technological capabilities, it should be subject to greater scrutiny by both Houses. This amendment will call for an Independent Review to take place and be approved by Parliament within 2 years of the Bill becoming law and then every two years.

New clause 22—Primacy of judicial commissioner’s approval—

“No authorisation sought for a warrant to intercept or obtain or examine primary or secondary communications data, whether targeted or in bulk, under this Act may be considered by a Minister unless it has first been approved by a Judicial Commissioner.”

New clause 25—Review of the Operation of this Act—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint an Independent Reviewer to prepare the first report on the operation of this Act within a period of 6 months beginning with the end of the initial period.

(2) In subsection (1) ‘the initial period’ is the period of 4 years and 6 months beginning with the passage of this Act.

(3) Subsequent reports will be prepared every 5 years after the first report in subsection (1).

(4) Any report prepared by the Independent Reviewer must be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State as soon as the Secretary of State is satisfied it will not prejudice any criminal proceedings.

(5) The Secretary of State may, out of money provided by Parliament, pay a person appointed under subsection (1), both his expenses and also such allowances as the Secretary of State determines.”

This new clause provides that the review of the operation of the Act shall be carried out by an Independent Reviewer.

New clause 27—Protection for journalistic sources, materials and activities—

“(1) Save in the exceptional circumstances identified in subsection (2), the regimes provided for by Parts 2 to 7 may not be used to access, obtain, record, hold, consider, analyse, disclose or otherwise deal with information, material or data—

(a) of, or concerning the activities of, journalists, or

(b) if the purpose of so doing is to obtain information identifying a journalistic source.

(2) The exceptional circumstances referred to in subsection (1) are—

(a) the case is one of great emergency,

(b) immediate action is necessary, and

(c) the relevant investigatory powers under the regimes provided for by Parts 2 to 7 can be used lawfully having regard to the provisions thereof.

(3) In any case where the regimes provided for by Parts 2 to 7 are disapplied by subsection (1), any person who could otherwise have sought to use one of the investigatory powers specified therein may apply to a judge for an order allowing that person to access, obtain, record, hold, consider, analyse, disclose or otherwise deal with such information, material or data in a way provided for by Parts 2 to 7.

(4) An application for an order under subsection (3) shall be made on notice to the journalist or journalists affected unless the judge determines that an application without such notice is required in order to avoid prejudice to the investigation.

(5) Paragraphs 7 to 9 of Schedule 1 to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 shall apply in relation to the service of a notice of application for an order under subsection (1) as if the application were for an order under Schedule 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

(6) Criminal Procedure Rules may make provision about proceedings under this section where the judge determines that an application without such notice is required.

(7) A judge may only make an order under subsection (3) if the person making the application has convincingly established that—

(a) the order is directed to one or more of the legitimate aims specified in Article 10.2 of the Convention,

(b) there is an overriding public interest necessitating the order,
Amendment 206, page 172, line 24, leave out clause 222. See new clause 17.

Amendment 494, in clause 223, page 173, line 18, leave out paragraph (i) and insert—

“(i) is about an entity to which a telecommunications service is provided by that telecommunications operator and relates to the provision of that service.”

This amendment clarifies that the definition of communications data should apply to the providers of the relevant telecommunications services, rather than allowing an organisation to be required to provide data about services it does not provide.

Amendment 496, in clause 225, page 177, line 27, at end insert—

“‘national security’ means the protection of the existence of the nation and its territorial integrity, or political independence against force or threat of force’.

This amendment would provide for a definition of national security under “General definitions”, to apply throughout the Bill.

Amendment 495, page 177, line 36, at end insert—

“‘professional legal adviser’ means a person who is—

(a) an Advocate

(b) a Barrister

(c) a Solicitor.”

This amendment provides a definition of a “professional legal Adviser” which is important for clarification in relation to Clauses 25, 100, 135 and 171.

Stephen McPartland: I speak in support of all the amendments that I have tabled in this group. First, new clause 18 and amendment 207 are designed to try to restrict the powers in the Bill to the intelligence agencies and law enforcement only. Schedule 4 currently includes the Food Standards Agency and the Gambling Commission, and I am not clear what evidence there is for including those organisations and granting them access to such intrusive powers when other organisations will not have that access.

The Bill gives incredibly wide-ranging powers and there is clear nervousness about that on both sides of the House. I completely respect the integrity of the security services and the police, but a lot of the fear seems to stem from the behaviour of some local authorities in the past and how they have used anti-terrorism powers to spy on people to see whether or not they have been recycling correctly and so on. As a result, those local authorities are not included in the Bill.

Let me give an example from Hertfordshire. The child protection unit of Hertfordshire County Council does not have access to communications data or the powers in the Bill in order to catch paedophiles, but the Gambling Commission and the Food Standards Agency would do so. I am unclear why a body that would want to have access to such powers so that it can catch paedophiles and break up rings around the world cannot have access, when organisations such as the Gambling Commission or Food Standards Agency can have access.

I want to understand that difference. In the oral evidence sessions, when Ministers were questioning witnesses and when witnesses were providing evidence, there was a lot of talk about intelligence agencies, paedophilia and the problems in that regard. Ministers made it clear that a range of organisations had made robust cases to be included. The amendments are intended to tease out of Ministers why those cases were accepted when others were not. Frankly, I would much rather that Hertfordshire County Council’s child protection unit had access to some of the powers in the Bill than the Food Standards Agency, the Gambling Commission or some other organisation. The purpose of my amendments is to try to identify why we are where we are at the moment.

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): My hon. Friend and I have indeed spoken about these matters in some detail. I recognise his abiding concern and that of others with regard to this issue, which is why I will commit to publishing a detailed case for the minor public authorities ahead of these provisions being further considered in the other place. I hope that gives him some reassurance about the points that he has consistently raised.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to the Solicitor General. That is evidence of the work of the two Ministers over the past 12 months in negotiations with me and Opposition Members throughout to try to make the Bill workable for all of us. As I said, all my amendments are probing amendments and none are designed to be pressed to a vote. Their purpose is to gain information. I accept the Solicitor General’s undertaking and thank him.
exceptional circumstances, placing it under the control of the judicial commissioner, like other bulk powers, and providing greater scrutiny of how it is used and by which organisations.

The fact that we have almost no information on who will be in charge of building the request filter, other than that it will be operated by a third party on behalf of the Secretary of State, fills me with great fear. It makes me question whether the request filter will ever exist in reality, because Governments of all colours throughout the ages have been rubbish at commissioning and running large IT projects and delivering them on time, on budget and in working order.

The request filter means that some third party organisation builds a system and collects data from the communications service providers. It then analyses the data inside that system and passes that analysis over to the police. The police are not given direct access to the information, which I think the Minister has referred to as a safeguard, but I wonder why the police are not allowed access to the information, whereas a third party organisation is allowed. We do not know who those third parties are. The whole filtering process needs to be looked into and restrictions placed on it if it is not removed from the Bill completely, because we do not know enough about the mechanics of the system—who is going to build it or pay for it, how it is to be operated and what safeguards will be in place? For me, that is a huge problem.

The last group of amendments in my name arises from the fact that the Bill deals with national security and changing technological capabilities, so it should be subject to greater scrutiny by both Houses. New clause 17 and amendment 206 call for an independent review to take place within a couple years. I know that there have been numerous calls in the House for procedures to take place every 12 months or every two or three years, but under changing technological circumstances there are technologically minded people in the House and outside who can already get round some of the provisions of the Bill. We are legislating only to catch up in some areas.

In other respects it will be difficult for the Bill to be made to work. On internet protocol 4 there is no possibility of identifying an individual IP address. For someone who is driving round the M25 and using a mobile phone, the IP address is the individual telecommunications towers as they move around the M25, so it would be impossible to identify what they were doing as long as they stayed mobile. Internet protocol 6, however, provides an IP address for each individual device. Internet protocol 6 is a long way off, so it seems to me that some of the provisions will not work technically. It is already possible to get around them. They are based on advances that may occur in 10 or 15 years’ time, but the technology will have moved forward so quickly that the provisions probably will not catch up then anyway.

There are a number of Tor browsers, as they are called, which allow an IP address to be masked. People can download a simple app on their iPhone or other device which, when they access the internet, will show their IP address as based in Munich or somewhere else, not in the UK. It is very simple to get round such details.

Finally, I understand the effort that Ministers have made to work with the Opposition and concerned Members in all parts of the House to try to ensure that the Bill gets on to the statute book by December. I appreciate that there is a sunset clause and that we must do something—we cannot do nothing. It is horrible that we live in a society in which these situations are emerging. For me, these are probing amendments designed to highlight specific areas of concern that need further scrutiny. I hope that they may be of interest to Members of the House of Lords and that they will consider the issues I have spoken about regarding the filter. I hope that the Government will take the amendments in the spirit with which they are offered, which is as probing amendments; not to be pushed to a vote, but as the basis for more negotiation.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): This final group of amendments covers three of the seven substantial concerns that I set out in a letter to the Home Secretary after Second Reading: first, protection of journalistic material and sources; secondly, the definition of internet connection records, and the threshold for their use; and thirdly, the independent review of the operational case for bulk powers. Let me take each in turn.

I will deal with journalistic material and the protection of sources briefly, as the matter was debated at length yesterday. Protecting the ability of whistle-blowers in private or public sector organisations to speak to journalists without fear of identification is one of the important checks and balances on state and corporate power. Many journalists and the National Union of Journalists have real concerns that clause 68 weakens the existing protections in law for journalistic sources operated under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. They point to an incident in 2014 when police secretly accessed the mobile phone records and call data from a national newspaper, bypassing the PACE protections. Rightly, there are now worries that that has set a new precedent. Furthermore, they feel that the Bill might be about to enshrine that new precedent in law.

Under PACE, journalists are notified when the authorities want to access material and sources, so that they have the ability to challenge that in open court. The worry is that the Bill removes those protections. The National Union of Journalists makes the point that there is no real difference between physical notebooks and communications data held electronically; both could reveal the identity of a source. Labour shares those concerns; they were ably raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) in Committee, and they were also raised on Second Reading.

The Government have gone some way towards addressing our concerns, tabling amendments 51 and 52, which we welcome. The amendments will ensure that judicial commissioners, when considering a warrant, must give weight to the overriding public interest in a warrant being granted for the use of investigatory powers against journalists and that they must ensure that that is in keeping with wider and more general privacy points. That is a significant move. It takes points that would otherwise have been in codes underpinning the Bill and puts them on the face of the Bill.

Labour will accept these amendments, but we will do so while being clear that they do not go far enough. Indeed, they cover only the award of warrants, not...
general access to communications data. We therefore support the amendments tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) on behalf of the Joint Committee on Human Rights—amendments 143 to 145—which seek to extend the same level of protection to journalists as is currently the case under PACE.

We accept that this is a difficult area to get right, particularly when the definition of who is and who is not a journalist is changing in the digital world. We accept the difficulty facing Ministers. However, we think that the general principle, enshrined in PACE, of allowing journalists to challenge in open court any attempt to access material that could reveal sources is a good one. It would allow those public interest arguments to be heard and tested in court. We hope that the Government will today commit to working with us and the NUJ to find a wording that in the end does the job.

Mr John Hayes: The right hon. Gentleman has made his case in a measured way. He acknowledges that it is difficult to define journalists because the modern media include many bloggers who are part time, occasional and so forth. However, he is absolutely right that a solution needs to be found, and I am happy to say that we will look at this issue with him and others in greater detail as the Bill enjoys its passage through this House and the other place.

Andy Burnham: I am grateful for what the Minister has said. It must be possible to find a definition that excludes casual or voluntary bloggers from individuals who make their living from writing or who work for organisations regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation or other regulators.

Joanna Cherry: I and my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) have added our names to the amendments tabled to clause 68 by the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and we will give them our support if they are pushed to a vote. However, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is regrettable that the opportunity has been lost at this stage to have uniform protection across the face of the Bill for communications with journalists, lawyers and parliamentarians?

Andy Burnham: I made a similar point yesterday, when I said that it would have been helpful had we made more progress on these issues, and perhaps I can push the Minister on this, because I know he is meeting the Law Society and the Bar Council later this week.

The truth is that this raises quite complex issues. With all three professions, a slightly different set of issues arises, and we should not rush to legislate. We should move on the basis that we know what we are trying to achieve, which is to protect the ability of the public to go to an MP without fear that there is any compromise on a private discussion. We want legal privilege—the privilege that belongs to the client—to be protected. We also want journalists to be able to protect their sources, as they want to do. If we work with the Government on that basis in good faith, I believe that we will be able to come to the right position.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: May I, through the right hon. Gentleman, tell the Minister that, when he says he will speak to people in the House and others, those others really must include the National Union of Journalists?

Mr Hayes indicated assent.

The Solicitor General indicated assent.

Mr Carmichael: Those are the people who will be better qualified than anyone else to define what a journalist is, and they do have something of a pedigree—going back to 1936—in terms of the definitions.

Andy Burnham: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which I saw was accepted on the Government Front Bench. He has tabled a detailed amendment on this issue, and he is right to do so and to press the Government on this. All of us have to apply our minds to getting those definitions right for all three professions. There is still an open question, as we discussed yesterday, about Members of Parliament and the right level of scrutiny for any warrant against them, but there is equally more work to do on other fronts.

We should not pass a Bill that weakens these professions—as I said yesterday, this is not about preserving the special status of the individuals who work in them, but about protecting the public and their ability to raise issues through those individuals.

Mr Hayes: I have committed to writing to the NUJ and the Society of Editors, which I have met already. I have been waiting to do so until today’s debate so that my letter can be informed by it. However, I will happily write to them tomorrow, very much on the basis of taking these matters forward.

Andy Burnham: I very much appreciate what the Minister has said. I think that any colleague in any part of the House who has read the NUJ’s briefing for today’s debate will struggle to disagree with anything in it. If we want this Bill to leave Parliament with a high degree of consensus across society, it is right that these professional bodies feel, in the end, that the Bill is something they can support. That is a prize worth working for. Given his comments, I get the feeling that the Minister agrees.

4.45 pm

Let me turn to the area where I have the greatest anxiety, and on which I am looking for considerable comfort from the Government—internet connection records. The hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) made some strong points about the bodies that can access them, and I would certainly want to support him in his endeavours in that direction. I want to raise issues relating to the definition of internet connection records and the threshold for their use.

When the Home Secretary introduced her draft Bill in a statement to this House in November, she correctly said that ICRs would cover sites visited, not pages looked at, but then went on to say that the ICR

“In my view, that comparison is neither helpful nor accurate. If a person’s itemised phone bill were to be leaked, it would not make a great deal of sense, and to most eyes it would simply be a jumble of numbers, but if an ICR were to be leaked, it would reveal a lot more"—[Official Report, 4 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 970.]
personal information that could potentially be used against people. ICRs therefore need a higher standard of protection than ordinary communications data.

I recognise that in a world where voice conversations over the phone are becoming less common, there is a need to move in this direction and allow the authorities to hold different forms of information. In order to deal with the changing nature of crime, police and security services need to have new tools at their disposal, and clearly the ICR is one such tool. It is also the case that information of this kind can prove vital in locating missing children in the crucial early hours of their disappearance. However, there is still a lack of clarity about what exactly can and cannot be included in an ICR, and a risk that if that is not clearly spelled out, there could be drift over the years—they could change and mutate, and become much intrusive. As they are a new construct, it would help to build public trust if the Bill contained a clear definition of ICRs and what they can include.

The Government’s position is that the draft code of practice makes it clear that URLs are not communications data and therefore, by definition, cannot be included. That is helpful to some degree, but it is not the same as having a single, clear definition in one place in the Bill. Our amendment 293 simply states that an ICR cannot include content. That is consistent with the position that Ministers have outlined throughout the Bill’s passage. Such an amendment would remove any lingering ambiguity. I urge the Government to accept it, or at least to commit to tabling one of their own that achieves the same thing.

Having made that point about the definition of internet connection records, I now wish to make it clear that my concern is less with the holding of data and more with the criteria under which they can be accessed. In general, communications data should not be capable of being accessed to investigate any crime, regardless of how serious the offence is and the impact on victims. For instance, we cannot justify intrusive powers for a minor driving offence, low-level antisocial behaviour or failure to pay a fine, but that, in effect, is what the Bill as drafted permits. There should be a clear and simple threshold for the use of communications data—namely, serious crime punishable by at least six months in prison, or crime where significant mental or physical harm could be caused. As I said, given the more intrusive nature of internet connection records, the threshold for their use should be even higher than that.

I understand the complexity inherent in getting the definition of that threshold right. I would not wish to rule out the use of internet connection records for cases involving online grooming, the sending of sexual communications to a child, online fraud or the location of a missing or suicidal child. I think we would all say that internet connection records should be used for those purposes, as the Home Secretary said in her response to my letter, but we need to agree a definition of serious crime that captures those activities without widening the net too much and allowing ICRs to be used in connection with the investigation of much more trivial offences.

Today, I am looking for an agreement in principle with the spirit of what I am saying: that there should be a general serious crime test for comms data and a higher threshold on top of that for the use of internet connection records. I will listen carefully to what the Minister has to say on that, but unless I am satisfied, I am prepared to press our general amendments to a vote.

Mr John Hayes: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman in his flow. I have listened carefully to what he has said, and it has been the subject of discussion, as he knows, in Committee and elsewhere. I do not want to anticipate my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General in his summing up, and I mean him no discourtesy, but as the Bill Minister and the Security Minister, I commit to doing what the right hon. Gentleman asked. I do so because it is really important that we have a threshold that works, particularly on ICRs.

ICRs are, as the right hon. Gentleman says, qualitatively different. He is right about cases of harassment, and so on and so forth, which is why the matter is challenging and complex. He has made a powerful case here, following the powerful case made by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), and I will bring the matter back to the House during our proceedings on the Bill in the form of an amendment, in the spirit that he has described.

Andy Burnham: I said at the start that I was looking for considerable comfort, and I think I have just received it from what the Minister has said. To be clear, I was saying that there should be a threshold of six months for the use of communications data, and a higher threshold on top of that for internet connection records. As the Minister just acknowledged, there is a qualitative difference between the two. If that is what we are agreeing, and if we are also agreeing that there should be no restriction on the use of internet connection records for the other serious purposes that I have outlined, the Opposition can probably move forward on that basis without pressing our amendments to a vote.

This is the area in which the Bill has the ability to lose public trust if we do not get it right, because it could affect every single citizen in the land. I am sure that as constituency MPs many of us have dealt with situations where an individual falls out with the police at a local level, and they perceive that they are being investigated for all kinds of things and that all aspects of their lives might be turned upside down. We have to put in place appropriate protections that would not allow personal information to be handed over freely in relation to more trivial offences.

Suella Fernandes: The provisions on ICRs are designed to resolve two problems. First, our law enforcement and security personnel cannot carry out IP address resolution—identifying which device is communicating with which device—without the new powers. Secondly, even with the originating and destination IP addresses, it may not be clear which website or communications service has been accessed. The evidence from the professionals to the Joint Committee was clear: ICR retention is imperative to enable IP address resolution for investigations.

Andy Burnham: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making a point that will enable me to be absolutely clear about what I am saying. I am not arguing against the retention of the data, as I think I made clear at the beginning. I am not arguing against ICRs per se. I acknowledge that they could be a very important tool. In an age when communications have migrated online and people have fewer voice telephone calls, this information...
could be crucial in detecting serious crime. I am saying that while we should legislate to allow the data to be held, we must also legislate to put in place a very precise threshold, so that the circumstances in which those data can be accessed are explicitly clear. There is not a broad reasonableness or necessity test. What I am saying is that we need a very clear definition of what level of crime permits the authorities to access those records.

I believe that if we find that definition—I feel that the Minister has given a commitment that we will get it—it will enhance public trust in this legislation. In my view, it will knock out completely that lazy label of “snoopers charter”. That is why it is so important that the Government nail this point before the Bill concludes its passage.

Mr John Hayes: The right hon. Gentleman has looked at these matters very closely, as is illustrated by the fact that he has rightly said that there are some crimes, such as harassment, stalking and so on, and so forth, that would not neatly fit into a simple category. He is also right that the threshold must be robust. This is not about minor crimes and it is not about snooping, as the less well-informed critics have sometimes described it. I have given the commitment that we will work with him and others during the passage of the Bill to move an amendment to address this issue. He was right to raise it today. He has asked for a commitment and he is getting one.

Andy Burnham: We have learned to admire the Minister greatly through this process, and we have learned that when he says something, it happens. I am reassured by the words that he has just put on the record.

If it helps—perhaps it does not, but I will say it anyway—I would favour quite a high test for ICRs, and significantly higher than six months. Alongside that, it might be possible to itemise the other individual occasions on which they could be used, be it online grooming or missing persons. The danger with trying to capture it all in a single time period is that we might open the net to other offences that we would not want to be included. I fully acknowledge that this is a complex area. That is why I want to give the Ministers leeway to see whether, working with us, they can find the right definition.

Dr Murrison: The Joint Committee spent a lot of time on ICRs and IP address resolution; then along came clause 222, which gave us some comfort because the matter can be reviewed in five years. Some of us are of the view that ICRs will not, in any event, prove to be as useful as we might hope and as Ministers certainly hope. The Danish experience was that they were not useful and their collection was therefore dropped. It is quite possible that that will come to pass here, and that in five years’ time we will review this matter. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that clause 222 persuades some of us who are a bit doubtful about the utility and value of ICRs that we should allow the provision because it will be reviewed in five years’ time?

Andy Burnham: The review is clearly a good idea, but it is also a good idea to tighten the definition and the threshold now, because we need to ensure that there is a degree of public confidence in what is being done here. I fully accept that the review is important. The point is that although ICRs in themselves may not necessarily solve a crime, they may let the authorities know where to go to ask for more intrusive information. They will identify the app, service or whatever it is that is being used, which might allow further lines of inquiry.

I would not be casual about this point—not that I am suggesting the hon. Gentleman was being so. If we were to publish somebody’s 12-month website visiting record, which effectively is what an ICR is, it would reveal a large amount of information about them. It would give a pretty decent profile of what kind of person they were and some of the information could be highly personal.

That is why I say that we need to legislate with great care in this area if we are to carry the public with us.

5 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making good progress in getting very welcome undertakings from the Minister to review this whole business, in particular on serious crime and on the creation of ICRs; will he confirm that his concern also extends to the accessing of communications data by a huge range of public bodies, including every local authority? When he is discussing this matter in the near future he will have better access than anyone else, or at least than most other people, so will his concern extend not only to defining serious crime but to looking at clause 53(7)? In that subsection, any crime is relevant, as is any occasion of preventing public disorder, which could extend to difficult neighbour cases. It also allows collection of data “for the purpose of assessing or collecting any tax, duty, levy or other imposition, contribution or charge payable to a government department”.

It seems to me that the word “serious” should be put in all that, or else certainly some threshold should be. It is extremely all-embracing, and allows a district council anywhere to start getting access to communications data. Will he take those points into account as well?

Andy Burnham: I will certainly take the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s points into account. He is making the same case as we are in our amendments. To be clear, those amendments would create a general seriousness test for all communications data collection, which would have to be passed before any of those data could be released. The test created by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras in amendment 292 relates to offences for which the sentence is imprisonment for more than six months. We felt that that was proportionate. It begins to meet some of the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s concerns, as it would knock out some of the lower-level offences he has just described.

Given what the Minister has said, I do not intend to press that amendment to a vote, but it is the bottom line from where we start. On top of the general six months test for all communications data, we want a higher threshold for the more personal data in an internet connection record. I am glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman intervened because we have now made that explicitly clear to the House.

I turn now to the independent review of the operational case for bulk powers, which allows me to finish on a more positive note. All the bulk powers in the Bill—bulk interception, bulk equipment interference, bulk acquisition, bulk personal datasets—give rise to privacy concerns...
because of the more indiscriminate way in which they might be used. That is why it is important that they are granted on the basis of what is strictly needed rather than what it would be helpful to have, a point made by the Intelligence and Security Committee in its extremely valuable report. The Joint Committee on the draft Bill also recommended that there should be an independent review of the bulk powers. It was a point upon which I laid great emphasis in my letter to the Home Secretary, and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras has done the same throughout the passage of the Bill.

We are extremely pleased that the Government have agreed to that request. We agree that David Anderson, the independent reviewer, is the right person to lead the review. I understand that, following correspondence between my hon. and learned Friend and the Security Minister, terms of reference have now been agreed and the review can start in earnest. It will be concluded in time to inform proceedings in the other place. Crucially, it will consider the necessity of the powers and whether the same result could have been achieved through alternative methods. It will also have a balance of security expertise and human rights expertise. This is a significant move by the Government and will ultimately help build public trust in the Bill.

To hark back briefly to the debate on the last group of amendments, it is too early to say what we will do on the back of the review. We will have to see what it concludes, but our working assumption is that it will be incumbent on Members on all sides of the House to respond to the review and if necessary reassess their position on the back of it.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that at the Dispatch Box the Security Minister initially said the review would focus on necessity, but when winding up the last debate would not concede that? Does that not raise some concern in the right hon. Gentleman's mind?

Andy Burnham: There is an exchange of letters between the Security Minister and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras, which I hope is in the public domain, and which I believe allays the fears of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). To be clear, it was a sticking point for Labour that the review had to consider necessity and not just utility. That is enshrined in the terms of reference, so I hope I can reassure him on that point.

Clearly, there is further to go on journalistic material and internet connection records, although it appears from what the Minister has said this afternoon that we are heading in the right direction. I stress again that progress on the ICR points that I have made are a personal red line.

That said, I thank the Home Secretary, the Solicitor General and the Security Minister for the constructive way in which they have approached our discussions. Because of the consensus we have been able to find, the legislation is more likely to succeed and to stand the test of time.

Mr Grieve: I am grateful to the Solicitor General for his comments and I will not take up any more of the House’s time. I think that “minimum” might well be acceptable. The key thing is the next subsection, which I think tries to encapsulate very clearly the sort of exceptions we are talking about.

Joanna Cherry: The right hon. and learned Gentleman and I may be on different sides of the House, but I have the highest regard for the clarity and erudition with
which he approaches matters. The Intelligence and Security Committee, which he chairs, said in its recommendation on the draft Bill that the Bill did not make it clear that getting internet connection records “through a specific request to a Communications Service Provider under Part 3” is not the only way in which the agencies may have access to internet connection records. He said that that was “misleading” and that “the Agencies have told the Committee that they have a range of other capabilities which enable them to obtain equivalent data” to internet connection records. He said the Bill should make that clearer. Has the Bill been amended to his satisfaction on that point?

Mr Grieve: The hon. and learned Lady raises a relevant point. The Bill has not been amended, but we received sufficient assurances from the Government that the way in which the system would be operated, in terms of the internal workings of the agency, would be such as to meet the concerns we expressed. Indeed, the Solicitor General or the Minister may be in a position to confirm that. On that basis, despite the fact that we raised the point, we did not table an amendment on it. The hon. and learned Lady is quite right to pick it up. I have not wanted to detain the House for too long, otherwise I could take her through a list of areas on which, having had further discussion, we decided amendments were not required. She is right to focus on that and I hope very much the Minister is able to provide some confirmation. I am grateful to her for having raised it.

Gavin Newlands: Along with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), I represented the SNP in Committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part on Report.

I have many concerns about the Bill, and my hon. Friends have already outlined a number of areas where the SNP is sceptical about the Government’s case. This is a wide-ranging and complex Bill and time constraints prevent me from speaking to everything I would like to. However, I will focus my contribution on communications data and internet connection records. The measures in the Bill are not limited to internet access, email or telephony and include, explicitly, communication without human intervention. As it stands, the definition of communications data can tell us an awful lot about someone’s life. Stewart Baker, former senior counsel to the NSA in the United States, states that the content of a person’s communications data is “the Agencies have told the Committee that they have a range of other capabilities which enable them to obtain equivalent data” to internet connection records. He said the Bill should make that clearer. Has the Bill been amended to his satisfaction on that point?

The industry has indicated a willingness to work with the Government to help implement ICRs, but the trouble is that the industry does not know what ICRs are, and it looks like the Government still do not know either. The lack of detail is not good enough, given that the Government are asking us to sign off on legislation that looks like the Government still do not know either. The lack of detail is not good enough, given that the Government are asking us to sign off on legislation that will have a significant impact on the industry and will impinge on the personal privacy of all our constituents. The Internet Services Providers’ Association says: “The Investigatory Powers Bill deals with highly complex technical matters, however, our members do not believe that complexity should lead to a Bill lacking in clarity.”

For me, this sums up the situation perfectly.

The information likely to be contained in an ICR is extremely intrusive data that could be used to profile and create assumptions about an individual’s life, connections and behaviour. For example, it might reveal deeply personal information, such as visits to pregnancy advice, mental health or gay websites. The Government did not...
always favour such intrusive policies. In 2009, during consideration of a European directive, the current Immigration Minister said:

“Our consideration of the regulations comes against the backdrop of an increasingly interventionist approach by the Government into all of our lives, seemingly taking the maxim ‘need to know’ to mean that they need to know everything. Certainly, we need to know what the Government’s intentions are in relation to the creation of a new central database, which would create a central store of our electronic communications.”—[Official Report, Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee, 16 March 2009; c. 6.]

In response to this point, the Solicitor General pointed out that the provision was not remotely like the 2009 directive—which, incidentally, the Minister voted against—because the retained data would not be in Government hands and that the arm’s-length approach was a key difference.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: The point about the arm’s-length retention gets to the heart of the matter. The concerns expressed by the Opposition Front-Bench team all surround the question of a threshold, but the threshold will never be of any significance to those out there waiting to hack into this information, as we have seen only too clearly with the recent experience of TalkTalk.

Gavin Newlands: I could not agree more with the right hon. Gentleman. I will come to that point shortly.

The question of who retains the information is secondary to the fact that it will be retained and accessible in the first place. The Government have, true to form, merely contracted out data retention to the private sector. Many people share unease about the security of this information. As we have seen recently, private providers are susceptible to sophisticated hacking operations. The consequences, should this information get into criminal hands, are deeply worrying. Indeed, the Joint Committee on the Draft Communications Data Bill shared similar concerns when it said that storing weblog data, however securely, carried the risk that it might be hacked into or fall accidently into the wrong hands.

Andy Burnham: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he is obviously aiming some of his comments in Labour’s direction. In a world where people are making fewer voice telephone calls—and if he is proposing that he would not want to collect this data—how would he propose the authorities go about locating a missing child in the early hours after the disappearance?

Gavin Newlands rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I wish to say, before the hon. Gentleman develops his case, that although I absolutely understand that he speaks for his party from the Front Bench and is entitled to develop his case, I would gently point out that another seven Members wish to contribute, several of whom sat on the Committee, and I most certainly wish to include the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. It is not a criticism, but I am sure he will tailor his contribution to take account of that fact.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will there be time for us to have a Third Reading debate and for those of us opposed to the Bill to show our opposition?

Mr Speaker: It depends on how many Divisions there are. As the hon. Gentleman will know, only one hour is allocated for Third Reading, and votes will eat into that, so it is a function of the demand for votes. I am sorry that I cannot give him a more precise answer, but I always have his interests uppermost in my mind, and I will try to accommodate him and others.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The House agreed a timetable motion yesterday, since when substantial amendments and concessions have been made by those on the Treasury Bench. The Bill is very different now. Can you confirm for me that it would still be within the Government’s competence to bring forward an amended timetable that would allow us to have Third Reading on another day?

Mr Speaker: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman, who has considerable experience in these matters, not least from when he was on the other side of the fence, as a very senior Whip, is that it is always open to the Government to table an alternative programme motion. That is not a matter for the Chair. The amendments were, of course, all on the paper at the point at which the House agreed the programme motion. I ought just to say for the avoidance of doubt that the hon. Gentleman who has the floor is not in any way being criticised; I simply wanted to make him aware of the level of demand. I think we ought now to proceed. I would happily sit here all night for colleagues to debate these matters, but I rather doubt there would be the same enthusiasm among Government Whips for such a proposition.

Gavin Newlands: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker; I have almost forgotten what the intervention was—[Interruption.] I do not doubt that, but to answer it, we do not know what ICRs are at the moment. They are not clearly defined—the shadow Home Secretary made that point himself earlier; nor do we know how effective they will be. People in the industry tell me that current technology, such as Tor, virtual private networks and what have you, may render them useless. We do not know what ICRs are at the moment, so I have to be honest with the shadow Home Secretary: I do not have all the answers.

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend sat on the Bill Committee with me and will remember that we heard evidence that if, for example, he wanted to see whether a missing child had been on Facebook, all that the internet connection record would show was whether they had been on Facebook, not whom they had been in contact with. Does he therefore agree that the utility of internet connection records for tracing missing children, which we all recognise is of the utmost importance, is perhaps being rather overblown?

Gavin Newlands: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. and learned Friend.

Before I was intervened on the first time, I was saying that the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Data Bill said that

“storing web log data, however securely, carries the possible risk that it may be hacked into or may fall accidently into the wrong hands, and that, if this were to happen, potentially damaging inferences about people’s interests or activities could be drawn.”
[Gavin Newlands]

It is clear that the intelligence services and the police need powers that benefit the digital age in order to keep us safe and to catch perpetrators. However, when seeking to introduce powers as intrusive such as ICRs, it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that their case is watertight. As my hon. and learned Friend said in Committee, we very much hope to be an independent country writing our own security policy, so we do not take our opposition to such measures lightly.

In drafting such a proposition, with such a loose definition, the Government are asking us all to trust them and to sign a blank cheque to allow the wide use of such powers without knowing what their full impact, costs or consequences will be. The Home Office has said that companies will be reimbursed for the additional costs placed on them, but that commitment does not appear in the Bill. The Government have earmarked £175 million to reimburse companies for the costs of meeting their new responsibilities. However, most in the sector believe that is a vast underestimation of what the true costs will eventually amount to. Owing to uncertainty about the extent and definition of ICRs and the extension of communication service providers that will be affected by the proposed provision, the cost is difficult to estimate, but industry figures have told me that they expect it to be anywhere between £1 billion and £3 billion.

I appreciate that the Minister, in a letter to the Committee, reiterated the Government’s intention to bear the cost of implementation, but without clearer information we cannot expect Parliament to sign a blank cheque. Between £175 million and £3 billion is a rather large range, and at a time when disabled people are losing benefits and the WASPI women cannot get the pension they were promised, this seems a rather anomalous and large black hole in potential Government spending. I have said in the past that the Government know the cost of everything and the value of nothing, but in this case they do not even know the cost.

This is a global problem and as such requires a global solution, and it is important that we reflect on what other countries have done to address the issue and that we learn any lessons from their experiences. It is unfortunate, therefore, that a similar scheme of logging data in Denmark has recently been abandoned. That scheme operated for seven years, and although I accept that there were differences in that scheme, there were many similarities. Upon its abandonment, the Danish security services expressed their view about the difficulty of being able to make proper and effective use of the large amount of data that had been gathered. It seems that, instead of spending their valuable time locating criminals, the security services will spend most of it working on spreadsheets and filtering out the useless from the useful. It should be noted that the Danish ICR model was proving too expensive and the cost spiralled out of control, that Australia considered the proposal but decided not to pursue it, and that, as we have heard, the United States is rescinding many of its intrusive powers and moving in the opposite direction.

It is for those reasons that we believe the case for ICRs has simply not been made. The Government have failed to convince us, and those working in the industry, that ICRs are necessary, proportionate and in accordance with the law. We tabled an amendment to remove them from the Bill, but it was not accepted, which leaves us no option but to vote against the Bill in its entirety. That is not a step that we take lightly, but, ultimately, it is a necessary step.

In the event that we are unsuccessful in bringing down the Bill, we will still attempt to ameliorate aspects of it in order to protect smaller companies, especially those that supply lifeline and low-profit services to rural communities. New clause 26, which I tabled along with SNP colleagues, would exclude the providers of rural or community access communication services and small service providers from the obligation to collect and retain data. I have mentioned the deep concern in the sector about the expense that the Bill will impose on industry. I am sure that the Government will not want to put any businesses in a perilous situation, particularly those that operate with smaller cash flows and tighter margins in rural Scotland in order to provide a vital service for their local communities.

The Committee was provided with written evidence stating that smaller internet service providers were still subject to the same demands as the much larger organisations that operate on the world stage. Organisations such as HUBS are supplying vital internet connections to some of the most remote communities. If the Government railroad these clauses through the House without proper regard for the impact they will have, they will seriously endanger those small businesses and restrict internet use for some of our rural communities.

Dr Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: I am afraid not, because I do not have time. Plenty of other Members want to speak.

You will pleased to hear, Mr Speaker, that I am nearing the end of my speech. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Thank you.

We live in a digital age. I therefore welcome the Government’s proposed digital economy Bill, and, indeed, the Chancellor’s commitment to match the Scottish Government’s commitment to universal broadband provision. The digital economy Bill is intended to make the United Kingdom a world leader in digital provision. However, according to many in the industry, this Bill will completely undermine that goal before the draft Bill has even been printed.

It is only right and proper for the Government to consider and propose new powers that our security agencies can use to keep us safe, but in many parts of the Bill the Government fail to make the case that the powers they want to introduce will be effective, are necessary, are in line with our right to privacy, and cannot be challenged in the courts. It is for those reasons that the SNP are still unconvinced of the merits of the Bill, and will vote against its Third Reading later this evening.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I rise to support new clause 19, which stands in my name. It is a scoping amendment, which I do not intend to press. A large number of amendments have been tabled so I will be extremely brief, but I want to pay tribute to my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General, who has been incredibly receptive to the concerns that I have raised throughout this process.
We all remember the examples of local authorities using powers inappropriately, whether that has involved rummaging through our bins or spying on paper boys to determine whether they have the right to work. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken to try to address that, including the creation of a new criminal penalty for the misuse of these powers. However, I believe that more needs to be done to ensure that the wider public can be confident that we will not see a repeat of history, and will not see councils misusing the powers in the future.

New clause 19 would introduce a requirement that when a judicial commissioner approves an authorisation for telecommunications data for a designated senior officer of a local authority, that senior officer must notify his or her chief executive before the authorisation has taken effect. I believe that that will help for two reasons. It will discourage over-zealous officers from applying for authorisations if they know that their chief executives will see those authorisations before they take effect, and, in the event that a council officer is found to have misused the powers, the chief executive will be accountable. Chief executives will never be able to say that they did not know what was happening in their authorities.

The Solicitor General: I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. The Government wish to consider the matter further, and return to it in the other place. I hope that that gives my hon. Friend some reassurance.

Will Quince: I am greatly comforted by that response, and, in the interests of time, I am happy to sit down now.

5.30 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I rise to support amendments 143, 144 and 145, which were tabled in my name and those of the other members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights and relate to the protection of journalists’ sources. Since they were tabled, they have been supported by Labour’s Front Bench and the SNP, for which I am grateful.

Yesterday, we considered additional protections for MPs and lawyers and the question of legal professional privilege. Journalists are in the same group. We extensively considered protections for everybody against the abuse of power and the invasions of privacy by the state, which is right, but there are particular issues about protecting a part of the constitution from abuses of power by the Executive. The legislature obviously holds the Government to account, so it is wrong for the state to abuse its power to prevent us from doing that. The same goes for lawyers and the rule of law. Journalists are in a parallel situation in that it is vital in our democracy that the media are free to hold the Government to account, which is an important aspect of the right of freedom of expression that is guaranteed in article 10 of the European convention on human rights.

I appreciate from the start that there is a difficulty here. It is easy to work out what a lawyer is. It is easy to work out what an MP is. It is not quite so easy with journalists. Some people are evidently journalists and some people are evidently not journalists, but some people might or might not be journalists, so I say “Good luck” to the Solicitor General with that one. However, that difficulty must be surmounted, because we must ensure that the press’s ability to go about their business and to hold the Government to account is protected.

The Solicitor General: The right hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right to talk about the difficulty of definitions, but we should be focusing on journalistic material. That is the question at hand and that is what the Bill addresses. Focusing on that might actually help us to come to a solution.

Ms Harman: It sounds as though the Minister is well under way to solving that problem, so that is encouraging.

My next point was considered by the Joint Committee on Human Rights and has been echoed throughout the House. We do not want the provisions in this legislation to contain less protection for journalistic material than the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 did. That Act relates to a very different world and refers to the journalist’s notebook, whereas we are considering communications data, but a key point is that the relevant journalist or media organisation is given notice when a warrant is being applied for so that they can make representations as to why one should not be granted in order to protect their sources. We are not talking about journalists who are up to their necks in criminal activity—that is not the issue. The issue arises from applications for material that relates not to any criminal activity but to a journalist’s work. Can we ensure that journalists are put on notice, because of the special status of journalistic material, so that the authorising authorities have the benefit of hearing from journalists or media organisations before a warrant is granted?

I appreciate that the Minister has already responded to those issues and has put in additional protections, such as taking the non-statutory code and putting it on the statute, but the issue of notice still remains, which is why we tabled our amendments and why they have gathered support. I welcome the Minister’s confirmation that he will look further at the matter, but other members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in the House of Lords, and many other Members of the Lords, will want to consider it. Nobody wants an unjustified fettering of the ability of the security services and the police to keep us safe. The point in the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was absolutely spot on. We are all in favour of the same thing here, but we must ensure that, at the end of the process, we have the right balance not only for journalists but in many other respects.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I shall speak to new clause 18 and amendment 207. I note that these are probing measures tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), and I also note the assurances given by the Solicitor General. However, given the concerns raised by the SNP, I thought it may be helpful to give some examples of how the organisations in schedule 4 need these powers and how they contribute towards the criminal justice system in our country.

We are speaking about communications data, not about bulk warrants or intercept warrants; we are discussing the who, what and when of communications between suspects. The criminal justice system sees thousands of prosecutions brought each year by the organisations
listed in schedule 4. The Department for Work and Pensions prosecutes benefit fraud, and I am sure we all support it on that. It conducted approximately 600,000 investigations last year, and communications data can be invaluable, particularly in dealing with conspiracies to defraud, in showing links between conspirators and the timing of their communications.

New clause 18 excludes one of the largest and most important investigating agencies: Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. It investigates a huge range of offences, from tax fraud to cigarette smuggling and the criminal exploitation of HMRC’s repayment system. The seriousness of some of these offences can be summed up in the offence that I prosecuted many times on its behalf: cheating the Revenue, which attracts a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The Joint Committee heard evidence from HMRC that last year it made 10,000 requests for communications data, which supported 560 investigations, in cases involving a loss to the Treasury of £2 billion. If that is not a serious investigating organisation that deserves our help in investigating and prosecuting criminal activity, I do not know what is.

The injustice does not end with HMRC, and I will give just two more examples, as I am conscious of the time. The Financial Conduct Authority regulates the financial markets, and the banking, financial and insurance industries, among others. In a £10 million insider dealing fraud case, in which I was instructed, we were able to build an electronic reconstruction of a day in the life of an insider dealer. It went from the moment when a memory stick was inserted into a computer to download the price-sensitive information, to the handover of the stick to a co-conspirator at another bank, to the material being uploaded on to webmail and messages being sent out to the defendants to get trading on these stocks. The FCA operates in the digital world, by definition, and it made more communications data requests last year than 20 police forces that are cited in new clause 18.

The second example, mentioned by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), is the Health and Safety Executive. It prosecutes employers who kill and maim employees and members of the public in the workplace. These are highly specialised cases, which could encompass any workplace, from building sites to chemical factories and care homes. Last year, the HSE conducted 3,280 investigations, resulting in 535 prosecutions in England and Wales.

I know that these are probing measures and that my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage is raising important issues, particularly on access for child protection units and others, but we must not lose sight of the important role that many of these organisations play in the criminal justice system and their need for their power to prevent and detect crime.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Several colleagues rather than three wish to speak.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I rise to speak to the amendments standing in my name, particularly amendment 3. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) said that the amendments tabled by the SNP sought to remove internet connection records from the Bill had not been selected. I notice that he and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) have also added their names to amendment 3. It was not my intention at the start of this debate, but I have heard so little by way of comfort from the Government Front-Bench team that I intend to press amendment 3 to a vote. It is surely unacceptable, at this stage in proceedings, that we still have no proper definition of what exactly is an internet connection record. Others have touched on that during the course of our debates.

It is 15 years to the day since I was elected at the 2001 general election. I have seen a few things in this House in that time, and one thing that I have learned to recognise is a well-rehearsed line exchanged between the two Front-Bench teams. I think we saw that when the shadow Home Secretary was giving his assurances from the Minister for Security. I have to say that he has...
got assurances which, frankly, miss the whole point. The assurances on threshold, for example, do absolutely nothing to address the problems that are inherent in the riskiness of retaining such data in the first place. I cannot improve on the definition or the expression that was used by the Joint Committee when it reported on the draft Bill. It said that the collection of internet connection records would be a “honeytrap for casual hackers, blackmailers, criminals large and small from around the world, and foreign states.”

David Anderson QC described the expanded data collection by internet service providers as “overstated and misunderstood”—to the point and understated. There is no other “Five Eyes” country in which operators have been forced, or are being forced, to retain similar internet connection data. That surely tells us all that we need to know. The case has not been made. It is always open to the Government to come back on some future occasion to make a case and to put these provisions in another Bill. They have not made the case, and the provisions should not be in this Bill.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): That was a very disappointing reaction from the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) to what I thought has been the very constructive way in which the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) has dealt with the Government both today and yesterday.

5.45 pm

I support the Bill and the amendments that the Government have accepted, and I draw the House’s attention to the fact that I have represented the police on a number of occasions. What has always struck me in cases about warranty is that if the police want to search someone’s house, their shed or even their car, they have to go and get judicial authorisation from a magistrate, yet for more intrusive and covert surveillance they did not have to do that. That is why the Bill is a welcome step towards proper independent scrutiny of the intrusive powers of the state. I am also pleased that the Bill brings up to date the powers that the police have to make a case and to put these provisions in another Bill. They have not made the case, and the provisions should not be in this Bill.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I want to speak briefly about clause 68, Government amendment 51 and amendment 145. Clause 68 is welcome and delivers the manifesto commitment to introduce judicial oversight of these investigatory powers over journalists. As the noble Lord Falconer has pointed out, no such protections exist under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. These new requirements for judicial consent by the commissioner are very welcome.

I very much welcome Government amendment 51, which explicitly acknowledges the public interest in protecting a journalist’s sources and makes it clear that the commissioner must weigh that against any other public interest, which must be overriding. I hope that gives the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) at least some comfort. Were we to adopt her amendment 145, I think the implication would be that the judgment would have to be made in open court, and given the difficult and potentially wide definition of journalistic material that now exists, that might impose a rather onerous requirement.

Were the Government so minded, they might at some later time fine tune clause 68 to say that if the judicial commissioner found the situation slightly ambiguous, they could go to the journalist to seek clarification: if there were cases in which they were finding it difficult to make that judgment, they could seek further and better particulars. However, I think that Government amendment 51 is extremely helpful in addressing many of the concerns expressed about that important issue.

The Solicitor General: It is a pleasure to speak at the end of a wide-ranging but important debate about the new power on internet connection records. It is right to remind ourselves of the context of the debate. Only last week, two individuals received significant prison sentences in Britain’s biggest known gun smuggling operation. It was analysis of communications data that provided vital evidence in that case. It allowed the investigative team to attribute telephone numbers and SIM cards to the defendants and to identify key locations.

However, communications data are changing. The world in which the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and I started out practising is no longer the world as it is today. Telephone calls are very often not the means by which criminals and terrorists conduct their activity. Much of that has moved on to the internet via WhatsApp, via internet chatrooms and via the electronic internet communications that have become the mainstay of many criminal enterprises. It is vital that the legislation that we pass in this House not only attempts to keep pace with this breathtaking change, but tries to get ahead of it as far as possible.

Joanna Cherry: The Solicitor General will be aware of an exchange that I had earlier with the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) about the fact that there are other ways in which law enforcement agencies can obtain internet connection records. Does the Solicitor General agree that that includes getting the data retrospectively for specific targets from operators who already temporarily store such data for their own
business purposes? It would therefore be misleading to imply that the provisions in the Bill are the only way of getting at internet connection records for the purpose of solving specific crimes.

The Solicitor General: I take what the hon. and learned Lady says advisedly. It is not good enough to rely purely on third parties to provide the sources of evidential leads. Government must take a lead in this. We are not in the scenario of building our own database, which has rightly been rejected as unfeasible and an unacceptable increase in state power. This is about requiring third parties to retain for up to 12 months information that could provide the sort of evidential leads that up till now have conventionally been provided by observation evidence and via telephone and SMS evidence that is increasingly becoming obsolete. This is about the Government doing their duty to the people whom we serve and to the country that we are supposed to defend, and doing our duty to protect our citizens.

I shall deal as best I can with the amendments in turn. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who spoke to the issue of the request filter. That is a filter that will be maintained by the Secretary of State. It does not hold data of itself; it is a safeguard. It is there to prevent collateral information being provided to the public authority. It is an innovation and it specifically limits the communications data retained to only that which is relevant.

I would argue that the measure is essential because it serves the interests of privacy that have formed such a part of the debates in this House, and it will help to reduce error. The filter will accept only communications data disclosed by communications service providers in response to specific requests from public authorities, each of which must be necessary and proportionate. Any irrelevant data that do not meet those criteria will be deleted and not made available to the public authority. My hon. Friend has tabled probing amendments, and I know that that is the spirit in which he has initiated debate.

On the question of review, I am entirely sympathetic with the desire for ongoing review of the Bill’s provisions, but that is already provided for. The operation of the Act is to be reviewed by the Secretary of State after five years, which is entirely appropriate. This Bill will need some time to bed in, and time will be needed to see what effect it has had. My concern is that a two-year review runs the risk that we will not be in a position to properly assess its impact. For those reasons, I urge hon. Members who have tabled amendments relating to the review to accept the argument that I submit and to withdraw the amendments.

We have had much debate about journalists. Quite rightly, we have sought to focus on journalistic material because there is a danger in this debate, as with MPs and as with lawyers, that we focus upon the individual and the role, as opposed to the interest to be served. Journalists serve a public interest—the vital importance of freedom of expression in our society, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and that vital aspect of journalism, the non-disclosure of the source of journalists’ material.

The Government are very cautious and careful about the way in which we seek to deal with these matters, which is why we have tabled the amendments that have already been spoken to by other Members. The placing of the stringent test in amendment 51—the public interest in protecting a source of journalistic information—is further evidence of our continued commitment to protecting the freedom of the press and freedom of expression in our country. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security and I have already said, we have listened to the strength of feeling on the matter and will consider whether further protections, over and above the significant protections that already exist under PACE in relation to journalists themselves, are appropriate where the collateral effect of warranted intrusion discloses their sources.

Let me therefore deal with the question of ICRs and their definitions. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security, in an intervention on the shadow Home Secretary, has set out clearly the Government’s position on how we would view the threshold. The right hon. Gentleman quite rightly accepts that this is not an easy task and that we must get it right. We do not want to exclude offences such as stalking and harassment, for example. We want to ensure that the threshold is robust but actually makes sense in the context of the new powers of ICRs. I look forward to that work being ongoing.

Let me deal with the question of definition. I can be clear today once again that the Bill does not require companies to retain content, but I am willing to consider any amendments that further improve definitions in the Bill, as another opportunity for meaningful dialogue to take place so that we get the definition absolutely right. I know that that is a concern not only of the shadow Home Secretary, but of other right hon. and hon. Members.

Let me move on to the SNP amendments. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who has been consistent in his argument today, as he was in Committee. With respect, however, I have to say that that consistency is misplaced. There is an important issue here about access to communications data that I think would be jeopardised in a way that would be prejudicial to the public if judicial commissioners became involved. I do not think that there is any utility or public interest to be served by the introduction of judicial commissioner approval for communications data acquisitions, because we are talking about a great volume of material. Also, the highly regarded single point of contact regime has already provided expert advice and guidance to authorising officers, and that is placed as a mandatory requirement in the Bill.

There are many other amendments that I could address, but time does not permit me, save to say that our commitment to protecting the public and ensuring that our legislation is up to pace with modern developments is clear, so I urge right hon. and hon. Members to support our amendments.

Stephen McPartland: I am grateful to the Solicitor General and to the Minister for Security for the time that they have given me over the past 12 months, to work with me on these amendments and in our negotiations. I am very happy to withdraw my new clause and not to press my other amendments, as they are probing amendments that were not intended to be pressed to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.
Clause 53

POWER TO GRANT AUTHORISATIONS

Amendment proposed: 320, page 42, leave out lines 14 and 15 and insert

"Subsection (2) applies if a designated senior officer of a relevant public authority considers—"

(a) that a Judicial Commissioner may, on an application made by a designated senior officer at a relevant public authority, issue a communications data access authorisation where the Judicial Commissioner considers—".—(Gavin Newlands.)

See amendment 327.

Question put, That the amendment be made.


Division No. 11 [5.59 pm]

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Blackman, Kirby
Boswell, Philip
Brake, rh Tom
Brook, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Steward
Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart
C.
McGarry, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sherrard, Tommy
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Stephens, Chris
Thelwiss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Wear, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowick, Victoria
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cartledge, James
Cash, rh Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey
Dr, Donelan, Michelle
Dowden, Oliver
Dyke-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David

Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, rh Sam
Hafren, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoaare, Simon
Hollinsrake, Kevin
Hollinne, Mr Philip
Holloway, rh Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardenena, Mr
Ranil
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jennick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewes, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Clause 68

COMMISSIONER APPROVAL FOR AUTORISATIONS TO IDENTIFY OR CONFIRM JOURNALISTIC SOURCES

Amendments made: 49, page 54, line 10, leave out “made an order under this section approving” and insert “approved”.

This amendment removes the need for a Judicial Commissioner to make an order when approving an authorisation under Part 3 to identify or confirm journalistic sources.

Amendment 50, page 54, line 12, leave out “an order under this section approving” and insert “approval of”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 49.

Amendment 51, page 54, line 25, at end insert—

( ) In considering whether the position is as mentioned in subsection (5)(a) and (b), the Judicial Commissioner must, in particular, have regard to—

(a) the public interest in protecting a source of journalistic information, and

(b) the need for there to be another overriding public interest before a relevant public authority seeks to identify or confirm a source of journalistic information.

This amendment requires a Judicial Commissioner to have regard, in particular, to the public interest in protecting a source of journalistic information when deciding whether to approve an authorisation under Part 3 to identify or confirm a journalistic source.

Amendment 52, page 54, line 27, leave out “make an order quashing” and insert “quash”—(The Solicitor General.)

This amendment removes the need for a Judicial Commissioner to make an order when quashing an authorisation under Part 3 to identify or confirm journalistic sources where the Commissioner has refused to approve the grant of the authorisation.

Clause 78

POWERS TO REQUIRE RETENTION OF CERTAIN DATA

Amendment proposed: 3, page 62, line 22, leave out “therefore includes, in particular” and insert “does not include”—(Mr Alistair Carmichael.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 69, Noes 282.

Division No. 12] [6.12 pm

AYES

Ahmed-Shiekh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackman-Kristy
Boswell, Philip
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline

NOCES, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Souby, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Symes, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tohill, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vaz, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noses:
Sarah Newton and
George Hollingbery

Question accordingly negatived.

6.11 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 6 June).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).
Tellers for the Ayes: Tom Brake and Owen Thompson

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cardidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishi, Reham
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleaver, Isles
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Sinner, Mr Dennis
Stephens, Chris
Thewlis, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete

Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Mims
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dowden, Oliver
Dwyer-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Fick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunham, Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ephnicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Frer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halton, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Mr Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margaret
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, rh Ms Anne
Mak, rh Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason

McCarty, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mullan, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Nuttall, rh Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, rh Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, rh Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scally, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Rosyton
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Ian
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
Symonds, Mr Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Throup, Maggie  
Timpson, Edward  
Tothurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tomlinson, Michael  
Tracey, Craig  
Tredinnick, David  
Truss, rh Elizabeth  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Turner, Mr Andrew  
Vaizey, Mr Edward  
Vara, Mr Shailesh  
Vickers, Martin  
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Wallace, Mr Ben  
Warburton, David  
Warman, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Heather  
White, Chris  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Bill  
Williams, Craig  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wilson, Sammy  
Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
Wood, Mike  
Wragg, William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim  

Tellers for the Noes:  
Sarah Newton and  
George Hollingbery

Question accordingly negatived.

Ordered,
That clause 94 be transferred to the end of line 38 on page 76.— (The Solicitor General.)

Ordered,
That clause 117 be transferred to the end of line 36 on page 74.—(The Solicitor General.)

Third Reading

6.23 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The first duty of Government is the protection of their citizens, and the first duty of Parliament is to hold the Government to account for the way they protect those citizens. This landmark Bill will ensure that our police and security and intelligence agencies have the powers they need to keep us safe in an uncertain world.

It provides far greater transparency, overhauls safeguards and adds protections for privacy. It also introduces a new and world-leading oversight regime. It is a vital Bill—on that, we are agreed across the House.

It is only right to afford such an important Bill proper scrutiny. Three independent reviews informed the Bill’s drafting: the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson QC; an expert panel convened by the Royal United Services Institute; and the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament. It was then scrutinised by not one, but three parliamentary Committees. We have now had a further report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which said:

“We welcome the introduction of a Bill as representing a significant step forward in human rights terms towards the objective of providing a clear and transparent legal basis for…investigatory powers”.

The reports produced on the Bill, when piled up, reach nearly 1 foot high of paper. It has proceeded through the House of Commons on the normal timetable and with the usual forensic line-by-line scrutiny applied by the House. I thank the right hon. and hon. Members who sat on the Public Bill Committee; those who sat on the Joint Committee that gave the Bill pre-legislative scrutiny with Members from another place; the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Science and Technology Committee for their reports; the right hon. and hon. Members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, who scrutinised the more sensitive aspects of the Bill; and all those right hon. and hon. Members who contributed on Report. The scrutiny that they have given the Bill may well be unprecedented.

I extend particular thanks to the Secretary Minister, the Solicitor General and the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) for the detailed way in which they have worked on the Bill. I also thank the hard-working team in the Home Office who have supported the Bill, and all those who supported the Committees.

It is because the Bill is so important that it has received unprecedented scrutiny. It provides a clear and comprehensible legal basis for the powers used by our law enforcement and intelligence agencies. It introduces the most fundamental reform in investigatory powers since the avowal of those agencies with the introduction of judicial authorisation of the most sensitive powers. It puts the Wilson doctrine protections on to the statute book for the first time; creates one of the most senior and powerful judicial oversight posts in the country with the creation of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner; and brings the powers of our police and security and intelligence agencies up to date, making them fit for a digital age.

I have always said that I am willing to listen to constructive contributions from those on both sides of the House to get the Bill right, which is why the Government returned with amendments that I am grateful the House passed on Report. We have strengthened safeguards for journalists, for MPs and for the use of medical records, and added protections called for by communications service providers. Reflecting the cross-party support for the Bill, I am pleased that we have been able to agree the Opposition amendment to put beyond doubt the protections for trade union activity. We have welcomed amendments from the ISC to add clarity and strengthen safeguards.

Perhaps the most important change to the Bill is the new privacy clause, which places the protection of privacy at the heart of the Bill. The manuscript amendment that we tabled and passed yesterday will ensure not only that privacy is at the heart of the Bill, but that privacy must also be central to the decision to authorise the use of the most sensitive powers.

It is because we continue to listen that we have committed to make further changes when the Bill enters the Lords. Responding to another suggestion from the official Opposition, we will introduce a threshold for access to internet connection records, to put beyond doubt that those vital powers cannot be used to investigate minor crimes. We will introduce an amendment to respond to the Opposition proposal on the important appointment of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. We have also committed to implement a number of further reforms proposed by the ISC.

I look forward to the continued careful scrutiny the Bill will receive in the other place, but the key message their lordships should take from the last two days of debate is that this House supports the Bill. We have before us a world-leading piece of legislation, which has been subject to unparalleled scrutiny, and which now, I hope, commands cross-party support. Being in government means taking the difficult decisions about the most
fundamental questions that democratic societies face. It
means striking the right balance between the need for
privacy and the right to live in safety and security.

Being a responsible Opposition means scrutinising
those decisions thoroughly, but fairly. I commend the
Opposition for the constructive approach they have
taken to these most important issues. I commend all
those who have contributed to the scrutiny that we have
seen today and throughout the passage of the Bill. I
commend this vital Bill to the House.

6.28 pm

Andy Burnham: I was first elected to the House
15 years ago to this very day. In that time, debates on
security and privacy have produced some of the most
fractious exchanges I have seen. It is treacherous territory
littered with past failure. Too often, such debates are
pitched as a clash between two absolutes of privacy and
security, where there can be no compromise and only
one winner—witness the Apple versus FBI debate in
the US.

I have always started from the point that people
should not be forced to choose between the two. We all
have an interest in maximising both our personal privacy
and our collective security. We have to work to find the
best point of balance between the two. Over the past
three months, this House has got closer to finding that
balance than ever before. We have elevated the debate
above simplistic loyalties to the security or privacy
lobby. As a result, we are now significantly closer to
developing the balanced, modern, world-leading framework,
which the Home Secretary spoke about, for the use of
investigatory powers that this country needs in the
digital age.

I echo the thanks the Home Secretary gave to right
hon. and hon. Members of this House and its various
Committees: all Members who have contributed in the
past two days; the members of the Public Bill Committee;
the Chairs of that Committee, the hon. Member for
Mid Bedfordshire (Nadine Dorries) and my hon. Friend
the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen); and the
Clerks and the Public Bill Office for overseeing such a
high quality process.

The Bill leaves this House in a much better state than
we found it. That is due in no small part to the forensic
mind and engaging approach of my hon. and learned
Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir
Starmer). By setting out clearly after Second Reading
our seven substantial concerns, we have been able to
bring a focus to this debate that I think has been to the
benefit of this House. I am pleased to say that we have
secured major commitments on all seven concerns, in
particular on bulk powers, the independent review, the
privacy clause, judicial oversight and the double lock,
particular on bulk powers, the independent review, the
secured major commitments on all seven concerns, in
benefit of this House. I am pleased to say that we have
brought all his considerable experience and personality
to bear in moving the Bill forward. It is all the better
for it. Although he probably does not want me to
mention him, I feel the need to mention the hon.
Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby), who
has been the most helpful Government Whip I have
ever come across.

Let me be clear: the Bill is not there yet. We need
further changes on internet connection records—the
Home Secretary alluded to that—and on the protection
of journalists and their sources, and on legal privilege.
However, if the Government continue with the same
approach as the one they have adopted in recent weeks,
I have every confidence that we will get there. We must
do that for those who depend on the Bill we are debating.
The police and security services do incredibly difficult
work on our behalf and we thank them for it. Their job
has got harder as both the level of the threat has risen
and the nature of communication has changed in the
modern world. To fail to respond to that would be a
dereliction of our duties to them; it would also fail our
constituents. The Bill is ultimately about their safety,
the safety of their families and their privacy. I think we
can look ourselves in the mirror tomorrow and say we
have done our level best to maximise both.

6.34 pm

Joanna Cherry: I start by placing on record my thanks
to all the organisations that have supported and advised
the Scottish National party during the passage of the
Bill. I said at the outset of the debate yesterday that I
made no apology for tabling so many amendments and
I stick by that. This is one of the most lengthy and
complex Bills that the House has debated for many
years. The powers it seeks to give to the state are
immense and far-reaching. The Bill is of huge constitutional
significance, yet we have had fewer than two full working
days to debate it on Report. Accordingly, the number of
amendments that could be put to a vote was just a very
small proportion of the number tabled.

The SNP wants to give the security services necessary
and proportionate powers to fight terrorism; we wanted
to support those parts of the Bill that maintained and
codified law enforcement’s existing powers; and we would
have been happy to support an enhanced oversight
regime. However, so long as the Bill allows such significantly
unfettered collection of, and access to, communications
data, including internet connection records, we cannot
give it our support. Neither can we support a Bill that
sets out such far-reaching powers to acquire the personal
and private data of our constituents, while a proper case for the necessity of those powers has yet to be made out.

We have been happy to support some Government amendments, including new clause 5, which appears to recognise the importance of taking into account the right to privacy and other human rights, but such concessions as the Government have made have been vastly exaggerated by both the Government and, I am sorry to say, the main Opposition party. There has been a great deal too much mutual congratulation. Only the SNP and the Liberal Democrats have been concerned enough to put opposition amendments to votes. Were there really no issues that the Labour party considered worth putting to a vote?

We were pleased to offer our support to the Labour party on its amendment protecting trade unionists going about their lawful activities, but what about other activists and campaigners? What about non-governmental organisations and whistleblowers? The SNP's amendments were also designed to protect them. Why were they not supported? The main Opposition party seems content to take Government assurances at face value and to leave matters to the Lords. The SNP believes that these issues should be debated in full and resolved on the Floor of this Chamber, which is democratically elected and accountable to the public, not in the unelected, unaccountable Lords. [Interruption.] I would appreciate it if those who have been absent for most of the debate would stop chuntering from the Front Bench. I am angry with people who treat these matters so lightly.

I want to take bulk powers as an example. All parties now accept that the case for bulk powers has not been made and that it needs an independent review. We sought to get the bulk powers taken out of the Bill until such time as a case had been made. It is possible that a case for the necessity of bulk powers will not be made. As we have heard in detail, America has recently retreated from the necessity to use bulk powers. What happens if the case for bulk powers is not made? Neither the Minister nor the official Opposition would answer that question. Because the SNP amendment to take bulk powers out of the Bill until such time as a case has been made was defeated, those powers are still in the Bill. When the independent operational case is published, it will be the House of Lords, not the Commons, that will scrutinise and debate it. I am proud to say I consider it a travesty of democracy.

There is huge public concern about the implications of the Bill. The public—our constituents—are concerned about their privacy and right to data security. It is disappointing, therefore, that the House has in effect abdicated its responsibility properly to scrutinise the Bill to an unelected Chamber. The interests of our constituents have not been well served by the system, and it simply reinforces me in my view that the interests of my constituents, the people of Scotland and the people of these islands are not always best served by the way we do things in this House.

For all those reasons, the SNP will take a principled stand and vote—[Interruption.] I know it is hard for Government Members to recognise the notion of a principled stand, but they will see one in action in about 10 minutes. For all the reasons I have outlined, the SNP will take a principled stand, reflecting the views of many people across these islands and their concerns about the Bill, and vote against it tonight.

6.39 pm

**Matt Warman:** It has been my privilege to serve on not one, not two, but three Committees examining this Bill. Whether it is the Joint Committee, the Bill Committee or the Select Committee on Science and Technology, they were just three examples from a huge number and an unprecedented level of scrutiny that this hugely important Bill has received.

In the Bill Committee, on which I served with the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), we saw a remarkably conciliatory approach from those on the Front Bench. I also thought it was a genuine privilege to be in the same room as an Opposition who took a view that went so far above party politics, because this is a Bill that is above party politics. That is because what our constituents worry about, even more than the vital privacy concerns that the SNP has persistently raised, is the threat that we face in a global and unstable world. The threats that we have seen on the Committees examining this Bill are greater than they have ever been before and they need to be tackled in a fundamentally different way from that provided for in the broken legislation that is currently in force.

I would therefore argue, and I hope the whole House would agree, that this is legislation that transcends party politics and goes beyond what we have seen from the legislation that exists today. What is demanded from us in this House is legislation that understands and is adaptable to technology that is unlike that in the world that the previous legislation was built to combat. I believe sincerely—from a principled position, I could even say—that, whether on ICRs, protection for journalists, bulk powers or bulk datasets, this Bill struggles and finds the balance that we all need to keep our constituents safe. That is why I will be voting for it this evening.

6.41 pm

**Mr Winnick:** I accept, of course, the changes, that those on the Labour Front Bench have got from the Government—it would be churlish of me not to say so—and although I voted in all the Divisions with her, I dissociate myself from some of the remarks made by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), representing the Scottish National party. I am sure that those on my Front Bench work on the basis of trying to get the best possible arrangements for this measure, and I accept that.

Unfortunately, I do not accept that this Bill is necessary. It would have been even worse if the measures I have mentioned had not been included, although I suspect that the original Bill that came to us on Second Reading would still have been supported by virtually every Conservative Member. As far as I am concerned, the Bill is unacceptable. Despite the changes, it remains the position that internet service providers and others will be compelled in certain circumstances to retain every person's communication data, texts, emails and, indeed, browsing history. I find that far too intrusive and indiscriminate. It should not be part of such legislation.
It is the first time this has happened. I find it unfortunate that such a measure can be put before the House of Commons, even more so when I take into consideration what happened when the Labour Government were in office and the manner in which the Tory Opposition at every opportunity said that they had such a deep concern for civil liberties. This Bill is hardly an example of such concern.

We are told that the review of such bulk powers—which, as I have said, are totally unacceptable—is to be done by the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. That is fine, but should it not have been done before the measure came before the House of Commons? Why should it have to wait until the Bill goes to the unelected House of Lords? Why should we not have the conclusions of any such review?

Let me say that literally no one in this House has a monopoly when it comes to wanting to prevent terrorism. All of us deplore the slaughter of innocent people—the manner in which, for example, 7/7 occurred, in which 52 people were slaughtered and so many were injured, and of course the terrorism that goes on abroad. All of us want not just to condemn such terrorism, but to take effective measures to stop it happening in Britain and elsewhere. However, I do not believe that this is the way to achieve that. If I did, I would support the Bill with no hesitation whatsoever, whether I was in the majority or the minority: that would not concern me in the least.

It is interesting to note that, as I pointed out on Second Reading, a former technical director of the United States National Security Agency—who presumably had a fair amount of knowledge of such matters—argued, in an article in The Times, that bulk collection simply did not work. It did not work, Bill Binney said, because dealing with such vast amounts of details defeated the purpose. He made the good and valid point that what was required was the targeting of suspects and their social network—the targeting of those who, in the eyes of the security authorities and the police, were likely to cause damage and murder in our country.

I greatly regret that I cannot support the Bill, and believe that it should be defeated. I do not know what the House of Lords will do, but if the Bill is passed there, I hope that it will incorporate amendments that will make it somewhat more acceptable. However, one thing is certain: when I look back on my many years in the House of Commons, if I live long enough to reflect on votes in which I have participated, I shall be pleased that I voted against this Bill. It will give me some satisfaction that I voted against a measure that intrudes on civil liberties on such an extensive scale.

Several hon. Members rose—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. We have 14 minutes, and about six Members wish to speak. I hope that that will be borne in mind.

6.46 pm

**Mr Grieve:** It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick). We have co-operated on civil liberties matters in the past, and the hon. Gentleman has shown great courage in many of the approaches that he has taken, including those to legislation when his own party was in government. I hope he will accept, however—just as I accept the principles that underpin his opposition and, indeed, that of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)—that those of us who will support the Bill on Third Reading are not acting in an unprincipled fashion.

As was pointed out by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), the simple fact is that this is not just some opportunistic gimmick employed by the Government in an attempt to acquire more power. The existing legislation was doing positive harm; indeed, allowing it to remain would have been far more likely to undermine civil liberties than ensuring that it was properly replaced. It seems to me that, during its passage in the House of Commons, the Bill has been immeasurably improved. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for listening and responding to the concerns expressed by the Intelligence and Security Committee and for accepting virtually all our amendments, although I recognise that we shall need to negotiate on some areas of detail.

The ISC has always taken the collective view that this legislation is necessary, and that that necessity applies to bulk powers of collection. We look forward to and will accept David Anderson’s report, and will consider whether there are indeed any alternatives that might be advanced, but I have to say that, on the basis of everything that we have seen up to now, we believe that bulk powers are needed, although sensible and proper safeguards are required to ensure that they cannot be abused. The Bill contains such safeguards, and I believe that when it comes back from the other place, it will be in an even better condition. Parliament, it seems to me, has been doing its job rather well.

If I have any complaint to make about the Bill’s passage, it is this: the quantity of amendments tabled on Report has rendered the Order Paper entirely inadequate. Until we have an Order Paper that marries the amendment numbers to page numbers—which is vitally needed—we shall be wasting a great deal of our time in the Chamber faffing around when we might have been doing other things. I hope that that complaint is passed on. I might even suggest that someone should consult GCHQ if there is a difficulty in finding the necessary formula on a computer to do the page numbering and the amendment numbering at the same time.

With that thought, I just want to say that it has been a privilege to participate in the passage of this Bill, and I hope that when it comes back to this House we will be able to reassure the hon. Member for Walsall North and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West that they have a piece of legislation that will actually stand the test of time and be a credit to this House.

6.50 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael:** I recall that the first Public Bill Committee on which I served was on the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, when the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) led for the Conservatives. I seem to recall that he made the same point about the Order Paper in 2001. Despite the modernisation that we have seen over the past 15 years, it remains a piece of work that is outstanding.

My party voted against this Bill on Second Reading, and it is a matter of profound regret that I will be doing the same again tonight on Third Reading. Notwithstanding
[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

the progress that has been made, the Bill is still not yet fit for sending to the other place.

The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) reminded us that it was 15 years ago today that he and I were elected to this House. I have seen a lot happen in that time, and I like to think that I have learned a thing or two, one of which is that when Government Ministers and Government Back Benchers shower the Opposition Front Bench with praise, it is time to head for the hills because we are going to do something that is seriously bad and dangerous.

The first time that the right hon. Gentleman and I saw that in this House was in the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003 when the Conservatives, then in opposition, said that they would take the Government position on trust. Later on, they said, “Of course, if we had known what we know now, we would not have supported them at the time.” They could not have known then what they knew later, because they never asked the questions. It is not the job of the Opposition to take the Government’s views on trust, but that is what they are doing. I do not question their principle, but I am afraid I cannot share their judgment.

Andy Burnham: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be advocating an argument that we can only achieve progress by being oppositional or party political. Surely there are occasions when we can do more by working across the House. We have shown that on this issue and on others, such as Hillsborough and other past injustices.

Mr Carmichael: I do not need to take any lessons about working with other parties from the right hon. Gentleman. I did that for five years in a coalition Government when the Labour Front Bench could do nothing but tribally oppose.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Carmichael: No, I am sorry. We have a shortage of time, so I am not taking any more interventions—[Interruption.] It will not be worth listening to; will the right hon. Gentleman just sit down, please?

We are told that a review is coming from David Anderson QC. We anticipate further amendments regarding the definition of internet connection records. We still await further detail on how the thorny issues of legal privilege and journalistic sources will be protected. That all adds up to a picture of massive doubt, and massive questions remain about the efficacy and necessity of the powers that the Government are bringing forward tonight. It would be an abdication of our responsibility as Opposition MPs to vote for it, and I will not be party to that abdication.

6.56 pm

Victoria Atkins: No, thank you. The Bill Committee considered nearly 1,000 amendments, and in it the Government were led with style and eloquence by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security and my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General. It was a pleasure to hear the forensic examination of the Bill by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and contributions from the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). The scrutiny, care, considered argument and good will of those involved in the past seven months has improved this Bill. I have absolutely no doubt that it will help the security services, the police and other law enforcement agencies to protect us and to prosecute those who mean us harm. It is world-leading legislation and I commend it to the House.

Dr Murrison: I certainly rise to support this measure, which has improved enormously during its passage. I cannot think of a measure in my 15 years here that has been more thoroughly scrutinised than this one. Our constituents are going to be very pleased with what we have been doing over the past weeks and months. I have to say to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), whom I respect very much, that one thing our constituents dislike most about this place is the perpetual protest in opposition, which we hear too often, particularly from his party. It does him no good. This Bill is—

Mr Carmichael: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Murrison: Certainly not. This Bill has been characterised by consensus, and I have been heartened by the constructive attitude that the Labour Front Benchers have taken to this measure, moving from a position of abstention on Second Reading to one of support now. It does them a great deal of credit and has made this Bill very much better. The double lock was a turning point in this measure as far as I am concerned, but may I also say that the privacy clause, new clause 5,
is essential for many of us? The Home Secretary pointed that out. We have not had an opportunity to debate it very much today, but new clause 14, on health matters, has also been particularly important for a number of us who had concerns.

Clause 222 has not been debated at great length, but again it is vital because it allows us in five years’ time to come back to this measure to see what more needs to be done and what might be removed. That is particularly relevant in the context of ICRs. We have heard that one outstanding issue relates to the definition and use of ICRs, and I know that the other place will debate that at some length. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security has referred to it and he is right to do so. I firmly believe that we will want to come back to it in any event in five years’ time, as technology will have changed so much in that period.

In summary, I very much welcome this measure—it is absolutely right. I am convinced that this overwhelming majority of our constituents will be pleased with the assiduity we have applied to this measure and, in particular, with the consensual nature of our debate. It is a great measure. It will give our constituents the protection that they undoubtedly need, while safeguarding their historic liberties.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): For the remaining one and half minutes, I call Suella Fernandes.

Suella Fernandes: I will be short and to the point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise to speak in support of this Bill, as it is a hard-won fight for all of us, and something of which this whole House can be proud. The nature and scale of the threat that we face today differs from the one that we faced even 12 months ago, as it is rapidly evolving and complex. I am proud to have contributed to this Bill as a member both of the Joint Committee and the Bill Committee. We made more than 100 recommendations, many of which have been adopted by the Government.

It is vital for our constituents that we pass this Bill today, and it will get my vote. I wish to put on record my thanks to the Front-Bench team, which was led by the Home Secretary and ably assisted by her turbo-charged team of the Solicitor General and the Minister for Security who brought style, eloquence, professionalism and panache, and to our Government Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby). I am proud to support this Bill, and it has my vote tonight.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 444, Noes 69.

Division No. 13] [7.00 pm

AYES

Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Kevin
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berger, Luciana
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Betts, Mr Clive
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, rh Mr Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cardiff, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chihi, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Coville, Oliver
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Mims
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dowden, Oliver
Doyly-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliot, Julie
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Evans, rh Mr Nigel
Evernett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiell, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Furniss, Gill
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Gapes, Mike
Garner, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Glindon, Mary
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard

Noes

Abrahams, Debbie
Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Mr Graham
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Ashworth, Jonathan
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Kevin
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berger, Luciana
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Betts, Mr Clive
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, rh Mr Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cardiff, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chihi, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Coville, Oliver
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Mims
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dowden, Oliver
Doyly-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliot, Julie
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Evans, rh Mr Nigel
Evernett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiell, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Furniss, Gill
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Gapes, Mike
Garner, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Glindon, Mary
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gwynne, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hallon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hamilton, Fabian
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Harris, Rebecca
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, rh Mr John
Hayman, Sue
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, George
Hendrick, rh Mr Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, rh Mr George
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margaret
Jarvis, Dan
Javid, rh Sakid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkeys, Andrew
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Diana
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
near, Mr Marcus
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kyle, Peter
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Philip
Leslie, Charlotte
Leslie, Chris
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Kris
Lynch, Holly
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Macaggart, rh Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shahabah
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, rh Mr Alexander
Malhotra, Seema
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mathias, Dr Alan
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCabe, Steve
McCarty, Kerry
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mears, Ian
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merrin, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Millling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Mordaunt, Penny
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, Grahame M.
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Ian
Murray, Mrs Sherrill
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Nokes, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Opperman, Guy
Osamor, Kate
Paisley, Ian
Pawsey, Mark
Pearce, Teresa
Penning, rh Mike
Pennycook, Matthew
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Phillipson, Bridget
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Purseglove, Ann
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raab, Mr Dominic
Rayner, Angela
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rotheram, Steve
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Allok
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shellbrooke, Alec
Sherriff, Paula
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Slaughter, Andy
Smeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Jeff
Smith, rh Elizabeth
Smurthwaite, Dr Alan
Smith, Tom
Smith, Tom
Smith, Tom
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh Mr John
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Starmer, Keir
Stevens, Jo
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeting, Wes
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swain, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Derek
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Maggi
Timpson, Stephen
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Ed
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turley, Anna
Turner, Mr Andrew
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watson, Mr Tom
West, Catherine
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, rh Andrew
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Sammy
Winter, rh Dame Rosie
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wrang, William
Wright, Mr Iain
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Simon Kirby and
Sarah Newton
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Boswell, Philip
Brake, rh Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Dochezth-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
McNally, John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McGarry, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Theatlss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weather, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete
Tellers for the Noes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving advance notice of his point of order during the Division. I think that everybody shares his feeling that under no circumstances should that ever happen. I am delighted that he did make it to the Division, and that there are no further Divisions this evening in which Members could be prevented from voting. We will certainly ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate and get back to us in order to make sure that that never happens again. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

PETITION

Car parking facilities at Watermead Country Park, Leicester

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The petition concerns car parking facilities at Watermead country park in Leicester. It has been signed by 146 local residents. The signatures were collected by local volunteers Nik Pattini, Kam Kanabar, Kit Kotak and Jat Parmar. I also want to thank Councillors Rita Patel, Ross Willmott and Piara Clair and other local residents for their support.

I went down to Alderton Close and saw the congestion that local residents have had to put up with. Last Sunday the situation got so bad, with those who cannot park in Watermead country park deciding to park in this quiet cul de sac, that the police had to be called. The residents therefore want urgent measures to be taken.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Leicester East, Declares that additional car parking facilities for Watermead Country Park users are required urgently as during bank holidays and hot days the car park capacity for Watermead Country Park is insufficient for the number of visitors to the park; further that, once the car park is full, Watermead Country Park users park on Alderton Close; further that this blocks the residents’ drives and restricts the movement of cars entering and leaving the area as vehicles are backed up along the road; and further that local police have been called on numerous occasions to diffuse the situation between residents of Alderton Close and Watermead Country Park users.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Leicester City Council to extend the parking facilities at Watermead Country Park in Leicester.

And the petitioners remain, etc.
Comparative Healthcare Economics/NHS Finance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. — (Charlie Elphicke.)

7.19 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I need to start by confessing an interest as a doctor. We are now 18 months into the five year forward view, and the big question really is: what next? “What next?” really means bringing English healthcare outcomes up to the standard enjoyed in peer group European nations, and I am afraid that means much more money. I hope that, in the next few minutes, I can suggest how we might go about achieving that.

The average age of Members of Parliament is 51. That means that most Members of this House have tipped, or are tipping, into the demographic twilight zone in which the incidence of common and chronic diseases begins to accelerate—it is sad but true. That focuses the mind on what a successful healthcare economy looks like and what it delivers for patients.

When those 51-year-olds enter the danger zone in a few years’ time, what will success look like? Success will mean accommodating the great advances in medicine that we believe we are on the cusp of achieving, and that we hope will add years to life and life to years, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is particularly exercised about those matters. Success will mean dealing with the healthcare needs of an ageing demographic, an expanding population, and more chronic diseases of lifestyle, which will amount to a 3% per annum uplift in demand, according to NHS England and the Nuffield Trust.

Success will mean satisfying the legitimate demands of a less deferential, consumerist, better educated society that will not be content with second best. Success will mean closing the gap between healthcare outcomes here and in northern European countries with which we can reasonably be compared, and therein lies the “What next?”

In July 2010, the Government White Paper “Equity and excellence” exposed relatively poor health outcomes in the UK, compared with other countries. Our healthcare system was delivering poorer results in terms of mortality and morbidity. The most recent OECD statistics, published last year, have confirmed Britain’s relatively poor performance across pretty well the complete spectrum of common diseases—common cancers, ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease and the rest. Crucially, the number of unnecessary deaths—mortality amenable to healthcare—is substantially higher in the UK than in neighbouring countries.

However, healthcare is not just about reducing deaths. What about other measures of quality? Measures such as post-operative sepsis, pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis, obstetric trauma and diabetic complications are worryingly unimpressive in the UK, compared with countries we would consider to be in our peer group. Although the teenage pregnancy rate has improved in recent years, the UK bumps along the bottom of the EU league table with recent accession states. The list goes on.

The Swedish-based and well-respected, if drug firm-funded, Health Consumer Powerhouse has been reporting on the performance of Europe’s healthcare economies since 2005. The UK’s position in its Euro Health Consumer Index has always been mediocre, but in January the UK was ranked 14th out of 35—just above Slovenia, Croatia and Estonia, and below European countries that most Britons would regard as peers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter forward. This may seem a bit like politicking, but it none the less needs to be said. There is no doubt that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has the potential to threaten the very nature of our NHS. What is even clearer is that we are sending millions of pounds every week to the EU that could be invested in our NHS, where that money is much needed. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is great potential to properly resource and liberate our great NHS, were we to vote to leave the EU?

Dr Murrison: I think the hon. Gentleman and I are on the same side of the Brexit debate, and I certainly would welcome the extra money that would be spent on the NHS in the event that we leave the European Union, so fingers crossed for 23 June.

The Health Consumer Powerhouse report highlights poor accessibility and an “autocratic top-down management culture” here, in contrast to top-performing Holland’s removal of what Health Consumer Powerhouse calls “healthcare amateurs”—that is to say, politicians and bureaucrats—from decision making. Unhappily, that sounds rather familiar. Earlier this year, Dame Julie Moore slated fellow senior NHS managers for “gross incompetence” and poor leadership.

The question is, what, apart from its management, accounts for the UK’s lacklustre ranking? Despite the UK’s innovative cancer drugs fund, Health Consumer Powerhouse found, for example, relatively poor availability of the latest oncology interventions and therapeutics, including radiotherapy. Sadly, that rings true, and we remember the high-profile case of Ashya King, the five-year-old with medulloblastoma, who was taken by his parents in 2014 from Southampton general hospital to Spain and then the Czech Republic for proton beam therapy, which was not available here.

The much-vaunted Commonwealth Fund report that some use to claim that the NHS is super-efficient and effective actually contains just one element that deals directly with health outcomes—a composite of deaths amenable to medical care, of infant mortality and of life expectancy at 60, it puts the UK 10th out of 11, the US being bottom. Tenth out of 11 sophisticated healthcare economies is not where I want the UK to be, and not where the Minister wants the UK to be either. The British public would expect us to be doing rather better against a raft of healthcare outcomes where the UK is firmly in the wake of our immediate northern-European neighbours France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Denmark.

Can we explain why UK healthcare outcomes are not as good as those of peer group nations through differences in the level of healthcare funding? We can expect an opinion from the House of Lords, which last week set up a Select Committee under Lord Patel to examine the sustainability of the NHS—that is, the “what next?” question. I would be very surprised if it did not conclude that the answer is to bring spend up to the level enjoyed in countries such as France, Germany and Holland.
After all, closing the gap with the EU15 in health spending as a proportion of GDP was a goal explicitly set in 2000. However, Conservative Members tend to be somewhat wary of making spend a proxy for outcome. It is not enough just to write big cheques and consider the job done. Can we do better with what we have? There are apologists for our low spending on health who cite the supposed efficiency of the NHS, but simply asserting that the NHS is more efficient than health services in other countries does not make it true.

I do not know what is in the Minister’s speaking notes, but there is a very good chance that he will use the New York-based Commonwealth Fund analysis on comparative healthcare to support a contention that the NHS is very efficient and thus ameliorates the relatively low UK spend on healthcare. The report’s methodology rewards close examination. I am sure he will have read it thoroughly, but if not, I commend it to him. In my opinion, its methodology renders the sorts of deductions that have been made unsafe. The only reliable element of the analysis that is used to claim that the NHS is relatively efficient is the percentage of national expenditure spent on administration and insurance, meaning that the UK comes in at fifth out of 11. Given that the nature of our system means that insurance and transactional costs are very low, that is hardly something to crow about. Other markers of efficiency rely on patient and practitioner surveys and include items such as time spent filling out financial transaction forms. UK-relevant metrics, such as rehospitalisation rates, were found to be comparatively poor. I conclude that it would be unsafe to make claims about the relative efficiency of the NHS based on contestable reports like that of New York’s Commonwealth Fund.

Let us suppose for one moment that the NHS is fairly efficient—not very efficient, because Carter and others suggest that that would be unwise, but fairly efficient. Indeed, I have no reason to suppose that it is institutionally profligate. If it is fairly efficient, we will not be able to squeeze many more efficiencies from it beyond the Stevens assumptions, but we will still be left with relatively poor outcomes and still needing to know “what next?” Simon Stevens still believes that we can squeeze £22 billion in efficiencies from the NHS. Much of this, presumably, is predicated on productivity gains that are contingent on holding down salaries and wages—a challenge if incomes in the economy rise. This is what I think he means by “strong performance”—strong indeed, because the implied productivity gains of 2.4% are well in excess of anything that has been achieved by the NHS historically and well beyond expectations for the wider economy. It also depends on sustained spending on social services and public and preventive health. Both, in the event, have been impacted by cuts to local government funding—cuts that I supported and accept were entirely necessary to repair the public finances, but cuts nevertheless.

So “what next?” will inevitably mean a step change in input—in money—if not by the end of the five year forward view period, then without doubt during the next decade and beyond. Here again, it is instructive to look across the channel, where we find some good news on care, but it impacts on the international spending league table. It means that we overtake southern European countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. However, we still lag well behind Germany, France and the Netherlands—my chosen basket of similar European countries.

So what next? Data from the Kings Fund and the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggest that income tax must rise by at least 3p in the pound simply to offset the fall in NHS spending as a proportion of GDP predicted over the rest of the decade. But all that will do is arrest the UK’s relative downward trajectory towards being the sick man of Europe. To bring spend up to the EU15 average would now involve an 8p increase. That eye-watering sum may be toned down a little bit by the new Office for National Statistics method for calculating healthcare spend, but probably not greatly if the comparison we actually want to make is with our closest European neighbours France, Germany and the Netherlands.

So, if we accept that big fistfuls of money are needed, the question becomes, “How are we to get it?” The Labour party does not know. It has yet to say how much it thinks the NHS budget should be, despite every encouragement from me and others to do so. All we know is that the party opposed the Stevens uplift at the general election. Maybe the unaccustomed reticence about pledging money from the party of fiscal incontinence is an indication of the sheer scale of the spending challenge that even Labour has perceived in a rare lucid moment.

Although I have every confidence in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, a precipitous growth in the economy seems unlikely, and further borrowing should not be an option. In fact, half the £350 million per week that we send to the EU—a figure, net of rebate and subsidy, that I personally rely on—would, by my reckoning, halve the difference. I fervently hope that it will be in play after 23 June, but it would still leave a gap. How will that gap be closed? It is said that if we want a social healthcare system, we must choose between Bismarck and Beveridge. For my money, I cannot see how the huge transaction costs implicit in insurance-based models or large-scale schemes of co-payment would improve productivity or efficiency in our NHS—this despite the fact that the UK healthcare economy is distinguished from others by the small scale of its private provision.

For me, the Bismarck versus Beveridge debate is pretty much settled. However, I would expect a commission to examine all possible funding streams, drawing on experience from other countries. I would expect it to look closer to home at incentives that can be given to encourage subscription to mutuals, such as the Benenden Healthcare Society, formed in 1905 by and for Post Office workers, whose headquarters in York I visited recently.

But affirming that the great bulk of healthcare in the UK should continue to be funded through general taxation does not just mean more of the same. A variable hypothecated tax would be an easier sell to the public than a general tax hike. Treasury officials, or course, hate hypothecation, but the Treasury has been softening its approach in recent years and we are now, of course, wedded to the far less economically literate practice of hypothecated spend as a proportion of GDP for selected
areas of public expenditure. Despite the Treasury’s reluctance, if we are talking about several pence in the pound to bring UK health spending up to the average of neighbouring similar countries, we have to find a politically acceptable and publicly palatable way of doing so. Either way, gathering a consensus on this most sensitive and complex of public policy areas, using a vehicle on a spectrum from royal commission to non-departmental public body, surely makes sense. As a model, may I suggest the influential Pensions Commission, chaired by Adair Turner, during the last Labour Government?

If the NHS is the closest we have to a national religion, its critical friends are often seen as heretics. We saw that even at the height of the Mid Staffs’s scandal. How, then, are we to uphold this rallying point for national morality, decency and righteousness with the more prosaic imperatives to save and lengthen life, make sick people better, prevent ill health and match health outcomes in comparable countries? I hope that the Minister will agree that the proposal for a commission and associated national conversation—made by me and others in this House, in the other place and elsewhere—has merit. I warmly congratulate Ministers on successfully arguing the NHS’s corner at a time of austerity. However, I urge the Government to give serious thought to establishing a commission that will examine how we can properly and sustainably fund healthcare and close the widening gap that exists between us and our European neighbours.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I do not think that a commission is the right way to go, but does my hon. Friend agree that we sit on a new horizon, with molecular diagnostics, personalised medicine and so on, and that it is really important that we take a broader look at what our healthcare needs will be in future and how we can embrace more self-responsibility and new techniques for ensuring good patient outcomes? I said in this place in 2010 that we were lagging behind; sadly, we still are.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we are lagging behind. I hope that in the course of my remarks I have made it very clear that we are lagging behind countries with which we can reasonably be compared, particularly Germany, France and the Netherlands. The challenge is to bring our spend up to that level and to anticipate new developments and technologies. We should welcome that, because it will extend our lives and it will make us healthier for longer, but we do have to decide where the money will come from. Since the sums, I fear, will be so great, I believe that a commission would be a reasonable way to approach this matter and to have the conversation with the public about how the money will be raised.

The sands are fast running through the five year forward view hourglass. I believe it is time for Ministers to consider, “what next?”

7.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison)—my honourable and clinical friend—for bringing this debate to the House. I am only sorry that there are not many more people here this evening, because this subject goes to the heart of the prosperity, sustainability, health, wealth and resilience of our economy and society in the 21st century. I am very grateful that he has raised it.

This subject raises, and my hon. Friend has raised, a number of important issues. I start by pointing out that our ability to fund the NHS is profoundly based on our ability to run a strong economy. Without getting distracted into discussing the merits of the case for Brexit, I would just say that it is very difficult to find any serious commentator who thinks that leaving the European single market would be good for our economic growth prospects. It would therefore have a direct impact on our ability to fund the NHS.

My hon. Friend made a number of important points. He rightly flagged up the importance of outcomes not inputs, and said that we should be driven not by inputs, but by outputs. He spoke of a better use of existing budgets, as well as the need for new money. He mentioned the importance of new care pathways that are changing the way we diagnose and treat disease, and indeed prevent disease in the first place. He also spoke of the importance of technology and productivity in allowing us to get more health for every pound that we spend.

The mission that I am delighted to say sits at the heart of the new portfolio that I hold as the first Minister for Life Sciences is to accelerate the uptake of innovation in our healthcare system to help us deliver more health for every pound, and to generate more pounds from our life sciences and health technology sector to help pay for our growing health costs as a society.

My hon. Friend touched on the fact that we have always had a mixed healthcare economy in this country—a mixture of public funding, charitable funding and some private funding. That mixed economy is mirrored across Europe, with different countries having different balances. He raised the equally important issue of health and care integration, and how as an ageing society we can tackle that challenge.

In the short time available, I want to say something about international health comparisons, which my hon. Friend raised, health outcomes and what the Government are doing. He mentioned the 2010 Government White Paper, “Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS”, in which it was acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve health outcomes in comparison to other countries. It stated:

“Compared to other countries… the NHS has achieved relatively poor outcomes in some areas. For example, rates of mortality amenable to healthcare, rates of mortality from some respiratory diseases and some cancers, and some measures of stroke have been amongst the worst in the developed world.”

I do not shy away from that. We are in the process, with NHS England, of grasping those issues.

It is true that the NHS has, at times, scored relatively poorly on being responsive to particular patient groups. We have had problems with MRSA that were worse than the European average. There is some international evidence that shows that we have much further to go on managing care more thoroughly. For example, the NHS has had high rates of acute complications of diabetes and avoidable asthma admissions.

I do not for a minute come here tonight to pretend that everything is perfect. But the truth is that it is difficult to compare like for like, as all healthcare systems
are different and there are many ways to compare them. For example, the OECD’s latest report on amenable mortality rates shows that the UK has average rates of amenable mortality in the OECD, and is not among the worst in the developed world, as has been suggested at times. The NHS has been ranked first overall in the Commonwealth Fund report. I accept my hon. Friend’s point about the report only measuring certain factors, but on quality, access and efficiency the NHS was ranked the No. 1 system in the world—I do not deny that scope for improvement was flagged in outcomes and healthy lives.

On the latest OECD data, for 2013, it is true that total health spending in the UK, inclusive of public and private spend, at 8.5% of GDP is lower than the EU15 average of 9.5% of GDP, but it is around the same as the OECD average of 8.9%, and the UK delivers above average health outcomes for an average level of expenditure within the OECD. The majority of UK health funding is through general taxation. Reviews of the evidence have shown that using general taxation as the main mechanism for healthcare funding is still fairest and most efficient. That raises the long-term point that my hon. Friend is flagging, which is that we need to think about how we want to fund the levels of healthcare that our ageing society is likely to need.

The OECD has said that no broad type of healthcare system performs systematically better than another in improving a population’s health status in a cost-effective manner. In his 2002 review, Derek Wanless concluded, interestingly:

“Private funding mechanisms tend to be inequitable, regressive (those with greater health needs pay the most), have weak incentives for cost control, high administration costs and can deter appropriate use.”

For that reason and many others this Government are absolutely committed to funding the NHS through the existing mechanism to the highest level we can afford as a society.

On health outcomes, I want to flag in particular the point my hon. Friend made about cancer. Cancer survival rates are at a record high and continue to improve, as shown by the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics in February this year. We know that we have to continue to do better. Every other country is improving, and technology is changing; that is why the independent cancer taskforce report, “Achieving World-Class Cancer Outcomes. A Strategy for England 2015-2020”—published to wide acclaim in July 2015—has pulled together a consensus from the whole cancer community. That strategy sets out a number of important measures that we are committed to and are seeing through: a radical upgrade in prevention and public health; a national ambition to achieve much earlier diagnosis; establishing patient experience on a par with clinical effectiveness and safety; and transforming the way we support people living with and beyond cancer, as there are now 850,000 people living with cancer.

New drugs on the horizon offer the prospect of actually curing cancer in some patients. That is an extraordinary breakthrough, and we are making the necessary investments to embrace genomic personalised cancer care. In the NHS and ensure that commissioning provision and accountability processes are brought up to date and are more fit for purpose. At the heart of all that is the need to adapt to the new drugs coming through, which is why I have launched the accelerated access review to look at the way in which we assess, adopt and reimburse new medicines, and unleash the power of our NHS to provide data and genomic insights to drive the increasingly personalised and precision medicines that the cancer community is producing.

I do not want to pretend that the issues my hon. Friend has raised are not real. They are real, for a number of reasons, not least our rising population. By 2030, England’s population is forecast to reach 60.2 million, a rise of more than 6 million from 2015. Over the same period, the number of people aged 85 and over is expected to grow by more than 74%, an increase of 1 million from 1.3 million to 2.3 million. That puts huge pressure on our system of both health and care, and speaks to the importance of integration. That is why we have supported NHS England’s own five year forward view—its own action plan; I am sure that, like me, he welcomes the fact that as a result of our reforms NHS England’s clinical and professional leaders are now able to set out their requests for how they want to manage the system, and we fund them and hold them to account in doing that. It has put in place a number of important mechanisms to change the models of care and to update how the system treats those key chronic diseases. If those services continue to be provided under the old model of 1947—silo care—they will put unsustainable pressure on our system.

NHS England is putting in place a range of measures, including the new care model vanguard sites—there are 50 of them around the country—and the Carter report on procurement. We are improving clinical commissioning group performance through the Right Care programme. We are putting in substantial extra money, including £2.1 billion in the sustainability and transformation fund, £4 billion for technology and the digitisation of the NHS, and billions for new drugs.

Crucially, we need to upgrade how the system diagnoses and treats so that we can liberate people from the 20th-century model of heavy dependence on the state system to provide healthcare at its convenience, where people queue to receive healthcare. We want to move to a system in which people can live with and manage diseases better from home and be productive citizens in the economy and society. A huge amount of work is happening on new care pathways.

Integration was at the heart of my hon. Friend’s speech. We need to develop a health and care system in which we recognise that, particularly for the elderly, health and care need to be seamless. In our system today, they are not. That is why we have set up the better care fund, and given local authorities the freedom to raise extra money through the local care precept, which will in itself put £3.5 billion extra into supporting care, including £500 million for disabilities facilities, which will prevent 8,500 people from needing to go into care homes.

We are putting the money in to try to support local health and care integration, but we want to go further and faster, which we must do as a society and economy. We do not want to impose top-down solutions; we want to create situations in which local health economies can adopt the right mechanisms and the right processes for them.

In this Parliament, we have responded to NHS England’s leadership’s requests. It set out clearly before the election its five year forward view and forecast that, by 2020, we
George Freeman would be looking at £30 billion of extra health costs, of which it said £22 billion would be avoidable with technology, transformation, better care models, digitisation, smarter and remote diagnostics, and more people being empowered and enabled so that they would not have to present at GP surgeries and hospitals so often. We have backed that plan. It asked for £8 billion a year, but by 2020 we will give it £10 billion. We have front-loaded that with £3.8 billion in 2016-17, the £3.5 billion for social care and the £4 billion for technology. Nobody can say that the Government have not put their money where the NHS’s mouth is. The NHS said that that is what it needed, and we have provided it.

In giving succour to the idea of a royal commission, I would not want to undermine that very important settlement, but I recognise that the points my hon. Friend has raised go to the heart of the big health and care debate we need to have as a society. The Government do not believe that a royal commission is the right solution, but I support the debate and want more of us to have it locally.

In the end, all hon. Members know that it is in their local health economies that the leaders who can crack this problem for us exist. We need to incentivise them. That is why the devolution plans and the integration of devolved budgets, and the measures we are considering to incentivise local health economies—we want not to reward them through tariffs for the treatment of disease, but to reward them for the prevention of disease—are so exciting. Ultimately, they provide the basis for optimism in the long term. We need to get more out of the money we spend as well as raise more money as a society. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

7.49 pm

House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Manufacturing

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps the Government is taking to support manufacturing in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): Our long-term plan is delivering a stronger economy across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. We are keeping interest rates low by dealing with the deficit, and we are boosting enterprise and investment by cutting corporation tax.

Nic Dakin: The manufacturing sector makes up roughly one in four jobs in Northern Ireland, so it is not surprising that 81% of businesses in Northern Ireland want us to stay in the European Union. Are those businesses right, or is the Secretary of State right?

Mrs Villiers: The Government’s position on this is clear, and we are united in delivering our long-term economic plan to ensure that we deliver economic stability for Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcome confirmation in the Assembly only this week that 80,000 people are working in manufacturing in Northern Ireland—more than at any point since Labour crashed the economy in 2008.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): Just this morning the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee began an inquiry into the energy sector, in particular the electricity sector, in Northern Ireland, and high energy costs are a problem for the manufacturing sector. No doubt we will speak to the Secretary of State, or perhaps a Minister, about that issue, but does she have any initial thoughts on that problem?

Mrs Villiers: I gather that my hon. Friend has been having lively discussions in his Committee on these matters, including on issues relating to the super-connector. It is important that those issues are resolved, so that everything possible can be done to keep energy costs low in Northern Ireland. The UK Government have taken action to support high-energy industries, saving them around £400 million over this Parliament, including exemptions from certain EU obligations.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is clearly good news that manufacturing jobs and output are increasing in Northern Ireland. What further steps can my right hon. Friend take to ensure that the Northern Ireland economy is further rebalanced in favour of the private sector?

Mrs Villiers: The implementation of the Stormont House agreement, and the measures on economic reform that it contains, are vital, as it is that the Government continue with their long-term economic plan, which is delivering the stability that manufacturing needs to flourish in Northern Ireland.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State recently joined the chief executive officer of Invest Northern Ireland at the successful launch of the “Exporting is GREAT” roadshow, and I thank her for attending. Northern Ireland is the only region of the United Kingdom in which exports have grown by 9% in the past 12 months. What other initiatives will the Government commit to, to ensure that exporting continues to be boosted for companies in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: We will continue with our “Exporting is GREAT” programme which, as the hon. Gentleman said, has a strong focus in Northern Ireland, and we will use our network of embassies around the world to promote Northern Ireland. It is positive that there is a commitment to devolving corporation tax setting powers to the Northern Ireland Executive as soon as finances are sustainable enough to make that possible, and the forthcoming reduction in corporation tax will be an even greater support for exports.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Secretary of State will know that Northern Ireland exports as much to the rest of the EU as it does to the rest of the world combined. Does she therefore appreciate just how important that makes continued membership of the EU to businesses in Northern Ireland, and will she encourage a remain vote to help those businesses?

Mrs Villiers: The Government remain absolutely committed to doing all we can to promote exports from Northern Ireland and inward investment into Northern Ireland. Both sides of the debate are committed to continuing to work together strongly to deliver our manifesto commitments and our long-term economic plan, whatever the outcome of the referendum on 23 June.
Mr Speaker and fellow Europeans, I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will join me and the House in welcoming the latest official trade figures, which show an increase in manufacturing exports. The value of goods exported in the last period was up by £6.6 billion—a 9% increase—from 2015. Interestingly, they also show that the majority of exports—52%—went to the EU, while the largest value increases were to the United States of America and South Korea. Does this not prove the case for remaining? Do we not have the best of both worlds? Do we not have an ideal opportunity to trade with the world’s biggest trading bloc and the major economies of the rest of the world? I am sure she will agree with that.

Mrs Villiers: I agree with the Prime Minister’s statement that trade will continue after the referendum, whatever the result. He was clear that we would continue to trade with the EU if the British people choose on 23 June to leave the EU.

Security Situation

2. Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had on the security situation in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [905249]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The Government are determined to do everything possible to keep people in Northern Ireland safe. I meet the Chief Constable, the Justice Minister and others regularly to discuss the security situation. I would like to acknowledge the exceptional work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which does an outstanding job tackling the terrorism threat.

Tom Blenkinsop: Will the Secretary of State join me in praising our security services for helping recently to uncover a cache of paramilitary arms? If she can, will she tell the House whether the armaments found were a historical cache or more modern weaponry?

Mrs Villiers: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there are limits to what I can share with the House, but I can assure him that the police are doing everything they can to bring to justice whoever was responsible for this cache of arms and that efforts, both north and south of the border, remain intense in seeking to press down on the terrorist threat. Sadly, there continues to be a significant amount of activity from small groupings seeking to pursue their aims by terror, but, thankfully, in the vast majority of cases, their plans do not result in harm being carried out, and that is because of the excellent work of the police.

11. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is obviously excellent and heartening news that the number of shooting incidents has fallen to its lowest level since 1969, but there obviously remains a credible threat from dissidents. Does the Secretary of State agree that even more needs to be done to choke off funding from organised crime and smuggling on both sides of the border?

Mrs Villiers: A huge amount of work is being done on these matters, but my hon. Friend is right that more can always be done. I warmly welcome the publication of the report on paramilitary activity by the panel this week. We have managed to get national security attacks down to 16 in 2015 from 40 at their peak in 2010, but it is crucial that Northern Ireland as a whole moves forward, away from paramilitarism. Many of the recommendations in the panel’s report will help us to achieve the goal of ending paramilitary activity.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am sure the Secretary of State and the whole House will join me in wishing Northern Ireland and the green and white army all the very best in the Euros, which start this Friday. Indeed, I extend that to all the teams involved from the British Isles.

On a more serious note, on security, the threat level assessment of Irish-related terrorism was recently raised from “moderate” to “substantial” for Great Britain. Has the Secretary of State given further consideration to the calls to increase PSNI numbers by 1,000, as recommended by the Police Federation, and certainly to bring them up to the level recommended by Patten?

Mrs Villiers: I share the right hon. Gentleman’s sentiments on the Northern Ireland football team and the other teams from the British Isles. I wish them well in the competition.

On the security situation, the Government of course support the efforts by the police, not just through the block grant but through the additional security funding, and further funding will be made available to tackle paramilitarism under the “Fresh Start” agreement. It is crucial that every effort be made in this area. The UK Government will continue to do all they can to support efforts to keep people in Northern Ireland safe and secure.

Mr Dodds: The Secretary of State will be aware that the panel set up under the “Fresh Start” agreement reported today on ways to tackle paramilitarism. Some of the recommendations fall within the remit of the Northern Ireland Office. Will she give an initial response to the report, and will she join me, the Northern Ireland Executive and all the parties in Northern Ireland committed to ensuring that the choice for people in Northern Ireland is now clear—either a democratic, peaceful way forward, or facing the courts and prosecution by the police?

Mrs Villiers: I can certainly agree with the right hon. Gentleman on those sentiments. It is a continuing tragedy that so many people in Northern Ireland are injured or murdered as a result of these brutal paramilitary-style assaults. My initial reaction to the panel’s report is to welcome it. I think it makes many good points, and I very much look forward to working with the Northern Ireland Executive as they develop their strategy in response to this important report.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Following on from that, yesterday’s panel report publication suggests that the PSNI has chosen to engage with some known terrorists rather than arrest them. How concerned is the Secretary of State about that assertion?

Mrs Villiers: The panel makes reference to certain contacts that have taken place on an informal basis with some of these groupings. The panel’s report sets out a
road to seeing an end to those kinds of interactions. It is something that we shall work towards in the future because we do not want these organisations to exist any more.

**EU Referendum**

3. **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions she has had with the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly on the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU; and if she will make a statement. [905250]

5. **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly on the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU; and if she will make a statement. [905252]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland** (Mr Ben Wallace): Ministers have regular meetings with representatives of the Northern Ireland parties to discuss a range of issues. The Government’s position is clear: we are safer, stronger and better off in a reformed European Union.

*Geraint Davies*: Only two countries in the EU run a trade surplus with Britain: Holland and Germany, and the rest have a deficit. If there is Brexit, the rest will vote for tariffs, which would lead to inward investment moving from Northern Ireland into southern Ireland, and it will be the same for extra opportunities and jobs. How can the Minister and indeed the Secretary of State justify supporting Brexit when it will lead to a movement of jobs to the south, along with advancing the cause of unification and the rising of sectarian tensions?

**Mr Wallace**: If I may correct the hon. Gentleman, I fully support remaining in the European Union, and so do the United Kingdom Government. We are acutely aware of the points he raised, as 87% of the agricultural exports of Northern Ireland go south to the Republic, and we do not want to see any trade barriers put in the way. That is why we want to remain in the European Union.

**Peter Kyle**: There has been a period in which both Ireland and Britain have been outside the European Union and a period in which they have both been inside it, but if we vote to leave, it will be an historically unprecedented period in which one is out and the other is in. What assessment is the Department making of the impact of that on the border between our great nations?

**Mr Wallace**: The Government are clear that, should the United Kingdom leave the European Union, the border between the EU and UK will be the land border in Northern Ireland. That will place us outside the customs union, which will mean delay, checks and other reforms that will hamper our ability to export to and import from the Republic of Ireland.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister not agree that the reality is that trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will continue very much as it has for centuries—regardless of whether we are in or out of the European Union?

**Mr Wallace**: What my hon. Friend misses is that export into the Republic of Ireland is also a gateway into the rest of the European Union and provides access to 500 million customers for United Kingdom goods. If we leave the European Union, that will, of course, be hampered; there will be a customs union on our borders, which will mean delays and barriers to our trade.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): The Secretary of State will have noticed the recent significant slowdown in foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland because of the uncertainty about the outcome of the referendum. Has the Secretary of State made any assessment of the impact of a UK exit on the future of job creation and specifically of a British exit decision that might arrest foreign direct investment and render the reduction in corporation tax as of little benefit?

**Mr Wallace**: It is certainly the view of the United Kingdom that if we leave the European Union, that foreign direct investment would be put under threat. It might go elsewhere in the EU rather than in the UK. We do not want to see that happen; we want to continue to remain in the EU. Luckily, I think for all of us, there is not long to go before we can cast our votes.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): The EU debate has focused over the last few days on migration. Does the Minister agree that migrants have brought in great skills to Northern Ireland, and will he clarify how he sees migration working after Brexit, if we leave?

**Mr Wallace**: What is often missed by people who want us to leave the European Union is the fact that, owing to our United Nations obligations under the 1951 treaty, the 1967 appendix and the 1984 and 1989 convention rights, if we did leave we would have to continue to take people who come to our shores seeking asylum and refuge. We would still not be able to decide 100%. Only North Korea can do that, and I do not fancy following North Korea.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): During his discussions with the Northern Ireland parties, has the Minister said whether he thinks that it would help the police if we left the European Union, given that, before the introduction of the European arrest warrant, extradition took, on average, a year rather than the 48 days that it takes now, and given that 162 criminals have been removed from Northern Ireland since 2009 through the use of the arrest warrant?

**Mr Wallace**: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. The ability to remove people whom we do not want so that they face trial elsewhere in Europe is a very powerful tool for our forces of law and order in Northern Ireland. We have deported 190 people to face trial, including terrorists from Spain, and we have managed to bring back 34 people to face justice in the United Kingdom. That is a tool that we need: it keeps people safe in Northern Ireland and in the United Kingdom as a whole, and to turn our backs on it would be foolish.

**Vernon Coaker**: I agree with what the Minister has said, even if his own Secretary of State does not.
Both the Chancellor and the Northern Ireland Office have spelt out the consequences for the border of leaving the EU. Moreover, I have a copy of a letter to the Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade in which the Home Office also spells out the potential consequences for the common travel area, given that an estimated 30,000 people cross the border every day. The letter states:

“If the UK left the EU these arrangements would be put at risk.”

Does the Minister agree, and has he told the Northern Ireland parties that?

Mr Wallace: The common travel area existed before the European Union, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is totally unclear what arrangements would exist after a Brexit. That is why the best solution is to remain in the European Union, so that we can take advantage of both the single market and the free travel of people, skills and trade that we enjoyed before membership.

Terrorism Threat

4. Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to tackle the increased terrorism threat in Great Britain from Northern Ireland. [905251]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): Our first duty is to keep people safe, and we give our full support to the police and the intelligence services. The threat level in Great Britain recently changed to “substantial”, meaning that an attack by dissidents is a strong possibility. People should be vigilant and alert, but not alarmed.

Maria Caulfield: Police and prison officers who tirelessly serve the community day in and day out are often the targets of republican dissident activity. What measures are being taken to mitigate the risk that they face?

Mrs Villiers: An extensive range of measures are being taken. The protection of police and prison officers is at the heart of our efforts to counter the terrorist threat in Northern Ireland, because the threat that they face is one of the most serious faced by any profession. The additional security funding provided by the Government under the “Fresh Start” agreement is contributing to necessary protections for the police and prison officers who do such an important job for our whole community, and we will continue to do all that we can to protect them.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State agree that, while we face a threat from dissident republicans in Northern Ireland, the greatest such threat comes from the Republic of Ireland, as has been demonstrated by the recent arms and explosives finds and arrests, and does she agree that those dissident republicans have the capacity to launch campaigns on the UK mainland?

Mrs Villiers: It is certainly true that dissident republican terrorist groupings have the aspiration to attack in Great Britain. Their main focus remains Northern Ireland, but they do have that capability and lethal intent. Every effort is being made to counter their activities, including their activities south of the border, through the co-operation that now exists between the police services and other security organisations in the north and the south.

Organised Crime and Terrorism

6. Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Irish Government on cross-border efforts to stop organised crime and terrorism. [905253]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): In December, as part of the implementation of the “Fresh Start” agreement, I attended a meeting with the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive at which we agreed on new measures to enhance co-operation on cross-border organised crime.

Tom Pursglove: I strongly welcome the arrangements that have been agreed as part of the “Fresh Start” agreement, but does the Secretary of State agree that there must be both strategic and operational co-operation to dismantle gangs and their activities?

Mrs Villiers: I would agree, and that is exactly what is happening. The new joint agency taskforce established as a result of the “Fresh Start” agreement enables exactly that kind of operational co-operation on cross-border crimes such as fuel laundering, human trafficking and drug smuggling, and I welcome the progress that has been made on that.

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State agree that is really important that cross-border crime should be tackled as part of the follow-up to the panel’s report on paramilitary activity? It will continue whether we are in the European Union or outside it, and it must be tackled head on.

Mrs Villiers: There is absolute determination on the part of the Governments of the UK and Ireland and the law enforcement agencies of both countries that we should continue to do everything we can to co-operate in countering the terrorist threat and the criminality associated with terrorist and paramilitary groups.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Secretary of State must recognise how much organised crime—including cross-border crime—is derived from paramilitarism, and how much it uses networks and assets that have been accrued under paramilitary campaigns. Does she therefore agree that any serious effort to eradicate paramilitarism on a whole-community and whole-enforcement basis cannot ignore such criminal enterprises with menaces, which are the vestiges of paramilitarism?

Mrs Villiers: I agree, and it will be well worth considering the views in the panel’s report on the laws that apply to organised crime in Scotland and the ways of cracking down on this kind of criminality there. It will be worth considering whether we could learn lessons from Scotland and impose statutory changes of that nature in Northern Ireland.

Implications of the UK Leaving the EU

7. Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): What assessment she has made of the potential implications for border controls and security in Northern Ireland of the UK leaving the EU. [905254]
Mr Wallace: Were the United Kingdom to choose to leave the European Union, the negotiations about what would happen between the sovereign state of the United Kingdom and the European Union would be done between the European Union and that country. The Republic of Ireland would therefore have a say in that, but it would not have an overall say on the terms of our exit. That is why the best solution is to remain in the European Union and to take advantage of its security, because we are better, safer and stronger in it.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Given that Brexit will threaten policing and security in the communities of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the communities of Ireland, will the Minister advise the Secretary of State to get out and campaign for the European arrest warrant to remain in place and for a remain vote on 23 June?

Mr Wallace: It is delightful to hear the Scottish National party talk about Great Britain from time to time. We will of course be delighted to ensure that we maintain the European arrest warrant and our membership of Europol by staying in the European Union, so I suggest that we all get out and campaign.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905133] Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 8 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mims Davies: Emily Davison died on 8 June 1913. Yesterday, we commemorated women’s suffrage and the importance of votes for women—and women voting for women, of course. Thousands wanted to register to vote yesterday but were unable to due to massive demand. Will the PM update the House on what he is doing to ensure that everyone has the chance to register to vote and can do so in this vital vote for a generation?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me join my hon. Friend in remembering what the suffragettes stood for, what they achieved and the fact that we achieved universal suffrage in this country. She raises voter registration and I am sure that the whole House will want to know what the situation is. Look, it is extremely welcome that so many people want to take part in this massive democratic exercise and in this vital decision for our country. Last night, there was record demand on the
Jeremy Corbyn: The case of Sports Direct shows that Mike Ashley certainly is not Father Christmas. Indeed, he makes Scrooge look like a good employer. I think we should commend Unite the union and its members for exposing what went on. It shows that we must strengthen, not weaken, workers’ rights, particularly when criminal activity is involved.

However, the Government’s Employment Minister, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), said that if we leave Europe, “we could just halve the burdens of the EU social and employment legislation”.

Perhaps the Prime Minister can help us. Does she speak on behalf of the Government when she promises to reduce the “burdens”, as she describes them, of employment legislation, or on behalf of whom does she speak?

The Prime Minister: The Government are in favour of staying in a reformed European Union because we are stronger, safer and better off. One reason that many people will want to stay in the European Union is that they believe it provides an underpinning of rights for workers and employment rights. I would make the point, in addition, that we in this House have repeatedly chosen to go over and above those rights: we have had the right to request flexible working for all workers since 2014; we went well beyond the EU directive on maternity leave by giving 52 weeks’ maternity leave; we have provided shared parental leave; and we give eight days more annual leave to full-time workers than the EU working time directive. I believe that this modern, compassionate Conservative Government have an excellent record on these things, underpinned by our membership of the European Union.

Jeremy Corbyn: If this is a modern, compassionate Conservative Government, as the Prime Minister describes them, why do they have an Employment Minister who wants to reduce the “burdens”, as she describes them, of employment legislation and make work less secure? I will quote one other person who has given some opinions on these matters:

“I can’t guarantee every person currently in work in their current job will keep their job.”

That was the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who is the Justice Secretary. He seems equally relaxed about employment rights. The Prime Minister has an Employment Minister and a Justice Secretary who want to reduce workers’ protections, which they describe as a “burden”. Can’t he do something about that?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are holding a referendum. That is what is happening. The Government have a very clear position, which is that we are stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union. That is the advice that we are giving to voters in our country, but of course there are Ministers in the Government who, in a personal capacity, are campaigning on another side of the argument. I do not agree with them—I do not agree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) said and I do not agree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) said. I could not be clearer about that. The Government have a clear position.
On this issue, not only do the right hon. Gentleman and I agree—not only do the Conservative Government and the Labour party agree—but we have the support of the Liberal Democrats, the support of the Ulster Unionist party and the support of the Green party. This is one occasion when business, large and small, and the trade unions are on the same side. I think that we should celebrate that, and get out and campaign as hard as we can.

Jeremy Corbyn: What I do celebrate is the work done by trade unions all across Europe that persuaded the European Union to bring in four weeks’ paid holiday, laws against sex discrimination, rights for part-time workers and rights for agency workers.

Two weeks ago, I raised with the Prime Minister the proposed amendment to the posting of workers directive, which would close a loophole that allows unscrupulous employers to exploit migrant workers and undercut wages here. Will he now reply to my question and confirm that he will argue in Europe for that amendment to close the loophole that allows this exploitation to go on?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, we support the current draft. We want to see this sorted out. We have been working with the Dutch Prime Minister who is leading this work, and we think that an amendment would be worth while. The current draft is good and we back it.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am very pleased that the Prime Minister backs the amendment, but I hope that he backs it to ensure that it goes through. Another issue that I raised with him a couple of weeks ago is the anger over tax avoidance that exists all over this country and indeed all over the western world. I agree that we are more likely to make progress on tax avoidance inside the European Union than outside it, but his Members of the European Parliament have not been supporting country-by-country tax transparency, which would force companies to publish their tax payments in each country in which they operate. Will he now tell us when that will be supported by his MEPs and when it will go through so that we can close down just one of the many tax loopholes that currently exist?

The Prime Minister: I would argue that no Government have done more nationally to crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. I would also argue that no Government have done more internationally to bring this up in the international agenda: I made it the centrepiece at the G8; we have driven change in the OECD; and we are now driving change in the European Union. Let me confirm that my MEPs do support country-by-country reporting, and they have said that over and again, and I am happy to repeat it again today.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am really pleased that the Prime Minister’s MEPs support this transparency; we are all delighted about that. I just hope that they get round to voting for it when the opportunity comes up, because that would certainly help. He will be aware that Labour’s position is that we want to stay in the European Union to improve workers’ rights, tackle exploitation, and drive down tax evasion and tax avoidance, but we are concerned that those issues are not the priorities of members of his Government and his party, such as the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and the right hon. Members for Surrey Heath and for Witham. They are talking about trying to destroy any of the social advances made within the European Union. Does he talk to them about that at any time? Do they speak for themselves or for him and his Government? If they speak for themselves, how are they Ministers at the same time?

The Prime Minister: Here I am trying to be so consensual. I am doing my best. I could mention that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) was out yesterday spinning for Nigel Farage, but I do not want to play that game. I want to stress the unity of purpose that exists, particularly over the issue of tax evasion, because there is a serious point here. What we have in prospect in the European Union, in part because of British action, is the idea of saying that if large foreign multinationals want to invest in the European Union, they will have to report their country-by-country tax arrangements not just in Europe, but all over the world. That could drive a huge change in some of these very large companies in which there are great concerns. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and I can unite and say that this would be a good thing, as it shows that when Britain pushes an agenda in Europe it wins, and it wins for our citizens.

Q2. [905134] Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The Prime Minister has repeatedly stated that he secured changes to reform the EU. Will he now confirm that, on 23 June, the voters are not guaranteed any treaty change in EU law as no treaty change was achieved despite a promise to deliver one, and that an international agreement cannot change EU law? Finally, will he stop denigrating our great country, because it is a sign, if any were needed, that he is losing the argument?

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend has very strong views on this issue, and I have very strong views on it, too. On the specific point that he raises, I am afraid that he is not correct. In the renegotiation, we secured two vital treaty changes: one on getting Britain out of ever-closer union; and the other on the protection for our currency. I do not accept for one minute that supporting Britain being a member of a reformed European Union is in any way doing our country down. If you love your country, you want to be strong in the world. If you love your country, you want opportunities for your young people. If you love your country, you do not want to act in a way that could lead to its break-up. That is why what I want to see is not Nigel Farage’s little England, but a strong Britain in Europe.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Last week, thousands of dead from both sides in the battle of Jutland were remembered in commemorations in which the Prime Minister joined the First Minister, the Princess Royal and the President of Germany, along with thousands of other people, on Orkney to remember the tragedy of so many people losing their life. European co-operation emerged from both world wars as the best way to secure peace, so does the Prime Minister agree that we should never take peace and security for granted, and that that is a strong reason to remain in the European Union?
The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There were very moving scenes as we stood on that cemetery ground, with the British and German frigates in the background together in Scapa Flow—a sight that I will not forget—as we commemorated and remembered how many people lost their lives. I want to be clear about this: the words “world war three” have never passed my lips, let me reassure everyone of that—[Interruption.] Of course, they have now; well spotted. But can we really take for granted the security and stability we enjoy today, when we know that our continent has been racked by so many conflicts in the past? Like all Conservatives, I would always give the greatest credit to NATO for keeping the peace, but I think that it has always been a Conservative view that the European Union has played its role as well.

Angus Robertson: This is not about world war three, but about the realities—the facts. There have been wars on the European continent, but outside the European Union; they have happened in the Balkans, in Ukraine and in the Caucasus. It is a fact that there has never been a single example of armed conflict between member states of the European Union. Will the Prime Minister, in the little time that is left ahead of the European referendum, take the time to stress the positive advantages of co-operation, peace and stability for us all, and not just of the single market or the rights we have as citizens? Peace and prosperity are an advantage to us all, and that is why we should remain in the European Union.

The Prime Minister: I very much take on what the right hon. Gentleman says. I think that the strongest argument for the Government’s position of wanting us to stay is that we would be better off, and that that market of 500 million people is essential for our businesses. The argument that I was just making—that we will be stronger in the world, in terms of getting things done for Britain and for our citizens—is important, but the argument that we are safer and more secure because the European Union is a means for dialogue between countries that were previously adversaries is one that I never forget. However frustrating it can get around that table with 27 other Prime Ministers and Presidents, I never forget that these are countries that were previously in conflict. Now, we talk, we discuss, we argue and we decide, and that is a far better way of doing things.

Q5. [905137] Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): If my constituents in the coalfields of Nottinghamshire are to share in the economic success driven by this Government, they need access to employment via good-quality public services. Can the Prime Minister give me any assistance in my campaign to open up the Robin Hood line by extending it to the villages of Ollerton and Edwinstowe, so that we can get people on a train and to a job?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Quality infrastructure is essential for our economy, and I am pleased to say that following representations from my hon. Friend and others, the Department for Transport has revised the conditions for its new stations fund, so that projects such as the Robin Hood line that are in an earlier stage of development can benefit from Government money to kick-start them and get them going.

Q3. [905135] Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): In 2003, the current Prime Minister and most of today’s Cabinet joined Tony Blair and his Cabinet in voting for the war in Iraq. This is historically factual and cannot be denied. Will not the judgment of Chilcot be discredited if the report fails to recognise that the then Prime Minister honestly and genuinely believed that his actions, given the information available, were the right thing to do at the time?

The Prime Minister: What I say to the right hon. Lady—I remember the powerful speeches she made at the time and all the concerns she had for people in Iraq, particularly the Kurds—is that we should wait for the Chilcot report and for what it has to say. I have absolutely no idea what is in it, but I do know that its publication is coming quite soon.

Q10. [905142] Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): The European Union recently admitted that it now has a black hole in its finances of €24.7 billion—about £19 billion. Eighteen months ago my right hon. Friend declared that he would not pay the EU a £1.7 billion surcharge—effectively a fine on British taxpayers for growing our economy—yet he was later forced to pay up. What reassurance can he give the House that hard-working British taxpayers will not be forced to pour money into that EU black hole if our nation votes to remain in the European Union? Does he, like me, accept that our only option to halt such payments is for our constituents to vote to leave the EU on 23 June?

The Prime Minister: The reassurance that I can give my hon. Friend is that we fixed the European budget for a seven-year period between 2014 and 2020, and we fixed a total for that budget that was lower than for the previous seven-year period, which means that European budgets are going to go down, not up. That cannot be changed. This is a very important point. That overall ceiling of spending is determined by all 28 Prime Ministers and Presidents. There is a veto over changing it, just as there is a veto over the British rebate. The only person who can give up the British rebate is the British Prime Minister, and as long as I am Prime Minister there is absolutely no prospect of that happening. As my hon. Friend ended his question with a remark, I will end my answer with a remark: there is no expert saying that we would have a smaller economy and lower tax receipts, so we would either have to cut spending or put up taxes to make up for that fact.

Q4. [905136] Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is time that buses, like trains, were required to provide audiovisual information. This would benefit not just those who are blind or deaf, but many general users. I have written to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), on this subject. Will the Prime Minister commit his Government to signing up to an amendment to the Bus Services Bill that would allow such a measure to be implemented in order to provide accessibility for all?

The Prime Minister: I will look closely at what the hon. Gentleman says. I think I am right in saying that the Bus Services Bill is a devolved matter, so it affects
issues in England rather than in Scotland, but let me look carefully at what he says, because we want to make sure that disabled people can properly use our bus services.

Q11. [905143] Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that it is five years since the announcement by Pfizer in Sandwich that it would scale down operations. Since then, with enterprise zone status, there has been a true renaissance of high-tech businesses on the site, and employment levels are now nearly up to where they were previously. My right hon. Friend has previously promised a trip to South Thanet. May I invite him once more to see on site the success of Discovery Park in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to answer that offer and say yes, I would like to go. I remember very well that it was early in the 2010 Parliament when Pfizer made that decision. There were real concerns that it would lead to an exit of jobs and investment from my hon. Friend’s constituency. I want to pay tribute to David Willetts who, as Minister of State for Universities and Science at the time, did a great job working with others, including with the local MP, to get businesses to locate in the constituency, and to show that there is a very strong pharmaceutical and life sciences industry in our country, providing the jobs that we need.

Q6. [905138] Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): With industrialists such as GlaxoSmithKline and Hitachi warning that if we left the EU, jobs would be lost, the Brexit economist Patrick Minford has revealed that under his side’s strategy, manufacturing would be mostly eliminated. Will the Prime Minister join me in calling on the Brexit leaders to say how many other people’s jobs they would sacrifice on the altar of their own political ambitions?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes an important point, which is that one of the reasons why international companies such as Hitachi invest in Britain—of course, we also have excellent labour relations, the English language, and a very hard-working workforce and great engineers—is that we are members of the single market. I thought that what the head of Hitachi said this week about wanting us to be the European headquarters, and to manufacture those trains in the north-east and sell them all over Europe, and how that might not be possible if we were to leave, was an incredibly powerful statement. In my clear view, jobs come first, and if people want to vote for jobs, they should vote for remain on 23 June.

Q14. [905146] Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Speaking at many universities, colleges and schools across England, and at events organised by Universities UK, University Alliance and the Russell Group, I have been struck by young people’s strong interest in remaining in the European Union. Does the Prime Minister agree that Britain should take a firm lead in the European Union to promote the interests of young people’s careers and research, and their opportunities in the future more generally?

The Prime Minister: I think our universities have been pretty much unanimous in recommending that we vote to remain in the EU. I think that is partly because of the opportunities young people will have from being part of a single market of 500 million people, but also because our universities do very well out of research funding that helps to create the businesses and jobs of the future. We contribute about 11% of the EU research budget, but receive about 16% of the allocated funding. Staying in Europe is good for students’ opportunities, good for young people’s opportunities and good for our science base.

Q7. [905139] Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Yesterday in the Defence Committee, the former First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord West, commented that the Ministry of Defence had effectively run out of money for shipbuilding. Given reports that another Russian submarine has had to be escorted out of UK waters overnight, does the Prime Minister share my concerns that the delays to beginning work on new frigates at the Clyde shipyards are causing real problems? Does he agree that it is essential that the money is allocated to deliver this programme in full and on schedule?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly not the case that this country has in any way run out of money, or run out of ambition, when it comes to shipbuilding. We are currently building the two largest ships the Royal Navy has ever had. We will shortly be commissioning the Type 26 programme, as well as the offshore patrol vessels. The point I would make to the hon. Gentleman is that there is only one way we could threaten shipbuilding on the Clyde, and that is by pulling out of the United Kingdom and seeing jobs decimated as a result.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): The beauty of a referendum is that every voter has an equal voice, every vote carries equal weight, and Members of Parliament have no moral or political superiority over anybody else. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the referendum is not a consultation but an instruction to Parliament from the British people? Is it not therefore incumbent on all of us to accept in advance that remain would mean remain and leave would mean leave, and that any attempt to short-change or distort the verdict of the British people would be a democratic outrage?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: every vote counts the same. We have asked the British people for their opinion, and we should treat their decision as an instruction to deliver. I know many people would like me to be a bit more nuanced in what I think, and to say there are two options that both have some merits and that it is a balanced decision. That might have made my life easier, but the problem is that I do not believe it. I very strongly believe that we are better off if we stay in. That is why the Government and I are saying so clearly to the British people: better off, stronger, safer. But in the end, it is the British people’s decision.

Q8. [905140] Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Only last week, the Prime Minister was rightly extolling the virtues of the EU as a means of tackling pollution, yet over recent months the UK Government have led efforts to water down a key EU directive aimed at reducing the number of people who die every year from breathing toxic air. Can he tell us why?
The Prime Minister: What we are doing in our own country is making sure that we improve our air quality, and that we go for these clean air zones. We have seen a major reduction in particulates in the air over the past few years, and we are going to continue doing just that.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): What the Prime Minister said today on Europe is right: we have to go and campaign. I remember, Mr Speaker, what you said yesterday about notifying Members if one is going to visit their constituency, so may I say to the Prime Minister that a group of global-looking leave campaigners will be descending on Witney at lunch time this Sunday? I will be there. Will the Prime Minister be able to join us? Given what he has just said, will he confirm that if the country votes to leave, he will be able to stay on as Prime Minister and negotiate the exit?

The Prime Minister: First, I am very sorry that I will not be able to meet my hon. Friend—I am making an appearance on the “Andrew Marr” programme on Sunday—but I would recommend that he goes to The Fleece pub in Witney and spends as much time and as much money as he can there, rather than on anything else.

Q9. [905141] Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Will we have a decision on the Davies report on airport expansion by the time the House rises this summer, and does the Prime Minister stand by his words: “No ifs, no buts, no third runway at Heathrow”?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely stand by what I said: that we will have a decision about this in the summer, and we do need to decide.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Next week, the annual national parliamentary prayer breakfast will take place in Westminster Hall, at which 600 community and faith leaders and over 100 MPs will gather. Yet also this week, we hear of a Christian union being banned from the grounds of the Government’s anti-terrorism Prevent strategy. Does the Prime Minister agree that such action was never the purpose of a strategy intended to address terrorism and extremism?

The Prime Minister: Of course what my hon. Friend says is right. I am very sorry I will not be able to attend the prayer breakfast, because I know it is a very good event, and it brings a lot of people together and means a lot to Christians around our country. On the point she makes about the Prevent duty being misused, I have not heard of that exact example, but it is clearly ludicrous. People do need to exercise some common sense in making these judgments, because it is quite clear that that is not what was intended.

Q12. [905144] Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Every day, around 6,000 people—many of them children—take on new caring responsibilities, providing unpaid care for an older or disabled family member or friend, yet many carers tell me they feel abandoned by everyone, including the Government. In this Carers Week, will the Prime Minister pledge that his Government will do much better for the 9,500 carers in my constituency, and the 6.5 million carers across the country?

The Prime Minister: I am working very closely with the hon. Gentleman, as is my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary, to help do everything we can to secure a future for Tata Steel. The sales process is progressing, and that is encouraging. I would say that, yes, for steel, we are better off inside the European Union, because together as 28 countries, we are far better able to stand up to the Chinese or, indeed, the Americans over dumped steel. Where we put in place those dumping tariffs, you can see 95%, 98%, and 99% reductions in the quantity of Chinese steel in those categories being imported into the EU. We still face a very difficult situation—there is still massive overcapacity...
but we are definitely, for the steel industry, better off as part of this organisation, fighting for British steelworkers' jobs.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Will the Prime Minister address an issue that the remain camp has so far fudged? Our present immigration policy, in all truthfulness, cannot control numbers coming in from the EU to the benefit of our public services, and also actually discriminates against the rest of the world outside the EU.

The Prime Minister: Having spent my evening yesterday with Mr Farage—or Farridge, as I like to call him—I am confused about what the leave camp actually wants when it comes to immigration. I thought it wanted less immigration, but now it seems to want more immigration from outside the EU into our country. My view is that we should restrict welfare in the way that we have negotiated, so that people have to come and work here for four years before they get full access to our welfare system—no more "something for nothing"; people pay in before they get out—and then we should focus on proper controls on migration from outside the EU, on which we have made some progress over recent years and can do some more. That is the right answer. As for the alternative of an Australian points system, if we look at Australia, it has twice as much immigration per head as we have here in the UK. That is not the right answer for Britain.

Q15. [905147] Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): As he reaches the end of his time in office, President Obama has reflected that his worst mistake was the catastrophe in Libya. What is the Prime Minister's worst mistake in his time in office?

The Prime Minister: The time to reflect on your mistakes is clearly when you are close to the end of your time in office, so that does not apply. [Interruption.] Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)

rose—

Mr Speaker: I am sure the hon. Lady is delighted to receive such a tumultuous cheer.

Helen Whately: Last week I was delighted to welcome my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Faversham in my constituency to visit our largest local employer, Shepherd Neame, which is the oldest brewery in the country, could not have been clearer about wanting to stay in a reformed European Union, because it wants a strong and successful economy, it wants to be part of a single market, and it recognises that that is in our interests. She and I very much enjoyed the pint of Spitfire we had at about 10.30 in the morning—the things we have to do to win this argument! But we have an absolute commitment to carry it through.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Given the number of people who will be travelling from all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, I am sure, to the Euros next week—[Interruption.] We welcome everybody, and given Leicester's success in the premiership, Northern Ireland, at 150:1, is almost certain to win. Will the Prime Minister ensure that given the number of visitors, the security threats and all the rest of it, the British embassy and consular staff are fully geared up, resourced and staffed to deal with the problems that will undoubtedly arise?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I am sure that this is one occasion when the whole House will want all the home nations to stay in Europe for as long as possible. [Interruption.] Come on now. I am going to be watching; our first game is England-Russia, and I will be watching very carefully to check that we get very strong support.

The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, which is that this is a very big security undertaking. Half a million people are planning to leave the United Kingdom to go to this tournament. We have set out very clear travel advice, because people do need to know that obviously there is a significant terrorist threat in France today, and there is a potential threat to this tournament. We have set out very clearly that the threat level in France is critical and the threat level for the tournament is severe, and people need to know that. The French security operation is enormous—77,000 police and gendarmes, 10,000 military personnel, and 13,000 security guards. We are providing additional counter-terrorism and public order support to the French, including deployment of additional police on trains to France and more UK Border Force outbound checks. We are also helping with sniffer dogs and in any other areas that the French ask us to.

We all want to see an absolutely great celebration of European football. I wish all the home nations well. It is brilliant that Northern Ireland has made it to this tournament, and I know we all—[Interruption.] And of course Wales, and of course England. I look forward, in the breaks in the campaign, to watching some fantastic football.
Voter Registration

12.41 pm

**Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab) (Urgent Question):** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the problems with the gov.uk voter registration website just before the deadline for voter registration for the EU referendum.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the Government's position. Whatever your view, Mr Speaker, or anyone else's on the question on the ballot paper on 23 June, the EU referendum is a very important moment in our democracy. Over the past three months, 4.5 million people have applied to register to vote. Very high levels of voter registration have been successfully handled over the past month by the systems, and in the last week alone more than a million people have applied. Yesterday, 525,000 people successfully completed their application. That is a record. At its peak yesterday, the website was handling three times the volume of applications at the previous record peak, which was just before the general election last year.

My strong view, and the view of the Government, is that anyone who is eligible should be able to register to vote in the EU referendum. Unfortunately, because of the unprecedented demand, there were problems with the website from 10.15 pm last night. To give the House a sense of the scale of the demand, the peak before the 2015 general election was 74,000 applications per hour. Last night, the system processed 214,000 per hour at its peak before it crashed. Many who applied to register after 10.15 pm were successful, but many were not. The problems with the website were resolved around the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. We are targeting under-registered groups, and consistently high numbers have been successfully handled over the past month by the systems, and in the last week alone more than a million people have applied. Yesterday, 525,000 people successfully completed their application. That is a record. At its peak yesterday, the website was handling three times the volume of applications at the previous record peak, which was just before the general election last year.

We are urgently looking at all options and talking to the Electoral Commission about how we can extend the deadline for applying to register to vote in the EU referendum. The website is now open and working, and when we can.

A huge amount of work has gone into encouraging people to register to vote in a timely fashion. We began the registration drive ahead of the May elections. From the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. Departments, local authorities and civil society organisations have all helped to boost voter registration. We are also offering extra resources to electoral registration officers to cover any additional administrative costs.

A huge amount of work has gone into encouraging people to register to vote in a timely fashion. We began the registration drive ahead of the May elections. From the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. Departments, local authorities and civil society organisations have all helped to boost voter registration. We are also offering extra resources to electoral registration officers to cover any additional administrative costs.

My strong view, and the view of the Government, is that anyone who is eligible should be able to register to vote in the EU referendum. Unfortunately, because of the unprecedented demand, there were problems with the website from 10.15 pm last night. To give the House a sense of the scale of the demand, the peak before the 2015 general election was 74,000 applications per hour. Last night, the system processed 214,000 per hour at its peak before it crashed. Many who applied to register after 10.15 pm were successful, but many were not. The problems with the website were resolved around the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. We are targeting under-registered groups, and consistently high numbers have been successfully handled over the past month by the systems, and in the last week alone more than a million people have applied. Yesterday, 525,000 people successfully completed their application. That is a record. At its peak yesterday, the website was handling three times the volume of applications at the previous record peak, which was just before the general election last year.

We are urgently looking at all options and talking to the Electoral Commission about how we can extend the deadline for applying to register to vote in the EU referendum. The website is now open and working, and when we can.

A huge amount of work has gone into encouraging people to register to vote in a timely fashion. We began the registration drive ahead of the May elections. From the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. Departments, local authorities and civil society organisations have all helped to boost voter registration. We are also offering extra resources to electoral registration officers to cover any additional administrative costs.

My strong view, and the view of the Government, is that anyone who is eligible should be able to register to vote in the EU referendum. Unfortunately, because of the unprecedented demand, there were problems with the website from 10.15 pm last night. To give the House a sense of the scale of the demand, the peak before the 2015 general election was 74,000 applications per hour. Last night, the system processed 214,000 per hour at its peak before it crashed. Many who applied to register after 10.15 pm were successful, but many were not. The problems with the website were resolved around the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. We are targeting under-registered groups, and consistently high numbers have been successfully handled over the past month by the systems, and in the last week alone more than a million people have applied. Yesterday, 525,000 people successfully completed their application. That is a record. At its peak yesterday, the website was handling three times the volume of applications at the previous record peak, which was just before the general election last year.

We are urgently looking at all options and talking to the Electoral Commission about how we can extend the deadline for applying to register to vote in the EU referendum. The website is now open and working, and when we can.

A huge amount of work has gone into encouraging people to register to vote in a timely fashion. We began the registration drive ahead of the May elections. From the middle of April we began in earnest to promote registration. Departments, local authorities and civil society organisations have all helped to boost voter registration. We are also offering extra resources to electoral registration officers to cover any additional administrative costs.

However, we are no clearer about exactly how the Government plan to make this happen and what the new deadline for registration is.

I want to offer the Government Labour's complete support across both Houses to do whatever it takes to get through any necessary legislation. This should be done today. What legislative options are open to the Government, and is one of the options being considered a statutory instrument, which could be quickly and efficiently scrutinised today? What is the new deadline to register to vote? People need complete clarity on how long they now have left, and it needs to be well advertised. Last night's chaos was totally unacceptable. What stress testing was done on the website in advance, and what provisions were made for the predictable rise in traffic?

What will be done about postal votes, given that the deadline for applications is 5 pm today but is available only to those who are on the register? Will the Minister confirm that this will also be extended? People would never expect to be turned away from a polling station despite being in the queue before the close of the polls. Those queuing up online last night must not be turned away. We need clear answers on how they can still make their voices heard.

Matthew Hancock: First, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for Labour's clear and unambiguous support for action—if necessary, legislative action—to put this right. The support of the Labour party in both Houses will be important if we need to get through emergency legislation. We are looking at legislative options, including secondary legislation, and I look forward to taking up such an option. We need to make sure that we get the details of any emergency legislation exactly right, since we will have to pass it at pace.

On the deadline that the hon. Lady mentioned, people should register to vote now. Those registrations will be captured by the system. We then have the legal question of whether captured applications can be eligible for 23 June, and that is the issue that we might have to deal with in legislation. [Interruption.] Labour Members are saying from a sedentary position, “What is the deadline?” I am absolutely clear: people should register now—and we will bring out further information as and when we can.

We did of course undertake stress tests, which the hon. Lady raised. We tested a significantly higher level of interest and of applications than at the general election last year, which is the best comparator, but, as I have said, the level of interest was significantly higher than the peak then and, because of the exceptional demand, the website crashed. Ultimately, the problem was born out of the fact that thousands and thousands—hundreds of thousands—of people want to vote, and the interest that that shows in expressing their democratic wishes is to be recommended.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I first commend the Government and my right hon. Friend for so successfully engaging millions of people that they want to register and vote in this referendum? That is definitely a good thing. I am afraid the problems he has encountered are born out of the fact that the Government and the Electoral Commission were ill prepared for the surge of registrations. The Government spent millions of pounds on promoting registration, so they should have been prepared.
This issue now arises: there is a cut-off in our legislation because the register has to be finalised and published six days before the date of the poll for the referendum—there have to be five days remaining so that any name on the register can be challenged during the first five days it is on the register—which leaves very little time for anything like legislation.

May I advise the Minister that it is probably legal to keep the site open for a short period—a few hours, to capture those who did not have the opportunity to register yesterday—but any idea of rewriting the rules in any substantial way would be complete madness and make this country look like an absolute shambles in the run-up to the referendum, which is such an important decision? Will he bear those things in mind, or risk a pithy from now on that would help.

Matthew Hancock: We prepared extensively for a peak in registrations, but the extent of interest in registering was unprecedented. My hon. Friend mentioned the period for which registrations may be valid in future in any legislative measure that we bring forward. He suggested that that should be for a short period, and I agree. That is to rectify the problem of people not being able to vote last night, so we are likely to bring forward proposals with that short period in mind.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I do not think that we can understate the seriousness of the great catastrophe that has happened. If we consult the people of this country on such an important decision for the first time in 40 years, and deny tens of thousands of our citizens the ability to participate, that will tarnish and call into question the entire process. It is not enough to allow them to vote on 23 June, we would need to legislate. If that legislation takes place tomorrow, registrations made today will be valid for the vote on 23 June. Therefore, the clear message from the Prime Minister, and from me, is that if people have not been able to register to vote, they should do so now. It is incumbent on all Members of the House to continue to state that if people want to vote in the referendum on 23 June and they are not yet registered, they should register now.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on the flexibility that he and the Government are showing, and I am pleased that so many people want to register, particularly young people who, as we know, are by and large very enthusiastic about remaining in the EU. It is clear that a short final deadline should not now be announced, in case the same thing happens again. The system must be able to cope with what might be another surge, and I suspect that a deadline of a few hours would be ill-advised.

Matthew Hancock: As my right hon. Friend will imagine, we are putting in place measures to ensure that the system has yet more capacity, in case there is further high interest because of the news about the potential extension that we and the Electoral Commission want. On the deadline, the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee set out an important practical consideration, which is that from the closure of registration for the referendum, electoral registration officers must ensure that the electoral roll is correct, and it is important that there is enough time for that to happen. That is why any extension would be for a short time, rather than for a long time.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP) rose—

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is smiling benevolently at me, but I would happily call him anyway.

Alex Salmond: In 2014, we achieved 98% registration in Scotland and an 85% turnout, with no collapse of a website or registration, and no difficulty at the polling stations. However, we were not starting from a position where hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens had been effectively disfranchised by the process of individual registration and the lack of electoral canvass. The Government were not worried about that, because it mostly involved young people whom they did not think would vote for them anyway. Now the Minister is concerned, and he is standing in this House, hoist by his own gerrymandered petard.
Matthew Hancock: It is a shame to bring a note of discord to what was otherwise a reasonably consensual discussion. If it were not for our online voter registration system, people would not be able to vote up to a midnight deadline at all. The website collapsed because of the success of online registration, and the huge demand for participation in this incredibly important referendum. The United Kingdom is much, much larger than just Scotland, and the scale of the challenge is more significant. That is why we are taking action to ensure that registration means that people can vote on 23 June.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I am proud to have been the Minister who introduced online registration, which I think has been a great step forward in our democracy. I fundamentally disagree with the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who thinks that individual electoral registration is problematic, because I think that it is the right thing to do in our democracy. I chair the all-party group on democratic participation, and I urge the Minister and the House to consider some of the recommendations that we have recently brought forward to improve the state of the registers. It is important that as many people as possible are registered to vote, and I commend the Minister’s calm approach to the situation this morning.

Matthew Hancock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and she is right to say that there is no link between IER and last night’s registration difficulties on the website. I will study her recommendations with great interest, and I understand that she will soon meet the Minister responsible for constitutional affairs to discuss the matter.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): It would be an absolute scandal if people who tried to register before the deadline were deprived of a vote in what is the most important vote in any of our lifetimes. Will the Minister pull out all the stops until the last possible moment to ensure that people can vote? Will he also address the concern raised by my constituents who live and work abroad, and who have heard that there are problems with processing the huge numbers of postal and proxy votes that are coming back in at local level, and ensure that those votes are counted?

Matthew Hancock: There are very high numbers of registrations for postal votes, and indeed of registrations by post as opposed to through the website. We are dealing with all those issues. The right hon. Gentleman asks me to pull out all the stops; believe me, we are.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Even before the failure of the electronic system we heard that thousands of polling cards had been sent inappropriately to people who do not qualify to vote. Given the great strain on the system caused by the surge, will the Minister explain exactly how that sort of mistake will not be made again?

Matthew Hancock: That was an identified software fault, which has now been fixed. The Electoral Commission brought it to the public’s attention. It has been addressed and lessons have been learned.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Minister’s statement, but I would like a wee bit more clarity on how all this is going to work, as that is the important issue. Last week I had a meeting with the electoral officer in my constituency, who informed me that demand for postal votes has been at unprecedented levels—she has never seen anything like it in her life—and that they were trying to do the processing as quickly as possible. Postal vote applications have been delayed, or sent in but not returned. Any delays in processing cannot be tolerated. What is being done to help those who have applied but whose applications have not been processed?

Matthew Hancock: Work has been done to address the challenge of the incredibly high interest in postal voting, and resources are available to deal with those issues and make sure that everyone has the democratic right to vote. Ultimately, this is about making sure that everyone who is eligible and wants to has the opportunity to register to participate in this great festival of democracy.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): It is very important that people have the opportunity to register to vote, but this issue has consequences not just for the referendum but for other elections. There are 4.5 million new people on the register; has the Minister thought about the consequences of that for the Boundary Commission’s drawing up of constituencies, as it will be doing so on numbers that are now completely wrong?

Matthew Hancock: The Boundary Commission is continuing its work based on the drop-dead date agreed by this House. The two issues are essentially separate.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I am ambitious for my country, which is why, earlier today, I voted by post to remain. Everyone else who wants to do so should be able to. What estimate has the Minister made of the number of people who were able to register after 10.15 pm last night and, by extrapolation, the number who were not?

Matthew Hancock: I welcome support from the right hon. Gentleman and the Liberal Democrat Benches. I hope that would be the case in the House of Lords, should legislation come forward.

Tom Brake indicated assent.

Matthew Hancock: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding, so I am delighted that there will be that Lib Dem support. The question he asked is about a very important matter, which we will take into consideration.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Minister is clearly putting a great deal of energy into ironing out this particular glitch, but he needs to be seen to be fair to both sides, given the likely closeness of the result on 23 June. How much energy is he therefore applying to quantifying the number of non-eligible EU nationals who have been sent postal votes? Clearly, after the event some in the leave camp may call things into question if we have not quantified what correspondence was sent out in error.

Matthew Hancock: We know that that number is less than 5,000, according to the Electoral Commission, and the problem has been fixed. By contrast, it will be impossible to know the total number of people—as asked
for by the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake)—who between 10.15 pm and midnight last night tried to register but did not succeed, because some people tried again and succeeded. That is why seeing what we can do to extend the deadline—which seems to have broad support across the House—is the right way forward.

Matthew Hancock: There are no proposals to change the postal vote deadline. We want to make sure that we deal with the registration deadline appropriately. That might mean legislation. If that legislation is brought forward we will explain it in full to the House.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I welcome the news that thousands want to register for the referendum, and the extension will encourage even more people to do so. However, having seen at first hand long-standing failures of IT infrastructure such as the NHS connecting for health programme, it was little surprise to me that the IT infrastructure was not able to keep up with the volume of registrations. What lessons will be learned from this latest episode, and how will the Cabinet Office provide solutions for the age-old problem of IT infrastructure as it looks to pursue a new Bill on data later in this Parliament?

Matthew Hancock: Believe you me, Mr Speaker, there will be a lessons learned exercise. Today, we are concentrating on making sure that everyone who wants to participate in the EU referendum and is eligible to do so can vote.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Clearly we all want as many people as possible to take up the franchise and vote. The news that more than 4 million people registered for the referendum in the spring calls into question the legitimacy of the foundation data upon which the boundary review has to operate from an electoral roll on an agreed date. That date was agreed by this House. In the past, the review operated on a 10-year cycle, and the electoral roll was therefore 10 years out of date by the time it was reviewed. We are now moving to five-year cycles, so we have brought in more frequent use of electoral roll data by the boundary review. If we could not have a drop-dead date we could not have a boundary review at all.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The fact that someone has a national insurance number does not of itself establish that they are eligible to vote in the referendum. Will my right hon. Friend explain what checks are being done to verify that everyone who applies is genuinely able to vote in the referendum?

Matthew Hancock: That is an incredibly important question. The eligibility requirements were debated extensively in this House. After someone applies to register online, the application is not taken at face value but is checked against Government data to make sure that person meets the eligibility rules set by this House. That is one reason why there needs to be time between the deadline and polling day—to make sure that exactly the concerns that my hon. Friend raises are met.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The Minister keeps saying that yesterday’s significantly higher numbers were unprecedented. There were 525,000 applications yesterday and 485,000 on deadline day in 2015. Why then was the system not prepared and able to cope, and is it not now time for automatic registration?

Matthew Hancock: The spike was much bigger than the hon. Lady’s figures, which are accurate for the whole day. I suggest, because there was an intense spike after 9 pm, the question for the system is how many people are trying to apply at once, and that figure was three times higher than in the peak before the 2015 general election.
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister is making a bad situation worse by refusing to give a clear answer on the deadline for registration. I want to ask him about the agile technologies that form the basis of online registration, and which were chosen for their very scalability when properly implemented and resourced. These are the same technologies as form the basis of other digital services, such as universal credit and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which might also be subject to unprecedented but entirely predictable surges. Will he commit, therefore, to laying before the House a detailed report on why a scalable technology was unable to deal with a predictable surge in demand?

Matthew Hancock: The hon. Lady asks a reasonable question, which we will be looking at in the lessons learned exercise. I would pick her up on one point, though. On the issue of clarity around what people should do now, it is incumbent on all of us to get out there and say that people should register now. We will come forward with legislation, should we choose to—[Laughter.] I think the House can gather that it is highly likely. Should we choose to, we will come forward with legislation setting out the deadline, but what matters right now is that people get on the website, which is currently working, and register to vote. Let that message go out loud and clear.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): What guidance would the Minister give to those who want to vote by post? I am still not clear what is happening with the 5 pm deadline this evening. If someone registers today and is informed tomorrow that they can vote, but only by post, will the Government not be open to judicial challenge?

Matthew Hancock: No; the two issues are separate. If someone wants to register, or applied to register yesterday, but is not available to vote on 23 June, a postal vote could not be organised in time, but they can still vote by proxy. That opportunity is available, so that they can express their democratic wish.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The House has heard a “carry on” registration message from the Minister and the Prime Minister. Should people in Northern Ireland listen, given that online registration is not available there? There were separate difficulties in Northern Ireland arising from strike action over proposals to centralise electoral office services that affected those offices yesterday and last week.

Matthew Hancock: This is an incredibly important concern in Northern Ireland, and any legislation will be absolutely clear about the position, which we will set out as soon as we can.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What additional support and help will the Minister give to local authorities unexpectedly having to undertake a great deal of verification work?

Matthew Hancock: We have made it clear that if needed, we will make resources available, to a reasonable extent, to electoral registration offices to ensure that everyone can vote who wants to and is eligible.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), I remember the glorious sunny day in September 2014 when hundreds of people queued up outside their local authority offices to hand in their voter registration forms. Were any lessons learned from the surge before the Scottish independence referendum and the 2015 general election? Will the Minister confirm whether there is now capacity to deal with any further surge when the deadline is finally announced? As the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) hinted at, will he also confirm that we are talking about online registration and that the paper registration deadline has passed?

Matthew Hancock: We are absolutely working to ensure capacity to deal with any further surge, but I repeat that last night’s level of demand in such a short period was unprecedented, which is why we had the problems we did.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is absolutely right that anybody who last night wanted to but could not register to vote be given the opportunity to do so, but given that the referendum result might be close, what legalities surround an extension of the deadline, and what advice has the Minister taken in case a close result, whether a yes or a no vote, is challenged legally?

Matthew Hancock: We are consulting and working closely with the Electoral Commission and lawyers to make sure that anything we bring forward is watertight. We all want the referendum to take place on 23 June, and we all want everyone who wants to and is eligible to vote to be able to do so.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Clarity is key. When is the deadline for bringing forward legislation, and is there any reason why it cannot be done today?

Matthew Hancock: We want to get the legislation exactly right to ensure that the referendum takes place on an entirely legal and unchallengeable basis, as I am sure the hon. Lady will accept, which is why we are being careful to get the details exactly right.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Following on from the question by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) about the industrial action in Northern Ireland, has further provision been made to allow people to register, including for a postal or proxy vote? The proposed closure of rural offices in Northern Ireland will only heighten the problem in future years.

Matthew Hancock: As I said to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), this is an incredibly important matter in Northern Ireland. We are considering the options right now, and I would welcome the input of the hon. Gentleman and other Northern Ireland Members.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It appears that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been given a blank cheque from all parties in the House for any legislation tomorrow, but we still need the certainty of a date from when registration will not entitle someone to vote. If the message goes out today that if people keep on registering they will be able to vote, it will lead to problems either tomorrow or towards the weekend.
Will the Minister indicate that if someone does not register by the end of today, their vote will not count on 23 June?

Matthew Hancock: We will make that clear when the legislation, should there be any, is brought forward. My answer is absolutely precise: let us encourage people to register now. We are doing all we can to ensure that people who register now can vote on 23 June.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I would like to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). The “Missing Millions” report made many recommendations, including on automatic registration. May we have a commitment today that following this example of poor practice and failure, automatic registration proposals will be brought before the House?

Matthew Hancock: We will look into the use of alternative sources of data, but we are not yet persuaded on the case for automatic registration. Most importantly, right now we are concentrating on ensuring that people who want to and are eligible to vote will be able to.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's point of order arises, I believe, directly out of the matters of which the House has just treated, and therefore it is proper to take it now.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The Minister has said he thinks that emergency legislation will be necessary if we are to deal with the problem now facing us. I think the whole House has said it wants the matter dealt with, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) made clear, the Opposition want to be as helpful as possible. It would be difficult to bring forward legislation and carry it through today. If it is primary legislation, it would have to come to the Floor of the House, so I presume the earliest would be tomorrow. If it is secondary legislation, it would be difficult because a Committee would have to be set up before Monday. It would obviously be better to deal with it tomorrow. My mere suggestion is that if the Leader of the House could come to us later today with a business statement to make it clear what will happen tomorrow, it would be in the best interests of the House and voters, as well as the other House, which will have to deal with the legislation as well.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's point of order arises, I believe, directly out of the matters of which the House has just treated, and therefore it is proper to take it now. I am in the happy position of agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. It is certainly open to the Government to bring forward business tomorrow, and I have a sense that that would be widely anticipated and enthusiastically supported in the House. To have some advance indication from the Government that that is their intention would be useful, and a supplementary business statement would be the ordinary, though not the only, way of providing the information.

Matthew Hancock rose—

Mr Speaker: The Minister is all agog and in a state of great excitement. I wish him to feel satisfied before he pops.

Matthew Hancock: Well, crikey, Mr Speaker. As I have made clear, it is likely that legislation will be needed, and I warmly welcome what the shadow Leader of the House said just now. We will work with him and through the usual channels to make sure that this is done as effectively as possible. I will take away the point about whether we should have a business statement today in order to facilitate that.

Mr Speaker: I know that discussions will take place between the usual channels behind the scenes. Given the normal courtesy of the Leader of the House, I would certainly expect to be kept apprised of the situation as the afternoon and events unfold.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If they are on unrelated matters, they should come after the Standing Order No. 24 application. It is unrelated, so I save up the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash)―[Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman cannot have a commitment that is more important than the Chamber. He is the ultimate parliamentarian. We shall hear from him soon, and I am becoming increasingly excited about the prospect of doing so.

Matthew Hancock: Me, too.

Mr Speaker: The Minister says “Me, too”, but I do not know whether he will feel the same way at the end of the hon. Gentleman's point of order. That remains to be seen.

In a moment, I shall call the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The hon. Lady has up to three minutes in which to submit her application.
Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter for urgent consideration—namely, the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016.

As you are aware, Mr Speaker, this is a time-sensitive EU diktat that is allocated to the Government as a negative statutory instrument. Unless the Government provide any time to discuss it, it will just pass through. The Backbench Business Committee is not reconvened and has met only twice since these regulations were brought in. They were tabled in April, and since then, I have had cross-party support for my early-day motion.

The tobacco regulations will have a huge impact on the vaping and harm-reduction products industry if these regulations pass beyond their praying date of 15 June, yet the House will not have had an opportunity to debate this important matter. Only two months ago, the Royal College of Physicians warned:

“Promoting wider use of consumer nicotine products, such as e-cigarettes, could...substantially increase the number of smokers who quit”

and

“is therefore likely to generate significant health gains in the UK.”

Last year, Public Health England found that e-cigarettes were 95% less harmful than smoking.

Our own Prime Minister said to me in a letter:

“Our view, based on all the evidence available, is that e-cigarettes can help smokers quit and that they are considerably less harmful to the health than continuing to smoke tobacco products.”

Perversely, however, these particular regulations, which we have not yet discussed or debated, will seek to impose severe limits on advertising for vaping products, and bring e-cigarettes under the same regulatory framework as cigarettes. Lord Prior, the Health Minister in the House of Lords said in May that

“we wish people to quit altogether but if, as a way of quitting, they can give up smoking and take up vaping, that is something that we wish to encourage.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 10 May 2016; Vol. 771, c. 77.]

I sincerely hope that the House will be given the opportunity to consider this matter under Standing Order No. 24 as the deleterious impact of these regulations on smoking cessation and public health shows that we really should give these Brussels regulations some serious consideration before absorbing them.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady asks leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016. I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady’s application, but I am not persuaded that this matter is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24.

I add that if there is significant interest in this matter, either in the House or beyond it, it might be regarded as helpful if, through the usual channels, a debate on it were arranged. I express myself in those relatively careful and understated terms, for it is not within the remit of the Chair. That judgment has to be made elsewhere. The hon. Lady, who is an indefatigable parliamentarian, has made her case with force and eloquence. If I have learned anything about her over the last 11 years when we have served in the House together, I suspect that it is pretty unlikely that she will let go of the bone.
Points of Order

1.25 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), the Prime Minister made an assertion on the question of treaty change. He said that he had secured “treaty changes”, but that is clearly not the case. This may have been inadvertent and if so, I have no doubt that the Prime Minister will take the opportunity to correct it. I have to say that it was not a statement that could be sustained in the light of the facts.

Mr Speaker: I am at a disadvantage by comparison with the hon. Gentleman because I do not enjoy a precise recall of everything that the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister’s Questions earlier, although I rather imagine that the hon. Gentleman does have such a recall and may even be capable of reproducing the verbatim text of prime ministerial answers backwards. Anyone who gives incorrect information to the House is responsible for correcting it. If the Prime Minister judges that he made a mistake, which would naturally be inadvertent, the responsibility is no less great or absolute on him than it would be on any other Member. Knowing the hon. Gentleman as I do, I feel sure that he, too, will not let go of the bone until he receives satisfaction. I will leave it there. His point of order will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, and doubtless its contents will wing their way towards No. 10 Downing Street ere long.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I hope you will be able to help and advise me on how to achieve some consistency in the Government’s position on Saudi Arabia. On 24 May in topical questions, the Foreign Secretary said:

“There is no evidence yet that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions.”—[Official Report, 24 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 395.]

In a written answer of 26 May, however, the Secretary of State for Defence said:

“The UK is aware that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions in the current conflict in Yemen.”

In a debate this morning, furthermore, the Minister for Europe said that the Government were seeking clarification about “allegations”. I hope you would agree, Mr Speaker, that this highlights some confusion at the heart of government, which must indeed cast doubt on the Government’s assurances that the Saudis have not broken international humanitarian law.

Mr Speaker: My response is twofold. First, I am not responsible for the consistency of Government statements. It is probably as well that the Chair has never been responsible for the said consistency under any Government of any complexion. Secondly, if the right hon. Gentleman feels that the statements to which he referred cause such confusion or uncertainty as to render an urgent clarification vital, he knows that there are devices available to him. I say this not to flatter him, but as a matter of fact. The right hon. Gentleman is a former Deputy Leader of the House, so he is well versed in the mechanisms available to him.

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

BBC White Paper

1.29 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government’s White Paper on the BBC fails to provide an acceptable basis for Charter renewal; notes the threat the White Paper poses to the editorial and financial independence of the BBC; expresses concern about the re-writing of the BBC’s founding mission statement; further notes the concerns about the White Paper expressed by Members of this House and the House of Lords; and calls on the Government to reconsider the proposals contained in the White Paper.

The new BBC charter will form one of the legacies of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, for good or ill. I say that not by way of making any predictions at all about the right hon. Gentleman’s immediate political future as a Cabinet Minister post-EU referendum in the Prime Minister’s revenge reshuffle, but simply by way of drawing attention to what is a fact of life for all Culture Secretaries who oversee the renewal of the BBC charter during their time in office.

The BBC is a revered, trusted national institution to which we all contribute, of which we can all be proud, and on which we all rely for much of our quality news reporting. That compares with 14% for ITN News, and 56% believe that it is the institution that it is. Furthermore, it is clear from the consultation responses that the public do not support the direction in which the White Paper proposes to take the BBC. I intend to mention some of those responses today, and to ask the Secretary of State to think again about some of his proposals.

The BBC’s editorial independence is one of the most important requirements of its future success. It must be protected at all costs, and there must be no suspicion that the Government of the day can influence the BBC board in any way. The White Paper’s proposal for BBC governance is among the most important of all its proposals. According to the Government’s own consultation, three quarters of the public want the BBC to remain independent, while 56% believe that it is the broadcaster most likely to produce balanced and unbiased news reporting. That compares with 14% for ITN News,
13% for Sky News and 13% for Channel 4 News. The public really do value the editorial independence of the BBC.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am loth to stop the hon. Lady when she is in full flow, but I wonder whether she has seen the results of a Government survey of views on the BBC from throughout the United Kingdom. If so, she will have learned that the highest levels of dissatisfaction were found in Scotland. Does that not suggest to her that we need to address this issue creatively? Has not the time now come for the establishment of a federal BBC throughout the United Kingdom, and the introduction of a “Scottish Six” service produced and directed from Scotland?

Maria Eagle: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s focus on matters Scottish, and, of course, I respect the fact that he has views on what policies should be used to address those matters. I do not myself believe that the policy prescriptions that he has just suggested represent the only or, indeed, the right way forward, but I do agree with him that the BBC should be better able to reflect the nations and regions of this country in the way in which it produces news and other programmes. I think that some of the proposals for increasing diversity and devolving production and power in the BBC will gain support across the House, but the question of precisely how that should be done in Scotland is not one on which we would necessarily agree.

No one in the House, I hope, wants to see the BBC become a state broadcaster, or have arrangements for governance that give the impression that it is one. The Government must ensure that there is no question of Government influence on editorial decision-making, but there are serious fears that these plans provide too much power for the Government to exert day-to-day influence on the BBC’s editorial decision-making.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Maria Eagle: I will in a moment, because I know that the right hon. Gentleman has had some important things to say about this matter.

The director-general has said that there are honest disagreements between Ministers and the BBC on how best to protect and enhance BBC independence. He is a diplomat.

Damian Green: I share the hon. Lady’s passion for BBC independence. As a former BBC journalist, I have been on both sides of these various arguments in my time.

The hon. Lady rightly quoted figures that demonstrated all the audience satisfaction with and public support for the BBC—which, as she knows, I share—but her basic position seems to be that the Government’s proposals in some way undermine its fundamentals. Let me gently point out to her that among those who welcomed the Government’s proposals was the BBC itself. The BBC does not feel that it is being undermined, so why does the hon. Lady think that it is being undermined?

Maria Eagle: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making, but I think that when the BBC’s future for the next 11 years is to be decided by the Government of the day, it should not be surprising that it may well agree in public with almost anything that the Government of the day say. Whether or not that is a true reflection of what is going on behind the scenes is another matter.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady not accept that the BBC welcomed the proposals because it had got off lightly? It will continue to be funded publicly for the next 11 years, and will be able to persist in its wasteful practice of spending money in a cavalier manner with very little input and curtailment from the Government.

Maria Eagle: I do not agree with that analysis.

The proposed new unitary board will run the BBC. In his statement on the White Paper in the House on 12 May, the Secretary of State suggested, in effect, that the new board would be like the BBC Trust but without its current regulatory functions, which would go to Ofcom, but in my view that stretches credulity. Page 51 of the White Paper states:

“The board as a whole will have responsibility for setting the overall editorial direction and the framework for editorial standards.”

There is to be only one board instead of two, and that unitary board will run the BBC in all meaningful senses. The Secretary of State plans to enable Ministers to appoint up to half the new board members, including the chair and deputy chair. That creates an unprecedented power for the Government directly to influence those who are responsible for editorial matters at the BBC.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Page 50 of the White Paper clearly states that the appointment of the chair “will be subject to a confirmatory hearing before the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee”, and that the appointments of other members of the board will be subject to discussions with the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Is the hon. Lady not satisfied with that?

Maria Eagle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting me in my right hon. Friend’s place. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman’s right hon. Friend for giving way. Page 50 of the White Paper states:

“The board as a whole will have responsibility for setting the overall editorial direction and the framework for editorial standards.”

There is to be only one board instead of two, and that unitary board will run the BBC in all meaningful senses. The Secretary of State plans to enable Ministers to appoint up to half the new board members, including the chair and deputy chair. That creates an unprecedented power for the Government directly to influence those who are responsible for editorial matters at the BBC.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Page 50 of the White Paper clearly states that the appointment of the chair “will be subject to a confirmatory hearing before the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee”, and that the appointments of other members of the board will be subject to discussions with the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Is the hon. Lady not satisfied with that?

Maria Eagle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman both for promoting me to the Privy Council and for suggesting that I might be a member of the Tory party, which was probably going a bit too far.

It is, of course, true that some safeguards are implied in the proposals, and that is to be welcomed, but how the proposals look is also important to those outside. I think that simply reiterating that the director-general is the editor-in-chief does not really allay the fears created by the Secretary of State’s plans. I also think that his recent record in respect of public appointments does not reassure those of us who are worried. When the independent panel that was established to appoint a trustee to the National Portrait Gallery failed to shortlist his five favoured candidates—three of whom were Tory donors and one of whom was an ex-Minister—he simply scrapped the appointments process, and attempted to impugn the integrity of the chair of the panel. This prompted a furious slap-down from the now-retired Commissioner for Public Appointments, who accused
him of exercising political interference in a supposedly objective public appointments process. We only know about this debacle because Sir David Normington’s letter was leaked.

Members on both sides of the House have expressed concern about the implications of the White Paper for the BBC and its editorial independence. The right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) might have had his concerns allayed, but he has described editorial independence as a red line. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee Chairman said as recently as yesterday that the plans had prompted “a lot of concern”, and the Voice of the Listener and Viewer has said that “there remain a number of concerns relating to independence”.

It is still not too late for the Secretary of State to make it clear that the appointments to the new unitary board will be made through a demonstrably independent means, and that he will not seek to influence the outcome of the process. Indeed, it would benefit him if he were to do that. Why does he not undertake today to agree that the Commissioner for Public Appointments should run the process of appointing the board members, and restrict his own power to appointing those people who have been selected through such an independent process? He really needs to provide proper reassurance, and he can do so. Such an undertaking would be heartily welcomed across the House.

Ofcom will have a new role setting service licences and quotas for the BBC. It is important that this regulatory regime should not be used to interfere with the editorial and creative freedom of the BBC to use licence fee payers’ money to produce the programming it decides to produce. There must be no efforts from the Government to pursue the wilder proposals on scheduling and so-called distinctiveness that did not, in the end, find their way into the White Paper. We will seek assurances that Ofcom’s role in this respect will not impact unduly on the BBC’s editorial independence or be a weapon to be used by the Government or the BBC’s commercial rivals to interfere with the BBC’s creative freedom.

The BBC must be seen to retain its financial independence as well as its editorial independence. In that respect, the explicit statement on page 97 of the White Paper that “the licence fee is not solely for the use of the BBC” is deplorable, and could impinge on the BBC’s financial independence. I am glad that there is to be no more top-slicing of the licence fee. That would have constituted a breach of last year’s funding agreement—of which the House knows I have been critical in any event—between the BBC and the Government. The White Paper proposes the creation of a contestable pot of licence fee payers’ money, worth £20 million a year over three years. This sets an unwelcome precedent. Governments of all stripes have been too keen in recent years to see the licence fee as money for the Treasury to allocate to its own priorities. I believe that licence fee payers’ money should properly be seen as belonging to the BBC to enable it to fulfil its remit. It should be for the BBC to decide how it wishes to do that, not for the Secretary of State or the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Secretary of State has said his Department will consult on this proposal. If the consultation responses are against establishing the contestable pot, will he undertake to drop the idea? Will he tell us today when his consultation will start and when he intends it to finish? Can he confirm that the same levels of transparency and accountability that apply to BBC funding will be applied to this contestable pot if his pilot goes ahead? Has he considered the fact that this could be categorised as state aid if it is given to other broadcasters to use, as he no doubt intends?

We agree that the BBC should be as transparent and accountable as possible in relation to the licence fee payers’ money that it spends, so we support the idea of the National Audit Office being allowed to investigate the publicly funded areas of the BBC. However, allowing the NAO to audit the BBC’s commercial operations, which are not in receipt of any licence fee payers’ money, could place those operations at a significant market disadvantage. What argument is there for doing that? The commercial operations of museums, for example, are not open to the NAO scrutiny, and I know of no organisation in the private sector that receives public money that is subject to NAO scrutiny.

Failure to get this right could have the effect of reducing returns for BBC Worldwide, thereby limiting the extent to which the BBC is able to subsidise the licence fee through its commercial operations. The money that it makes from BBC Worldwide operations currently amounts to more than 12.5% of the BBC’s entire content budget, which would save licence fee payers the equivalent of more than £10 each if the licence fee had to be increased to cover a shortfall of that amount.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): The hon. Lady is a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, as indeed am I. She will be aware that the Committee has a long-standing issue with the BBC in relation to parliamentary accountability. Is she in favour of an increase in that accountability?

Maria Eagle: That is going back a bit, but I am indeed a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, and that is one of the reasons that I have very high regard for the abilities of the National Audit Office. I have no problem with the NAO being the auditor of the BBC, but there is an issue with its being the auditor of the BBC’s purely commercial operations. Is it really appropriate for the NAO to pursue entirely private money that has nothing to do with public funding? If this goes ahead, it will set an interesting precedent. I want to hear from the Secretary of State why he thinks this might be appropriate. I want to hear his arguments for doing it, because I think that there could be difficulties. I am also concerned about the imposition of a mid-term health check on the new charter. It seems suspiciously like the break clause—which the newspapers were briefed that the Secretary of State wanted—by another name. We welcome the fact that the charter is to last for 11 years, and it should not be compromised or have the agreement that underpins it reopened by the back door during that period. I am concerned that the so-called health check—the break clause by another name—will be destabilising for the BBC and create uncertainty, which will not be helpful. Page 58 of the White Paper states:

“It will be for the government of the day to determine the precise scope”—of the health check—

“consulting the BBC’s unitary board and Ofcom”.

John Pugh: The hon. Lady is a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, and she will be aware that the Committee has a long-standing issue with the BBC in relation to parliamentary accountability. Is she in favour of an increase in that accountability?

Maria Eagle: That is going back a bit, but I am indeed a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, and that is one of the reasons that I have very high regard for the abilities of the National Audit Office. I have no problem with the NAO being the auditor of the BBC, but there is an issue with its being the auditor of the BBC’s purely commercial operations. Is it really appropriate for the NAO to pursue entirely private money that has nothing to do with public funding? If this goes ahead, it will set an interesting precedent. I want to hear from the Secretary of State why he thinks this might be appropriate. I want to hear his arguments for doing it, because I think that there could be difficulties.

I am also concerned about the imposition of a mid-term health check on the new charter. It seems suspiciously like the break clause—which the newspapers were briefed that the Secretary of State wanted—by another name. We welcome the fact that the charter is to last for 11 years, and it should not be compromised or have the agreement that underpins it reopened by the back door during that period. I am concerned that the so-called health check—the break clause by another name—will be destabilising for the BBC and create uncertainty, which will not be helpful. Page 58 of the White Paper states:

“It will be for the government of the day to determine the precise scope”—of the health check—

“consulting the BBC’s unitary board and Ofcom”.

1211 BBC White Paper 8 JUNE 2016 BBC White Paper 1212
So, the Government could decide, were they so minded, to reopen such questions as whether the licence fee belongs to the BBC or should be given to other broadcasters, the extent of the contestable pot, whether the licence fee is indeed the right form of funding, and any number of other things that would in effect reopen the charter settlement.

The Secretary of State told the Culture, Media and Sport Committee yesterday that this was not his intention. He now has an opportunity to guarantee, in the charter and the agreement he makes with the BBC, that any such process will have the narrowest possible focus and cannot be used to reopen the fundamental tenets that underpin the charter halfway through its term. We need reassurance, in other words, that it will not be a five-year charter in all but name.

I know that Members raised this issue when the White Paper was published. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) pressed Ministers for more detail on this point immediately after its publication. In the other place, the Conservative Lord Fowler has questioned the plan to have such a review, arguing that these functions should be left to a “strong board of independent directors”.—[Official Report, House of Lords, 12 May 2016; Vol. 771, c. 1825.]

He stated that those directors should be allowed to run the BBC “without interference”, and I find myself agreeing with him. Can the Secretary of State confirm today that the health check—if he decides to persevere with it—will be able to recommend proposals to be included only in the subsequent charter, rather than being used to compromise the BBC’s independence midway through the charter term we are about to embark on? Will he reassure the House, especially Opposition Members, that it will be set in the narrowest possible terms?

The BBC’s core Reithian mission to “inform, educate and entertain” has worked well for over 90 years. It is the foundation on which the corporation’s success has been built. There has always been a virtue in the clarity provided by the simplicity of the current mission statement that has stood the BBC in good stead, so why is the Secretary of State determined to alter the substance of the mission statement to include “an explicit requirement to be distinctive, high quality and impartial”? What exactly do the Government mean by “distinctiveness”? It is one of those words that can mean all things to all people. It certainly means something different to him than it means to the BBC or members of the public. Page 32 of the White Paper defines distinctiveness as:

“A requirement that the BBC should be substantially different to other providers across each and every service”.

That hardly pin it down. Ministers must allay the concerns that this could be interpreted as the BBC being forced to withdraw from anything its commercial rivals wish it was not doing, for their own commercial gain.

The Secretary of State has questioned the distinctiveness of some of the BBC’s most popular programmes, such as “Strictly Come Dancing”. The White Paper states on page 71:

“The government is clear that it cannot and indeed should not determine either the content or scheduling of programmes.”

However, it also sets out prescriptive content requirements for radio and TV. To take one example for TV, it demands on page 38:

“Fewer high-output long-term titles.”

He seems to be telling the BBC to stop producing much-loved shows, such as “Countryfile”, “Casualty” and “Doctor Who”, that happen to have been produced for many years. What reassurances can he give that he will not simply require Ofcom to make the BBC back off doing things he does not like, on the basis of those extremely prescriptive requirements?

Sammy Wilson: I do not think that anyone wants the BBC to be unable to make popular programmes, but does the hon. Lady accept that companies such as ITV have a valid point when they say that the money that is available to the BBC every year through the licence fee gives it an advantage in the ratings war and in buying in programmes that help it in that ratings war?

Maria Eagle: I think that competition between private and commercial broadcasters and public broadcasters in this country on the basis of high-quality programming benefits all sectors, the British public and our creative industries. I do not accept that the BBC being able to make good-quality programmes, perhaps over an extended number of years, somehow compromises the capacity of the rest of our broadcasting and TV industry to do similar things. It gives us a better, bigger, richer broadcasting ecology.

If the Secretary of State, who is a free marketeer by instinct, wishes to intervene by micromanaging the public sector elements of our broadcasting industry, he is making a very big mistake, as well as turning into a statist, interfering Minister who should leave our broadcasters to get on with the job that they do so well, particularly those who work in the BBC.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend talks about the Secretary of State micromanaging the BBC. Is she as disappointed as I am that, although there is a lot of micromanagement, there is not much micromanagement to make sure that there is more diversity at the BBC in respect of its programmes, producers and so on?

Maria Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend that the BBC needs to do more on diversity. To be fair to the Secretary of State—I want to be fair to him, of course—he is concerned about that too. It is perfectly reasonable to expect the BBC to achieve results. The difficulty is when Ministers start telling it precisely how it should achieve those results. That is when we run into difficulties. It is perfectly reasonable, as he has said, to expect the BBC to do better in that regard. I think we all expect that.

We should be in no doubt about the scale of the public’s support for the BBC. Some 192,000 people participated in the public consultation on the charter, which is the second largest response to a Government consultation ever. More than four fifths of the responses indicated that the BBC is serving its audiences well; 66% indicated that the BBC has a positive wider impact on the market; and approximately two thirds indicated that BBC expansion was justified, rather than its diminution. Although the public’s overwhelming support for the BBC cannot be in any doubt, the Secretary of State
should recall that there is concern about some of the Government’s proposals. For example, 62% of over-60s are suspicious of the Government’s intentions towards the BBC.

I hope that the Secretary of State will consider fully the widespread concerns among the public, industry professionals and parliamentarians about his proposals, and take steps genuinely to change them to reassure those of us who care about the future of the BBC over the next charter period. If he does so, he will be able to look back on his time in office as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport knowing that he boosted the BBC. If he does not, I believe that his legacy will be seen as rather more disruptive.

1.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

(Mr John Whittingdale): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” in line 1 to end and add:

“notes the positive response from the BBC to the publication of the BBC White Paper which sets a clear framework for a stable and successful future for one of the United Kingdom’s finest institutions, enhancing its independence and empowering it to continue to create distinctive, high-quality and well-liked programmes and content; welcomes the open and consultative process that has informed the Charter Review including the second largest ever public consultation and the detailed contribution from committees of both Houses to the Charter Review process; and notes the Government’s intention to publish a draft Charter, in good time, for debate in the devolved administrations, as well as both Houses, before the Charter is finalised.”

I thank the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for giving the House the opportunity to debate the White Paper on the future of the BBC, even if I am less than happy with the terms of her motion. The motion talks about the “threat” to the “editorial and financial independence of the BBC”—two principles that will be explicitly strengthened, rather than weakened, under the proposals in the White Paper. However, that is typical of the entire debate around the charter renewal process, which has been characterised by the Government’s critics tilting at windmills, perhaps in tribute to Cervantes, the 400th anniversary of whose death we are commemorating, alongside that of Shakespeare.

The White Paper was designed not to wreck the BBC, but rather to cement its status as the finest broadcaster in the world for many years to come. It was informed by an extensive consultation—the largest of its kind ever undertaken by Government. We talked frequently and at length to representatives of the BBC—both the management and the trust—in what the chair of the BBC has described as “constructive engagement”. We received more than 190,000 responses from the public; 16 focus groups were held; there was nationally representative polling of more than 4,000 adults across the UK; and more than 300 organisations and experts engaged with us. I will not list all of those, but to give a flavour of how diverse they were, let me say that they included the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, the British Film Institute, Equity, Glasgow City Council, Sir Lenny Henry, the Met Office, the National Union of Journalists, UK Sport and the Wellcome Trust.

I am also grateful to the members of the advisory group, who provided expert views; to Armando Iannucci, who assembled two panels containing some of the best and brightest creative minds working in television today; and to David Clementi and David Perry, who conducted detailed reviews of BBC governance and licence fee enforcement respectively. Moreover, February saw the publication of reports on BBC charter review by Select Committees of both Houses. Each one was considered very carefully by myself and the Department, and I am pleased that we agreed with many of their recommendations.

Pete Wishart: I say the same thing that I said to the shadow Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will have seen from the response from Scotland that the dissatisfaction levels there are higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom. There is a sense that the BBC does not properly and adequately reflect us as a nation. What will he do to address those concerns?

Mr Whittingdale: I share those concerns. It is a matter that I discussed at some length with the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), who is hoping to catch your eye shortly, Madam Deputy Speaker. He is a member of the Select Committee that I gave evidence to yesterday on charter review. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is absolutely right that opinion research has shown that the level of satisfaction with the BBC, while still being high, is lower in Scotland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. That is of concern to the BBC. We have sought to put in place new measures to ensure that the BBC takes action to address that. First, there is representation on the board. We want somebody who will act as a voice for Scotland, and I will come on to the governance arrangements shortly. Secondly, there will be a new service licence for each of the nations of the UK, so there will be a specific service licence setting out in broad terms how the BBC is expected to ensure that it meets the needs of people in Scotland. However, at the end of the day, these are matters for the BBC. The service licence, like all service licences, will be set in broad terms. How the BBC goes about raising the level of satisfaction in its output in Scotland is ultimately a matter for the organisation, but I know that it is anxious to address that. I am sure that the director-general will be happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about that.

Pete Wishart: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for that. He knows that there is great concern about this issue in Scotland. A few proposals have emerged, including the one from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs in the Scottish Parliament for a much more federal type of BBC. There is also the ongoing discussion about a new service that is produced in Scotland, where we can see the eyes of the world through a Scottish production with Scottish values. Does the Secretary of State see any merit in that? If he does not, what is wrong with those suggestions?

Mr Whittingdale: This is the point at which I fear I will disappoint the hon. Gentleman. Although it is important that the BBC achieves high levels of satisfaction right across the United Kingdom, it is the British Broadcasting Corporation and it represents the whole of the United Kingdom, and I do not support making it a federal structure. The question of how it provides news coverage is for the BBC, but as it is the UK
broadcaster, it is important that it should provide a UK-wide national news bulletin that draws the nation together.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for so generously giving way. On this issue of Scotland and other regions in the United Kingdom, does he agree that, under this new arrangement, Scotland has far greater representation than many regions within England? The west midlands, for example, has an equivalent population to Scotland, but Scotland has a much greater seat at the table.

**Mr Whittingdale**: There will be a non-executive member of the BBC board to represent England, but not specifically each region. The requirement on the BBC, as part of its purpose, is to serve the nations and regions. The BBC is fully aware of the dissatisfaction that is felt in some parts of England. My hon. Friend identified the west midlands. The level of investment by the BBC in the west midlands has already been debated in the House in the past. It is important for the BBC to invest in production in every part of the United Kingdom and to reflect the requirements of every part of the country.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Mention is made in the White Paper of sub-committees for the four nations. Can the Secretary of State elaborate a little more on what might be the make-up of those sub-committees and how they will be chosen?

**Mr Whittingdale**: I am afraid that I cannot do that at this stage. That will primarily be a matter for the BBC. While the charter will set out the over-arching governance structure—in other words the creation of a unitary board and an external regulator—organisation within the corporation itself is largely a matter for the BBC. Obviously, I encourage the hon. Lady to discuss that matter with the BBC and perhaps the new chairman of the board, who is currently the chairman of the BBC Trust.

I was tempted by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire to talk about some of the evidence that I gave yesterday to the Select Committee. Obviously, the House of Lords Committee has also taken a close interest in these matters, and I have no doubt that the Committees in both Houses will continue to do so as we move towards producing a draft charter, which I hope to do before the summer. Members will then have plenty of time to study it in detail before debates in both Houses as well as in the devolved Administrations, as we committed to in the memorandum of understanding with the devolved Administrations. Once approved by the Privy Council, the new charter will formally come into effect on 1 January 2017 and the BBC will then transition to its new model of governance and regulation over the ensuing months.

I will not repeat all the details of the White Paper, because we had a lengthy discussion when it was published, but let me address the two specific concerns, which were raised by the shadow Secretary of State, of editorial and financial independence. On the former, the new governance structure is exactly as recommended by Sir David Clementi in his widely welcomed report. Whereas previously all of the appointments of the governors of the BBC and, following changes, the BBC Trust were made by the Government, at least half of the new BBC board will be appointed by the BBC. The six positions that are Government appointees will be made through the public appointments process, which was not previously in place. Peter Riddell, the new commissioner for public appointments, said:

“I welcome the broad principles outlined in today’s BBC White Paper about how appointments will be made to the new Unitary Board. To put these into practice, there will need to be a robust, independent process which attracts a broad range of candidates for these posts.”

That is exactly what the Government want to see. The BBC accepts that the Government should appoint both the chairman and the deputy chairman through the public appointments process. It has questioned whether the Government should make the appointment of four non-executive directors, but those four NEDs are there specifically to represent each of the nations of the UK, and their appointment is made not just by the Government in Westminster, but in consultation with the devolved Administrations. If that was taken away, we would lose the ability of the devolved Administrations to have a say in the appointment of the governor to represent each of the nations of the UK.

However, as well as putting in place a more independent board, we will also strengthen the independence of the director-general as editor-in-chief. Editorial decisions will be a matter for him and the BBC executives—not for non-executive board members. Those non-executive members will be able to hold the director-general to account for his decisions, but only after programmes are transmitted. It is clear that the board’s involvement is to oversee and to deal with possible complaints about editorial decisions, but only after transmission of programmes.

The shadow Secretary of State mentioned that we have decided to extend the term of the charter to 11 years specifically to meet the concern that it should not coincide with the electoral cycle. It is correct that we are intending to have a mid-term health check, and, as we have repeatedly said, it is precisely that—a health check. It is not an opening up of the charter. However, it does seem sensible that, if we are setting a charter for 11 years, we should not have no opportunity whatever to look at how it is working for the whole of that 11-year period, particularly at a time when changes are taking place so rapidly. We have said explicitly in the White Paper that it is a review to provide a health check focusing on the governance and regulatory reforms in the mid-term. We have gone on to say that the review will not consider changes to the fundamental mission, purposes and licence fee model as these have been determined by the current charter review process. I make it clear again that this is a health check to examine how the changes we are putting in place are working, but we do not anticipate any need to reopen questions about the charter.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Given the criticisms of the inefficiency and value for money at the BBC, the huge payouts for people who are made redundant, for example, and then come back nearly a year later—even the National Union of Journalists has criticised that—and the high levels of pay at management level, if after five years there has been no reform or change in the squandering
of money by the BBC, what will happen at the review at that stage? Would the Secretary of State reconsider the licence fee or would he put in greater financial controls?

Mr Whittingdale: We are actually putting in stronger financial controls now, because we are opening up the whole of the BBC for the National Audit Office to examine to consider the questions of whether maximum value for money is being obtained for the licence fee payer. Not only will the NAO be able to carry out value-for-money studies, as it has in some areas already, but it will become the auditor of the BBC. The NAO has a very good record of ensuring that public money is spent properly and is not wasted.

Julian Knight: To return to the health check, does the Secretary of State envisage that it would cover whether or not adequate progress had been made to allow access to independent producers, as set out in the White Paper?

Mr Whittingdale: We have set out a path that will, we hope, lead to the whole of the BBC’s schedule being opened up for commissioning. We would expect the BBC to meet the targets in doing that. We will continue to talk to the BBC about that and if it looked as though they were failing to meet those targets we might raise that with them before, but that is already set out in the charter. No changes would be required, because we have already made it clear that we expect the BBC gradually to open up the whole of the schedule until it reaches 100%.

Dawn Butler: On the subject of independent producers, after the last debate we had on the BBC I thank the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy for helping to secure the recordings of “The Real McCoy”. I hope to have a special screening in Parliament with a Q&A with some of the original cast in the not too distant future, and I hope that both the Minister and the Secretary of State will come along.

Mr Whittingdale: I am delighted to have given way to the hon. Lady to allow her the opportunity to praise my excellent Minister, who is sitting beside me.

I want to come back to the point about the National Audit Office and its ability to carry out value-for-money studies across the BBC. It is correct that the activities of BBC Worldwide are not funded with public money—they are commercially funded—but the success of BBC Worldwide has a definite impact on the finances of the BBC since it generates income for the BBC, and it is important that we extract maximum value to minimise the burden on the licence fee payer. As I mentioned when we debated this issue in the Select Committee yesterday, BBC Worldwide has not always had a brilliant record of looking after the money it spends. The Select Committee, when I was the Chair in the last Parliament, was highly critical of the Lonely Planet saga, which resulted in a massive loss to BBC Worldwide. However, I can reassure the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood and the BBC that the National Audit Office is very aware of the concerns that have been expressed and is confident that it can provide reassurance that it will have no impact either on creative decision making in the BBC or on commercial negotiations with other companies.

The NAO already audits a number of public bodies that have commercial relationships with other companies and is well familiar with the need to maintain commercial confidentiality when necessary. I know that the Comptroller and Auditor General will continue to talk to the BBC, but I very much hope that we can find a way whereby the BBC’s concerns are satisfied. The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood also talked about the BBC’s financial independence and, as I said, I believe that we have strengthened that rather than diminished it. We have agreed that the licence fee should be subject to regular review every five years, and that for the first five-year period it should rise each year in line with inflation, having been frozen for a long time. We have also agreed to close the iPlayer loophole and to phase out the broadband top-slice. That means that the BBC can now plan with certainty on the basis of licence fee income, along with its own commercial earnings, and it will have total flexibility in how it spends its money, with the single exception of the ring fence for the BBC World Service and the top-up grant that the Government are giving to fund its expansion.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The Secretary of State is outlining the freedom that the BBC will continue to have in expenditure, but one of the big concerns for the public is transparency. Why was there a withdrawal from the proposal to force the BBC to publish the pay packages of presenters and others in the BBC? It was originally set at about £150,000, but now it is up to a massive £450,000. Why was the decision taken to increase that when most members of the public think that it was perfectly reasonable, as this is public money and the information should be out there and transparent?

Mr Whittingdale: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says and have some sympathy with him. We debated with the BBC the appropriate level at which to set the publication limit and, after that debate, set it at £450,000 as a first step. It will mean that those individuals who are the highest paid on the BBC payroll will now be identified, and I think that is an important step forward in transparency. I hope that it is not the end of the saga and I would encourage the BBC to go further. The BBC expressed concerns about the consequences if it were required to publish the names of more individuals at lower levels of pay, but we will see how this first step goes. I share the right hon. Gentleman’s hope and I hope that in due course we might see more publication.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): May I suggest to the Secretary of State that tweaking that level downwards might be reviewed at the five-year point?

Mr Whittingdale: I am sure that the BBC, which will be anxiously listening to this debate, will have heard the pressure that is being put on the Government to achieve greater transparency. Since I too would like to see that, I hope that it will consider it.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend absolutely certain that nobody wishes the limit to be set at a much lower level?

Mr Whittingdale: The people who initially did not want it to be set at a lower level were in the BBC. The BBC raised concerns about the potential consequences.
For instance, it talked about whether it might result in poaching once people’s salary levels were known. There was also a concern that it might have the effect of bidding up salaries. I do not think that those concerns are merited, but as I say, we have taken a first step towards greater transparency and I hope that in due course we can go further.

Let me very quickly address the point raised by the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood about the contestable pot. The contestable pot is a small amount of money, amounting to £60 million over three years, which, out of the total amount of money available to the BBC, is a very small amount. It does not affect the July settlement. We made it absolutely clear that the Government stand by the July settlement, and the funding for the contestable pot does not in any way affect it. We will be consulting on precisely how the contestable pot will operate. The hon. Lady raises concerns about whether it will fall within the requirements in respect of state aid. I rather hope that that will become an academic issue in a few weeks’ time but if, extraordinarily, it still applies, we will need to take that into account.

Far from threatening the BBC, the proposals in the White Paper, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) said earlier, have been welcomed by it. Lord Hall, the director-general, said:

“This White Paper delivers a mandate for the strong, creative BBC the public believe in. A BBC that will be good for the creative industries—and most importantly of all, for Britain.”

The BBC Trust chairman has, as I mentioned earlier, talked about the “constructive engagement between the Government, the BBC and the public” which “has delivered a White Paper that sets good principles, strengthens the BBC’s governance and regulation and cements a financial settlement”.

The chair of the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, Laura Mansfield, said:

“This is an historic charter for the UK’s entire production sector and recognises the world-leading creativity British producers bring across every genre of production. This white paper will give BBC commissioners the freedom to choose the very best ideas, while ensuring diversity of supply and regionality is rightly protected.”

The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) was one of the first people who celebrated the fact that diversity is for the first time to be enshrined in the BBC charter.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): On regulation and diversity, does my right hon. Friend agree that Ofcom itself may need to better reflect the population of the United Kingdom, especially as diversity becomes an ever-increasing component of its regulatory requirement?

**Mr Whittingdale:** My hon. Friend raises a perfectly valid point. Obviously, Ofcom is a public body. We would want to set an example in achieving diversity, and if its performance falls short, that is something which I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy and I will be happy to point out to the chairman and the chief executive.

**Sammy Wilson:** Can the Secretary of State clarify whether one of the benefits for the BBC will be that it will now have access to the database of Sky and other broadcasters, so that it can identify the names and addresses of people who may not be licence fee payers?

**Mr Whittingdale:** We are looking at ways of enforcing the licence fee requirement. Anybody who watches live television is required to have a licence, so those databases represent people who are required to have a television licence.

I wish to add in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) that although I would not suggest that she is not right to be concerned, Ofcom took a major step towards greater diversity with the appointment of a female BME chief executive, who is doing a fantastic job. I am sure she would agree that there is still more that needs to be done.

**Mrs Grant:** Diversity is an important issue which is close to the hearts of many of us and we are making good headway on it, but does my right hon. Friend believe that designated funding—ring-fenced funding—might be helpful in driving diversity, as suggested by Lenny Henry?

**Mr Whittingdale:** We have set diversity as one of the public purposes in the charter. How the BBC delivers that is a matter for the BBC, but having been given that requirement, it will have to state how it will go about it, and that will be subject to Ofcom scrutiny.

The BBC reaches 97% of the UK population and 348 million people around the world every week. It is one of our most recognisable and strongest national brands and an utterly vital source of information, education, entertainment and soft power. It is precisely because the BBC has such a special place in British life and is so valued by the British people, and because the rest of the world feels the same way, that this Government wanted to secure its future and enable it to thrive in a media landscape that has changed beyond recognition in the past decade. That is what the proposals in this White Paper do.

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend raises a perfectly valid point. Obviously, Ofcom is a public body. We would want to set an example in achieving diversity, and if its performance falls short, that is something which I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy and I will be happy to point out to the chairman and the chief executive.

Sammy Wilson: Can the Secretary of State clarify whether one of the benefits for the BBC will be that it will now have access to the database of Sky and other broadcasters, so that it can identify the names and addresses of people who may not be licence fee payers?

Mr Whittingdale: We are looking at ways of enforcing the licence fee requirement. Anybody who watches live television is required to have a licence, so those databases represent people who are required to have a television licence.

I wish to add in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) that although I would not suggest that she is not right to be concerned, Ofcom took a major step towards greater diversity with the appointment of a female BME chief executive, who is doing a fantastic job. I am sure she would agree that there is still more that needs to be done.

Mrs Grant: Diversity is an important issue which is close to the hearts of many of us and we are making good headway on it, but does my right hon. Friend believe that designated funding—ring-fenced funding—might be helpful in driving diversity, as suggested by Lenny Henry?

Mr Whittingdale: We have set diversity as one of the public purposes in the charter. How the BBC delivers that is a matter for the BBC, but having been given that requirement, it will have to state how it will go about it, and that will be subject to Ofcom scrutiny.

The BBC reaches 97% of the UK population and 348 million people around the world every week. It is one of our most recognisable and strongest national brands and an utterly vital source of information, education, entertainment and soft power. It is precisely because the BBC has such a special place in British life and is so valued by the British people, and because the rest of the world feels the same way, that this Government wanted to secure its future and enable it to thrive in a media landscape that has changed beyond recognition in the past decade. That is what the proposals in this White Paper do.

2.24 pm

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I welcome this opportunity to speak about the BBC in the aftermath of the publication of the Government’s White Paper on charter renewal and the Secretary of State’s appearance yesterday before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, of which I am a member.

We on the SNP Benches are passionate defenders of public service broadcasting and independent journalism, so throughout the charter renewal process the SNP has engaged constructively in the debate about how the BBC can be protected and improved.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): On regulation and diversity, does my right hon. Friend agree that Ofcom itself may need to better reflect the population of the United Kingdom, especially as diversity becomes an ever-increasing component of its regulatory requirement?

Mr Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend mean the composition of Ofcom or its actions?

Mrs Grant: The make-up. At present its diversity figures at senior management level are about 6%.
At its best the BBC is unsurpassed. Since its foundation in 1922, the BBC’s mission has been, as we all know, to inform, educate and entertain. It forms one of the cornerstones of all our national lives. In our homes daily it can be an intimate friend or sometimes an infuriating relative, but we are proud of it at its best, not least for its world-renowned reputation.

Any organisation that is successful over such a period of time must adapt. It must be able to embrace changes in technology, as well as changes in the society in which it operates. Charter renewal allows the BBC and Parliament to take stock and assess what the BBC is doing well and where it needs to improve. For some on the Government Benches and in the press who dislike the BBC, the process holds out the opportunity to attack the corporation’s core functions, and indeed during the charter renewal process we saw some wild notions floated. Some, of course, were newspaper fabrications. Other were clearly the result of Government kite flying. All of us know how that works. Ministers are able to float fanciful notions for radical reform and assess the reaction before the Secretary of State fans himself with faux horror and tells us that, of course, he had absolutely nothing whatever to do with the ludicrous and impractical proposals splashed across the pages of the madder right-wing tabloids.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I know that the hon. Gentleman is a bit of a cheerleader for the BBC, but does he have any constructive criticisms of it? It may be unsurpassed in many ways at its best, but its best is not 90% of the time.

John Nicolson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for teeing up the rest of my speech. This part is what is known as the opening paragraphs, where I say something nice before heading further south for a good kick where it is well deserved.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The hon. Gentleman refers to the Government creating some of the headlines in the right-wing press, as he put it. What logic would there be in doing so and then not delivering? It strikes me as completely illogical and therefore very unlikely that the Government would have put those points in the press.

John Nicolson: I am touched by the hon. Gentleman’s naïveté. Let me explain how the process works. Politicians sometimes talk to journalists. They say things that they do not want to be quoted as saying. The journalists then report that. If it floats, the politician then goes on the record; if it does not float, the politician backs away from it. That is generally the way it works. I would be happy to introduce the hon. Gentleman to journalists whom he might find useful in this regard over the coming months.

In the end—this is where I disagree to some extent with the Labour shadow Secretary of State—the White Paper is a relatively unambiguous document. I suspect that that may well disappoint the Secretary of State, whom many think may have wanted a more radical legislative legacy.

There are a number of welcome proposals in the White Paper. I am far from a cheerleader for the BBC. The BBC does many things which are good, but it also—as we discovered in Scotland during the referendum, which I will touch on later—does many things which are much less good. We welcome the abolition of the BBC Trust and its replacement by a unitary board. However, like many members of the House, I am worried about the composition of the new board and its independence. How will non-executive members be chosen? Can we be certain that they will not be subject to party political pressure? We have had worrying indicators already.

The National Portrait Gallery in London was recently looking for a new trustee. The selection panel, in a blind sift, rejected all five of the Government’s preferred candidates. The Secretary of State then blithely dismissed the selection panel in its entirety and appointed a new one that pleased him rather more. I pressed him on that during his appearance at the Select Committee yesterday. He told me that the panel had been dismissed because of a technicality. Although he had not necessarily wanted to influence the selection board, he did want them to know who his preferred candidates were.

That is policy masquerading as process. I asked the Secretary of State what would happen at the BBC; specifically, would this happen at the BBC? It seemed obvious, from his reaction, that it would. I do not want independent selection panels for the BBC board to know who the Secretary of State’s preferred candidates are. I want the BBC board to be entirely independent of government. I am worried by the evidence the Secretary of State gave at our Committee yesterday, as anyone, across all parties in this House, who cares about the independence of the BBC should be.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman not see the other side of the coin? Given the bias that exists within the BBC and the fact that it will be able to choose half the members, with the other half being chosen by the public appointments committee, the real danger is that the BBC will simply continue on its merry way choosing half the board from the cadre of people that it believes most reflect the BBC values that many people currently reject. There would be a diversity of people chosen by the public appointments board.

John Nicolson: I am afraid that that is simply called editorial independence. There should be board members chosen by the BBC who are independent and not subject to politicians’ pressure. However, non-executive members should be entirely independent as well. What worried me yesterday about the Secretary of State’s evidence was that he showed a willingness to apply political pressure to non-executive board members. That is something that all Members across the House should be disturbed to hear.

Mr Whittingdale: I am puzzled. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Scottish Government should give up their right to have a say over the appointment of a non-executive director on the BBC board?

John Nicolson: I am absolutely delighted for the Scottish Government to have a say. My objection, however, is about something different. My objection is to political pressure being put on appointments, in particular to the main board. As we all know, the main board, with the number of members it has, will be enormously powerful.
In fact, the Secretary of State yesterday argued how different this board would be from the previous trust—he said it would have real teeth. It is therefore vital that we should have fully independent board members, specifically the non-executive members the Government want to appoint.

John Nicolson: Does the hon. Gentleman think the new BBC board will be more or less accountable and democratic than the outgoing BBC Trust?

John Nicolson: The answer to that is we do not know yet. That is precisely why I am addressing these concerns in Parliament today. If the non-executive board members are truly independent, of course that is a great thing. However, the evidence the Secretary of State gave yesterday was worrying for the reasons I have given.

Trust in the BBC is crucial. It is no secret, as my hon. Friends have mentioned, that many in Scotland have been suspicious of BBC objectivity in recent years. The Secretary of State said a short while ago that a majority in Scotland—although he acknowledged a lesser number—were pleased with the BBC, but let me give the House the figure from the BBC Trust itself. The BBC enjoys only a 48% satisfaction rating in Scotland—less than half, for those who are numerically challenged. Sometimes criticisms of the BBC in Scotland have been fair and sometimes not, but the BBC itself—the Secretary of State acknowledged this—has a problem in Scotland.

We welcome other proposals in the White Paper. Licensed services issued by the new regulator Ofcom will include specific regulatory provision for all the nations. Out-of-London quotas will be maintained, which should enable a healthy, independent production sector in the nations and regions. The BBC’s network television supply target will be 17% for content spending in the nations and regions. The BBC’s network television news and current affairs. I reported for “On the Record”, “Panorama”, “Assignment” and “Newsnight”, and I presented “BBC Breakfast” and “ITV News”. I am passionate about editorially independent news. Combined with greater financial commissioning and editorial control, we believe the BBC in Scotland can provide relevant reflective programming and support our nation’s creative industries. We believe that bringing the BBC closer to viewers and listeners in Scotland is the best way of ensuring trust in, and satisfaction with, the BBC, and making sure it is rebuilt and retained.

Let me turn to news provision in Scotland, because I think it lies at the heart of the problem of trust for the BBC in Scotland. Some Members of the House may know that I spent much of my previous career in television news and current affairs. I reported for “On the Record”, “Panorama”, “Assignment” and “Newsnight”, and I presented “BBC Breakfast” and “ITV News”. I am passionate about editorially independent news. I therefore speak as a friend, albeit a critical one, when I say I do not think the BBC covered itself in glory during our referendum on independence. The model for coverage was wrong. The BBC treated a binary choice as though it were a traditional election. Proponents of the status quo were subjected to much less scrutiny than those who wanted constitutional change.

Julian Knight: Is it not really simply the fact that the BBC had the gross audacity to point out that an economic plan based on $100 a barrel was nonsense?

John Nicolson: That is a soundbite, not an answer to my arguments.

The problem was that the BBC treated the referendum coverage not as a binary choice but as a traditional election. The BBC recognises that it made a mistake in that, but let me tell the House how it does so. It says, on the one hand, “We made no mistakes whatsoever in our coverage of the referendum”; but then simultaneously says, “We must learn the lessons from the Scottish referendum in the way that we cover the European referendum”—and it now tells me that it has done that in its current coverage. It cannot say that it made no
mistakes in covering the Scottish referendum and simultaneously say that it will learn lessons from it—that is intellectually incoherent.

Ian Paisley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this point, which goes to the heart of where the BBC is critically wrong, because that coverage could have determined the outcome of the electoral process. That happened in our country in 1998, when Alastair Campbell flew to Belfast and said that he could rely on his friends in the BBC and in the press to do the Government’s job for him. At that point, the BBC lost all credibility, and today it stands in a shambles in Northern Ireland.

John Nicolson: There is widespread agreement that the BBC did not do well in Scotland during the referendum. The corporation looked stretched and dated, and there were fresh calls for what became known as the “Scottish Six”. At the moment in Scotland, the evening news on TV cannot cover any news item outwith Scotland. Armageddon in Carlisle? The BBC Scotland coverage will lead on an airshow in Carluke. I sometimes get emails from people who are upset when I say this, so let me make it clear that it is not the fault of the journalists, but the fault of the remit, and it leads to couthie, entrenched provincialism. The BBC has been piloting a new, grown-up programme that would cover news based on merit and have a normal remit. If the main story is a UK one, that will lead the news; if American, that will lead the news; if Scottish, that will lead the news. BBC Radio Scotland has done this for decades, and BBC Alba has done it for a number of years.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman’s argument, because most people do not think the BBC is biased. Could he give just one example of where he has a grievance about a particular story that he thinks was biased, and then we can perhaps look into it and judge it on its merits?

John Nicolson: It is not a question of one example but of the ongoing nature of the coverage during the referendum. As I have tried to explain, the problem was ongoing. People do not have to take my word for this. The fact that the BBC’s approval ratings are so low in Scotland obviously shows that there is a problem. There is no point in looking at figures that show that 52% of people believe that the BBC does not cover the country well and then saying, “Well, it’s just the SNP who are making a big fuss about it.” It is a deeply entrenched problem in Scotland. As somebody who loves independent journalism, as I hope I made clear in my earlier comments about the independence of the BBC, I hope that people will take me at face value when I say that I want to see an editorially independent BBC Scotland and, indeed, BBC network.

Sammy Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Nicolson: Does the hon. Gentleman mind if I proceed for a moment or two?

There have recently been rumours of political interference, on the subject of the “Scottish Six”, emanating from worried BBC staff. Let me remind the Secretary of State about our chats on the subject over the past few months. Charmingly, if candidly, he said yesterday at the Select Committee that he was “not qualified to judge the BBC’s output in Scotland or the reasons for its unpopularity.” On that we are agreed—he is not qualified. In March, however, he told me in this Chamber that he agreed that increased investment and employment at BBC Scotland would be beneficial. He said:

“I obviously welcome any investment at the BBC that will create additional jobs, particularly in Scotland”.—[Official Report, 3 March 2016; Vol. 606, c. 1083.]

On that occasion, when I asked about the separate “Scottish Six”, the Secretary of State assured me that it was a matter for the BBC and that neither he nor his colleagues at No. 10 Downing Street would want to interfere. I hope he recalls his comments.

Mr Whittingdale indicated assent.

John Nicolson: He nods to say that he does. However, yesterday, when I pressed him three times in the Select Committee on whether he had been talking to BBC bosses about the “Scottish Six”, or trying to influence them, his body language looked a trifle uncomfortable, and eventually he conceded something very different. He told me that he “might have concerns if he felt that the central place of the BBC in providing a nationwide news bulletin was being changed” and added that the BBC “has a responsibility to bring the nation together and news is part of that.”

Let us reflect on that line: that the job of BBC news is to bring the nation together. I could not disagree more. The job of the BBC is not to be a cheerleader for one constitutional settlement or another—that is what has caused all the distrust in Scotland. The job of the BBC is to be editorially and journalistically independent.

The Secretary of State should be playing no role whatsoever in trying to influence or block a separate “Scottish Six”. He himself stated several times that it should be a matter for the BBC and that he was not qualified to judge as he was not familiar with the BBC’s news output in Scotland. Such interference would undermine the statements made in the White Paper regarding improving the BBC’s services in the nations and restoring confidence there. It would show a blatant disregard and lack of respect for the constituent nations of the UK, including the devolved Administrations who have participated fully in the charter renewal process, and in good faith. Furthermore, it would undermine the plans that the BBC is intent on implementing.

So there we have it: a White Paper with which we broadly agree, but worrying signs that the Government want to tamper with the editorial independence of the BBC in Scotland and tamper with the political independence of the proposed new BBC board in London. SNP Members will resist both, just as we will fight any upcoming moves to privatise Channel 4. With Mr Speaker’s permission, I am now heading to the DCMS Committee to hear about Channel 4’s annual report and to offer it some moral support. Interference in the decision making of the BBC by the Government would put the independence of the BBC—a key feature of the organisation—in jeopardy, tarnishing its reliability and reputation.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Eight Members are wishing to catch my eye to speak in this debate, and we are hoping to finish at about 4.30 pm, so if everybody sticks to about 10 minutes, then I think we will come in on perfect time.
2.47 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) mentioned his BBC past, so I too should declare that I spent five of my happiest years at the BBC, where many of the people I worked with were some of the finest professionals I have worked with anywhere. Many of them existed on low salaries, very much in contrast to the supposed talent that so often fills our pages. That is not a moan about my own salary, of course.

One of the main duties of any Government is the maintenance of our country’s most important institutions, of which the BBC is undoubtedly one; millions enjoy its output every year. For me, though, that does not mean keeping it flush with public money and shielding it from change; it means fighting for reforms that ensure its long-term sustainability and relevance to the modern world. While it produces many excellent programmes and is an important part of the UK’s extraordinary global influence, it is becoming increasingly apparent—except, perhaps, to the corporation’s most highly paid stars—that the BBC must change further. Its broadcasting model, based on the idea of millions of families watching live broadcasts, is increasingly becoming outdated. It has expanded far beyond its initial remit, in some cases smothering independent local journalism in the process, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.

The White Paper on the renewal of the BBC charter offers us the opportunity to do some very important things: to refocus the corporation on the core functions that justify its present place as a state-funded broadcaster; and, I trust, to wean it off the licence fee gradually, over the longer term, and to open itself up to the calming winds of competition and outside production.

When I was setting out on my career, I and many other journalists got our first jobs at thriving local papers. Such papers provided British journalism with a natural talent-scouting system, and that has profited all of us, including the BBC. The BBC was never meant to compete with newspapers, yet the BBC News website now undercuts a lot of independent local journalism, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.

The White Paper on the renewal of the BBC charter offers us the opportunity to do some very important things: to refocus the corporation on the core functions that justify its present place as a state-funded broadcaster; and, I trust, to wean it off the licence fee gradually, over the longer term, and to open itself up to the calming winds of competition and outside production.

When I was setting out on my career, I and many other journalists got our first jobs at thriving local papers. Such papers provided British journalism with a natural talent-scouting system, and that has profited all of us, including the BBC. The BBC was never meant to compete with newspapers, yet the BBC News website now undercuts a lot of independent local journalism, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.

The White Paper on the renewal of the BBC charter offers us the opportunity to do some very important things: to refocus the corporation on the core functions that justify its present place as a state-funded broadcaster; and, I trust, to wean it off the licence fee gradually, over the longer term, and to open itself up to the calming winds of competition and outside production.

When I was setting out on my career, I and many other journalists got our first jobs at thriving local papers. Such papers provided British journalism with a natural talent-scouting system, and that has profited all of us, including the BBC. The BBC was never meant to compete with newspapers, yet the BBC News website now undercuts a lot of independent local journalism, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.

The White Paper on the renewal of the BBC charter offers us the opportunity to do some very important things: to refocus the corporation on the core functions that justify its present place as a state-funded broadcaster; and, I trust, to wean it off the licence fee gradually, over the longer term, and to open itself up to the calming winds of competition and outside production.

When I was setting out on my career, I and many other journalists got our first jobs at thriving local papers. Such papers provided British journalism with a natural talent-scouting system, and that has profited all of us, including the BBC. The BBC was never meant to compete with newspapers, yet the BBC News website now undercuts a lot of independent local journalism, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.

The White Paper on the renewal of the BBC charter offers us the opportunity to do some very important things: to refocus the corporation on the core functions that justify its present place as a state-funded broadcaster; and, I trust, to wean it off the licence fee gradually, over the longer term, and to open itself up to the calming winds of competition and outside production.

When I was setting out on my career, I and many other journalists got our first jobs at thriving local papers. Such papers provided British journalism with a natural talent-scouting system, and that has profited all of us, including the BBC. The BBC was never meant to compete with newspapers, yet the BBC News website now undercuts a lot of independent local journalism, and it has done all that by levying what is one of Britain’s most regressive taxes—the licence fee.
Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I have been following the hon. Gentleman’s words with great interest, and I credit him with and pay respect to him for his experience in this area. If, however, he is looking for logic in the structure of the BBC, he will be sorely disappointed because the BBC is above that. The BBC is an utterly unique institution—there is no similar corporate structure anywhere else—and we have a system which on paper seems bizarre, but by heaven it works. They must also make sure that the BBC is proactive in finding fairer and more imaginative ways of funding its services. Many of its assets, such as its back catalogue, are not core to its public service function and could easily be made subscription services. Like other Members, I welcome the initiative to bring in the National Audit Office when it comes to the BBC’s activities.

Julian Knight: I hasten to add that the hon. Gentleman’s words with great interest, and I credit him with and pay respect to him for his experience in this area. If, however, he is looking for logic in the structure of the BBC, he will be sorely disappointed because the BBC is above that. The BBC is an utterly unique institution—there is no similar corporate structure anywhere else—and we have a system which on paper seems bizarre, but by heaven it works. Can we not just glory in this special, unique and, dare I say it, British BBC?

Julian Knight: I am sure those comments have been noted outside this place, and the hon. Gentleman can expect the headhunters to call shortly. As I was saying, many of the BBC’s assets, such as its back catalogue, are not core to its public services, and if there are both audiences and quality programming, such services will survive and thrive. If not, why are we taxing the poorest to pay for them? Such change may seem difficult and even painful to people who have grown up being used to the status quo, but a fair and flexible funding model and a narrower focus on the core functions of public service broadcasting will be good not just for independent journalists and their viewers, but for the BBC as well.

2.58 pm

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Last month the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport published his long-awaited White Paper on the BBC’s charter renewal, which we have all seen, and I have deep concerns about it. In response to overwhelming opposition from the general public and my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), the Secretary of State has climbed down from some of his most radical proposals: “Strictly Come Dancing” will no longer be banned from prime time, the BBC will no longer be forced to sell off its highly profitable stake in UKTV, and he claims that the new all-powerful unitary board will no longer be packed with a majority of Government appointees. The way that has been handled suggests that those suggestions were either leaked to gauge public opinion on the Secretary of State’s long-held intentions against the BBC, or to make his final proposals seem paltry by comparison. Whatever his intention, he has laid bare his fundamental dislike of the BBC and what it stands for.

I welcome the publication of salaries above £450,000. However, I question why there is no threshold of £150,000, because MPs and those in public life speak about that figure—and below it—as one that should be put into the public realm. Why £450,000? To my constituents, people in the broadcasting industry on £300,000 earn a considerable amount of money.

I agree that closing the iPlayer loophole is important. We are seeing a transformation in the way that broadcasting is delivered, and it is important that the Government keep up to date with those changes. I also welcome the increase in funding for the World Service. That is long overdue, especially after the issues that we had a few years ago, where changes to the World Service moved it from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the BBC. That was effectively a reduction in the BBC budget, and it had consequences on delivery, some of which have led to a U-turn.

I welcome 11 years for charter renewal instead of 10, but if the Government collapse, or if we have a general election outside the five-year cycle, will that aspiration be lost? What mechanism can be introduced to ensure the fundamental principle of the BBC being non-political, as the Secretary of State says, so that the cycle of charter renewal falls after a general election should general elections not fall in five-year cycles?

There are significant problems with the Government’s proposals, and those persist despite the Secretary of State’s apparent U-turns in the past few weeks. Such proposals could have a significant impact on the BBC’s independence, remit, and purpose. Part of what makes the BBC such a fundamental cornerstone of our democracy is its independence from politics. Unlike other media corporations, it is a public service and accountable to the public. Because it is beholden to all of us, it can hold those in power to account. The BBC is respected by the UK public and—more importantly—internationally, for its impartiality, but the Government’s proposals for a new BBC unitary board threaten to undermine that impartiality. Although the Secretary of State was thwarted in his efforts to allow the Government to appoint a majority of board members, he still intends Ministers to handpick as many as half the membership. Given that the new board will have far greater powers than the current BBC Trust, because appointees will make operational and strategic decisions that will determine the BBC’s future, his proposals constitute a worrying attack on the organisation’s impartiality.
Given that the Secretary of State has described the BBC’s abolition as a “tempting prospect”, it is hardly surprising that 62% of over-60s admitted to having no confidence in the Government to protect the BBC during its charter renewal. Indeed, their concerns are entirely justified. Before he set his sights on the BBC, the Secretary of State intervened in the National Portrait Gallery’s recruitment process, and people have a right to be concerned about his track record. Indeed, he has form on interference, because after his preferred candidates were not shortlisted, he decided to rerun the selection process. Such a willingness to intervene is undoubtedly a frightening precedent for the appointments procedure of the new BBC board. Equally worrying is the Government’s insistence on a five-year review of the charter—the Secretary of State calls it a “health check”—and the encouragement of commercial rivals to bid for licence fee money. While the former will prevent the BBC from carrying out long-term planning, the encouragement of commercial rivals to bid for licence fee money will accelerate the erosion of the organisation’s financial independence. Taking money from the BBC undermines its ability to deliver services. We have seen a worrying reduction in or changes to BBC online and BBC radio, and a worrying threat—a sword of Damocles—seems to hang over BBC 24.

The Secretary of State says that the five-year health check is mid-term, and that he will not be interfering. No matter what promises he makes, he cannot escape the fact that the five-year health check is an intervention—a dialogue between the Government and the BBC. What is the point of the health check if the Government have no powers and no ability to change the BBC should it show failing health? In my opinion, the health check is a political tool of the Government.

Such measures are completely at odds with wider public opinion, and threaten to damage the UK’s influence abroad through the BBC. The BBC is popular. Some 97% of the population use it for around 18 hours a week, and 76% of people think it delivers value for money. Despite that, the Secretary of State wants to transform the BBC’s entire mission under the banner of “distinctiveness”. Here, I worry. Although he himself could not provide any definition of distinctiveness to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I do not think that the public will be fooled into believing that that will represent anything other than an attempt to marginalise the BBC in favour of its commercial competitors.

The requirement for so-called distinctive content, overseen by the commercial regulator Ofcom, will inevitably undermine the BBC by restricting its popularity. It will push popular programmes from peak-time slots; putting less popular shows in those slots will harm the BBC’s excellent viewing figures and reputation. That will enable a future Government to push an agenda of further cuts and reforms, as the Government will have set the BBC up to fail. Cash grubs, such as the Chancellor’s transfer of the costs for free TV licences for the over-75s from the Department for Work and Pensions to the BBC, and efforts to expunge BBC services, which we saw in the Government’s attempt to remove online recipes, will become commonplace, further damaging the BBC’s reputation. The result will be a BBC lacking impartiality, financial autonomy and independence, and with its reputation for quality broadcasting undermined.

An immense amount of public pressure forced the Secretary of State to step away from attacks on the BBC’s online recipes and on some of its better broadcasting, such as “Strictly Come Dancing” and “The Great British Bake Off”. But all this is happening on top of the Government’s previous attacks on the excellent BBC Online services and on the BBC’s local and international radio content, among others. Other issues not in the White Paper are not being addressed, such as the charges the BBC faces for delivery via satellite—the cost the BBC incurs for that ought to be addressed.

We must maintain the pressure on the Secretary of State to protect the BBC and the public interest, to make him withdraw his attacks on the BBC’s independence and uphold the great virtues that mean that the BBC is held in the highest esteem, not only in the UK but around the world.

3.8 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) and to speak in this debate about the BBC’s future. With that in mind, although she is not in her place I thank the hon. Member. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for giving us the opportunity to have this debate. She was right to say that the BBC is a revered and trusted national institution that we should view with great pride. I certainly do so from the Government Benches. We should also be minded that the BBC costs licence fee payers just 40p a day, the same price as The Sun—I will leave the analogy there.

The BBC is particularly important given the Government’s commitment to improve social mobility. Children from the poorest backgrounds have the ability to access the BBC while they are growing up, and we should not forget what it can do for their social mobility. I speak as an example, having failed my 12-plus. I eventually went on to study for my A-levels at a sixth-form college, where I had quite a lot of independence. Had it not been for the BBC filling in some of the years for me, I do not believe I would be here in this place—although for some that may be a reason to speak against the BBC. I was proud, therefore, to be one of the 190,000 members of the public who responded to the consultation document, and I believe that the Government’s charter renewal fits about right with the document I completed. During the process, I engaged with the BBC and wanted to do everything I could to support it. When I was elected 12 months ago, I made this my cause. I wanted to come here and speak highly of an institution that had done so much for me over the years, and I was delighted to obtain reassurances from the Secretary of State that the Government wanted only to strengthen it.

I am aware that the Government have tabled an amendment, but I want to focus on the three key areas in the motion. The first is the view that the charter renewal White Paper “fails to provide an acceptable basis for Charter renewal”. That is not true of the White Paper as a whole. The charter will be renewed for an 11-year period, which puts it outside the election cycle. I listened to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), who is no longer in his seat, and his view that the BBC was
biased in the Scottish referendum. Over the years, it has struck me that the party that loses an election or, in this instance, a referendum tends to turn around and bash the BBC for letting it down and not giving it a proper crack. The bulk of our constituents would put that down to being a sore loser. Such attacks do this place no favours.

Deidre Brock: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman speak that way. Much mention has been made of “leftie luvvies” within the BBC. I wonder why he makes that point, given his own election result.

Huw Merriman: I won my election so I am delighted with the BBC to that extent, but I am making a serious point. It ill behoves this place to attack the BBC from all sides. I have observed over the years that when both parties attack the BBC, it probably means it is getting it about right.

The day the White Paper was published, I was fortunate to speak at a Media Society event in favour of the BBC and about the White Paper. The head of BBC policy was also at the event, and he was asked how many marks out of 10 he would give the White Paper in terms of support for the BBC. He gave it eight out of 10. If someone was sitting an exam, 80% would give them a first-class mark. This suggests that the BBC is happy with what has been negotiated, and I applaud it for having done a great job.

The second element in the motion is “the threat the White Paper poses to the editorial and financial independence of the BBC”.

Again, this does not stack up, in the light of the White Paper’s content. For the first time, the BBC will be able to appoint people to the board. If the chairman opts for a board of 14, the BBC will appoint the majority. The BBC’s editorial independence lies with the director-general, which provides for a welcome separation of responsibilities. On financial independence, there is a five-year funding commitment that ensures a real-terms increase, which the BBC has lacked for some years. I welcome that and know that the BBC does as well. The National Audit Office and Ofcom also provide a degree of independence that allows the BBC to spend its money better and to be better regulated. I would have thought that all hon. Members would have welcomed that.

The third element of the motion “expresses concern about the re-writing of the BBC’s founding mission statement”.

The BBC’s duty is to educate, inform and entertain, with the additional requirement that its output should be distinctive. If something is not distinctive, it should not be shown on the BBC—thatch would mean an end to repeats of my speeches to the House, as well as the cookery recipes! The BBC has nothing to fear from the addition of the word “distinctive”. Originality is what it does best and constantly. The BBC’s output now contains fewer derivative formats and US imports than it did some years back, so if all this means is the loss of “The Voice”, I would welcome it.

I do, however, seek the Minister’s confirmation on a few points. The first relates to the health check on page 54 of the White Paper.

Graham Jones: I want to take the hon. Gentleman back one sentence to the issue of distinctiveness. What would he say about the BBC’s distinctiveness in the provision of sport? If it is not distinctive, should the BBC provide for sport or not? I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman’s views on that.

Huw Merriman: I was coming on to this point, because distinctiveness was one of my asks for the Minister. The hon. Gentleman is right to mention this issue. When it comes to showing sport, taking too distinctive an approach could end up being an unpopular approach that nobody wants to watch. If distinctiveness in football programmes on TV means panning away from the pitch and doing something distinct, I will not want to watch it, but I do not believe that is how the issue will be interpreted. There must be a common-sense and sensible way of interpreting it.

Let me provide another example, about which I am a little more concerned—the output of Radio 1. I recognise that someone of my age should not be listening to Radio 1, but I do listen to it. In my view, Radio 1 already provides a distinctive mix. It provides music that is currently in the charts, as well as playing music that is being aired for the first time because no other commercial broadcaster will play it. If it then goes into the charts, the commercial radio stations will want to play it. If we expect the BBC to be distinctive in having nothing but new music, my worry would be that listeners will not turn on at all, so the new music would never make it through towards the mainstream.

The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) is right that we need to be careful about the definition of ‘distinctiveness’, but I do not see that as anything other than reminding the BBC that its output should be both original and excellent. I acknowledge that the Secretary of State is more a fan of Motorhead, but I hope that distinctiveness will not be taken far enough as to allow any of Motorhead’s music to be played on Radio 1.

I mentioned the health check, and I believe that the devil will be in the detail of the language. It is important to have the opportunity to survey what is happening. It makes absolute sense that, five years into an 11-year period, there should be an opportunity to ensure that the charter renewal has worked. If it has not, it can be changed. I agree that if it is worded too widely, it could become a matter of concern and end up being a break clause. As I say, the devil will be in the detail. It was interesting to hear Opposition speakers assuming that a Conservative Government would be in place at that particular point. I obviously very much hope that that will be the case.

Graham Jones: I made the point that the 11-year charter renewal could be fraught if the principle were that it should follow a general election, because the Government might collapse.

Huw Merriman: The hon. Gentleman did indeed say that, so I correct myself on that basis. Perhaps we can agree by saying, “Who knows what the future will bring?” making it essential for the five-year health-check provisions to be worded tightly to ensure that the BBC continues to be the BBC that I believe this charter will deliver—certainly for the first five years.
I also seek the Minister’s reassurance about the make-up of the board. We might find that six appointments are made through the Government process, but we should all remember that these will be in accordance with the Nolan principles on public appointments, which is why I do not buy some of the points that have been made about bias. I am conscious that there will also be up to eight appointments made by the BBC itself. It is essential for the board to have one culture and to operate as one, notwithstanding the two different mechanisms for appointments.

My final concern relates to diversity targets. I was delighted to have a BBC breakfast yesterday with the BBC team that is looking to promote its diversity objectives. I applaud the ambitious figures it came up with to make sure that the BBC’s output reflects the society that we live in. The figures are indeed ambitious and have to be delivered by 2020. Key for me is that the BBC does not lose its excellence in so doing. It is essential for the best people to be put into the jobs on the basis of merit. That is a huge concern for me.

I end by welcoming the White Paper, which I believe strengthens the BBC. It gives the BBC integrity and gives back much of the independence that it might have lost over the years. It must be funded properly. I greatly welcome the Government’s amended motion, and I look forward to supporting it and the BBC in the Lobby later today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I apologise for the fact that there has been a slight change in today’s business. As Members will see on the Annunciator, there is to be a business statement after the debate. If no Member speaks for more than seven or eight minutes, everyone will be able to contribute before the vote.

3.19 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. Some of what I say will reflect the fact that I chair the NUJ parliamentary group, the financial support for which is specified in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests under my name.

Members on both sides of the House have agreed that the BBC is a fantastic organisation. It is a fantastic organisation for us as a country because of the exceptionally high quality and variety of its output, and it is a fantastic organisation internationally. On the international front, I think that the fact that the BBC is watched and listened to by 350 million people every year is a remarkable tribute to the quality of its journalism, and we must focus on maintaining and supporting it in what is a lively, vibrant and changing media world.

The BBC’s international role goes back a long way. My mother is Danish, and in the middle of the second world war it was to the BBC that her people turned when they wanted to find out the truth of what was going on and hear some news on which they could rely. It is very important that we continue to invest in the kind of journalism that provides that reliability for people in places across the globe where there is no free media and no free press.

For us at home, as we heard from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), the BBC provides a range of programmes. Whether we are talking about music and music festivals, about the contribution to the creative sector—for every £1 that is invested in the BBC, we get £2 back for the creative industries—or about what I enjoy most, namely the quality of the science and nature programmes, the BBC is a truly remarkable institution, and we must give it the support that it needs in this changing world. However—partly because of the moves set out in the White Paper, and partly because of other things that have happened since the general election—I fear that it will not be given the support to which it is entitled, on either the financial or the independence front. I want to say something first about money and then about independence before making a few points about other specific issues.

On the money front, of course it is welcome that the licence fee has been guaranteed for five years, and of course it is welcome that it is to be extended to iPlayer watchers. It is also welcome that there is to be no more top-slicing—although the fact that top-slicing is ending for broadband is rather ironic, given the somewhat problematic roll-out that we are seeing in rural areas, which the Minister knows so much about. However, all that must be seen in the context of the fact that, last summer, the BBC Trust rolled over and accepted responsibility for providing free television licences for pensioners, at a cost of £700 million in licence fee money.

It is all very well for the White Paper to set out a process for establishing what future financial arrangements will be. I would have a bit more confidence in the BBC Trust had it not rolled over and agreed to what the Government wanted, but—not just because of that, but because, on a previous occasion, the previous chair and director-general also agreed to big cuts in the space of, I believe, less than 24 hours—I am not convinced that the BBC’s current financial settlement is adequate. When I receive emails from BBC managers telling me that they are reviewing the 24-hour rolling news service because it has to make cuts, I am afraid that that does rather challenge the roseate picture that was presented by the Secretary of State.

Graham Jones: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point on a subject that I touched on only briefly. This proposal would create a monopoly—at present there is a duopoly—for Sky News. Would not this create a massive issue, in that the BBC provides competition?

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend is of course right, and I shall move on to the argument about contestability in a moment.

In some respects the White Paper is a good document because it provides lots of interesting facts and background. One particularly interesting aspect is the forecast of people’s media use. People’s use of mobile media is forecast to double by 2020, so it seems extremely odd to be chopping the BBC’s resources at this particular moment. I can see that time is pressing, so I shall move on to the question of independence.

The problem with half the board members being appointed by the Government through a Government-run process will be the convergence between the Executive and the trust. I agree that the trust suffered from some
role confusion. Was it a cheerleader or a regulator? It seemed to slide between the two. However, the problem is that it will not be possible for the director-general, who sits on the board alongside its other members, to maintain the kind of editorial independence on which we all rely. And of course, if appointment is not a problem, reappointment certainly will be.

I want to mention three specific issues. The first is the proposal to merge the world rolling news service and the national rolling news channel. It is completely obvious that each of those channels has a completely different agenda, and that one of them would lose out under such a proposal. My second concern is the contracting out of about 60% of the BBC’s radio content. On the question of contracting out and contestability, it is fine for us to subject to competitive tender and contract out between 10% and 25% of programmes, but once we move beyond 50%, we are tipping the balance in the wrong direction. We already have independent television producers and independent commercial channels. We have channels funded by subscription and channels funded by advertising, and it seems quite inappropriate to suggest that the BBC should follow their model through contestability.

The impact of the BBC on the general quality of programming is reinforced by what happened when ITV made “Downton Abbey” and exported it to America. The Americans were convinced that it was a BBC production because it was so good. That illustrates the influence of the BBC on television standards across the board. Finally, I have to question whether financing local news through the licence fee is the best approach. Allowing the BBC to generate revenue from advertising and subscription funding is reinforced by what happened when ITV made “Downton Abbey” and exported it to America. The Americans were convinced that it was a BBC production because it was so good. That illustrates the influence of the BBC on television standards across the board. Finally, I have to question whether financing local news through the licence fee is the best approach. Allowing the BBC to generate revenue from advertising and subscription funding is the right route through which to do that.

3.28 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), and it has been a pleasure to listen to her contribution. I nearly always agree with about half of what she says. I shall limit myself to making one main point. I am grateful to you for squeezing me into the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I shall try to limit myself to five minutes. I shall pass over all the complimentary things that I was going to say about the BBC. It is an example of British expertise and invention right across the world, and I would have liked to say more about that.

We need to recognise that developing and agreeing on the role and scope of the BBC is an important responsibility for the Government through the charter review and renewal. The BBC is inevitably very powerful, and its huge success means that it becomes dominant in many of its markets, so there is a role for Government to be aware of the impact that the BBC, backed by £4 billion of what is effectively public money through the licence fee, has on diversity and to ensure that that remains positive. I believe that it always does, but that is a role for Government.

However, just because we are huge supporters of the BBC, it does not mean that we cannot criticise it from time to time. My approach to the BBC is a bit like my approach to the Welsh rugby team: I love it second only to my family, but when they play badly, I feel that I have the right to criticise. I do not think that that impacts on my regard for the BBC or, indeed, for the Welsh rugby team.

I was a bit surprised to see this topic coming forward as an Opposition day debate, and I think that the Opposition Front-Bench team had to work quite hard to generate genuine disagreement as there is a large measure of agreement across the House about where we are going. The White Paper has been welcomed across the board, including by the BBC. Before its publication, I was receiving hundreds of emails telling me about the terrible things that the Government were going to do to the BBC, including virtually disbanding it and taking away its independence—all total nonsense, of course. I have not had a single email since. The reality is that the White Paper was welcomed by almost everybody who has had a proper response to it.

As for the argument that was made earlier about the publication of payment packages, I have some sympathy with those who believe that the level should be lowered from £450,000. A level of £150,000 is reasonable, and I hope that the Secretary of State will return to that and that the BBC accepts that the public do not really agree with the position that it has taken. It may well volunteer to bring the figure down itself.

I want to make a short point about the relationship between the BBC and S4C. S4C is important for Wales’s cultural identity and hugely important to the Welsh language. Such matters are vital to me and I often speak about them. During the previous Parliament, S4C’s funding was moved from the Government to the licence fee. Indeed, 90% of S4C’s funding now comes from the BBC, so the relationship is crucial. The Government have agreed to hold an independent inquiry into S4C’s future support arrangements, but I am told that it will not take place until after the charter for the next 11 years has been agreed. I do not want to criticise the Government here, but I want to make an important point about the degree of uncertainty that that causes.

We do not want a charter agreement that in some way makes it too difficult to have a proper, independent inquiry into S4C’s future. I make that point in this debate—I am pleased that the Secretary of State is back in his seat—because it is causing a great deal of concern about what might happen, not what is going to happen. Whenever we move forward and such things are discussed by the relevant parties, we must be careful—unless the charter review and the inquiry can be run side by side—that the charter review does not impinge on the future relationship between S4C and the BBC in the independent inquiry.

3.33 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): We should start by remembering that the BBC has just been asked to make what is pretty much a 20% budget cut. There must be some senior executives and some people close to the BBC who are beginning to question whether the deal that was made last summer is a good one and is being delivered. I was not privy to the conversations or the late-night telephone calls, but the nature of the deal was presumably that if they agreed to make a £650 million contribution to the black hole in the Chancellor’s Budget, the BBC as we know it would be safe going
forward in two respects: that it would continue to be funded by public subscription through the licence fee and that it would be editorially independent.

I do not know what is in the minds of Ministers—we will see that as the debate on the White Paper develops over the rest of the year as we head towards the charter renewal—but it is the case that there are voices on the Government Back Benches that are hostile towards the BBC, and that will question whether the licence fee should remain and whether the BBC should be obliged to undergo more privatisation and have more of a commercial motive in its output. I thought that that debate had gone, but the BBC needs to be cognisant that it is not over.

The SNP, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) said, is absolutely committed to public service broadcasting. We must remember that the opposite of having a public service ethos in our broadcasting is to have a commercial one, in which decisions are made on the basis of how many viewers there will be and how many programmes can be sold in an international market. In my view, that makes for bad programmes and would remove innovation, creativity and experimentation.

To illustrate that with an example, probably my favourite television programme on air at the moment is “Peaky Blinders”, a gritty BBC drama series set in 1920s Birmingham about gangsters of the time. It is rich in social realism and in its attention to period detail in every respect but one: it has a contemporary electric soundtrack, even though it is a period drama. Some would say that, on paper, that does not work and spoils the programme. Actually, the electric guitar of Jack White and the other people on the soundtrack enhances the menace in the narrative.

I would bet that if somebody had taken that idea to a commissioner whose principal objective was to get as many viewers and sell as many programmes as possible, they would have sent it back saying, “No, I want a soporific score that is reflective of the ragtime music of the period.” An experiment would have been denied. That might have sold more copies and it might have gained more viewers, but it would have been a much worse programme as a result.

There have been steps forward—some of them baby steps—in the way the BBC operates. There has been some decentralisation, which is extremely welcome, and that has resulted in better programmes. For example, the forensic and high-energy examination of alleged corruption in the Metropolitan police was produced by a production crew in Belfast. Who would have thought that? It is a remarkable situation.

When we give examples of drama or entertainment, most people would probably agree that the output should reflect the place in which it is made, but that is even more important when it comes to news and current affairs programmes. Those on the Government Benches misunderstand, perhaps deliberately, our concern in this respect. There was talk earlier of sour grapes and sore losers—by the way, Members should remember that I am speaking on behalf of a party that is getting almost 50% of the people do not agree that staying in the United Kingdom in the longer term is the best option for us. They would like to see self-government of their own country. I am not arguing about who is going to win or lose that argument, but we should accept that there is more than one opinion. Therefore, to deny that the BBC to keep the nation together, that becomes a non-neutral statement when we consider that the constitutional future of our country is, shall we say, a matter of divided opinion. It is not about reviewing the 2014 referendum result, but about understanding that there are different perspectives within the Scottish population.

Almost 50% of the people do not agree that staying in the United Kingdom in the longer term is the best option for us. They would like to see self-government of their own country. I am not arguing about who is going to win or lose that argument, but we should accept that there is more than one opinion. Therefore, to deny that the BBC to keep the nation together, that becomes a non-neutral statement when we consider that the constitutional future of our country is, shall we say, a matter of divided opinion. It is not about reviewing the 2014 referendum result, but about understanding that there are different perspectives within the Scottish population.

We believe, as we put forward in an amendment to the Scotland Bill and as we will put forward again, that broadcasting in Scotland should be the responsibility of the Scottish Government. How can it be that this House entrusts the Scottish Government to make decisions on assisted dying, abortion, the running of all public services and what rate of income tax people should be charged, yet thinks that they cannot control the telly or the radio? It is a remarkable situation.

We believe that, in the process of charter renewal, those debates can be revisited. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire said, we think that the BBC should consider a federal structure in which the licence fees that are collected in Scotland are controlled and directed in Scotland by people who understand what they are doing, and in which programme making and commissioning are controlled in Scotland, so that, most importantly, all of the considerable resources that are available can support the creative industries, talent and artists in our own country. At the moment, many of them do not, and much of our best creative talent is obliged to travel 400 miles south to ply its trade in this city, which is not acceptable in the long term.

When we give examples of drama or entertainment, most people would probably agree that the output should reflect the place in which it is made, but that is even more important when it comes to news and current affairs programmes. Those on the Government Benches misunderstand, perhaps deliberately, our concern in this respect. There was talk earlier of sour grapes and sour losers—by the way, Members should remember that I am speaking on behalf of a party that is getting almost 50% of the people do not agree that staying in the United Kingdom in the longer term is the best option for us. They would like to see self-government of their own country. I am not arguing about who is going to win or lose that argument, but we should accept that there is more than one opinion. Therefore, to deny that the BBC to keep the nation together, that becomes a non-neutral statement when we consider that the constitutional future of our country is, shall we say, a matter of divided opinion. It is not about reviewing the 2014 referendum result, but about understanding that there are different perspectives within the Scottish population.

Almost 50% of the people do not agree that staying in the United Kingdom in the longer term is the best option for us. They would like to see self-government of their own country. I am not arguing about who is going to win or lose that argument, but we should accept that there is more than one opinion. Therefore, to deny that and to allow the BBC to take an editorial view that the nation must be kept together, by which I presume it means the UK, means that many, many people will feel disfranchised and alienated from the national broadcaster. That must be a matter of concern. I know that the Secretary of State’s opinions are his opinions and that he does not control the output of BBC Scotland—if of course that is right—but having senior politicians who take that view will have some effect on the people working at the coalface and making the programmes. We need to say quite clearly to BBC Scotland that it is
its responsibility to reflect the diversity and the plurality of opinion that exists in that country, rather than take sides in this matter.

After speaking to senior executives at BBC Scotland, I know that the director-general now has four pilot episodes—I do not know whether they are videotapes or DVDs—of a potential Scottish news programme on his desk. The degree of control that is being exerted in relation to Scottish editors and producers varies. I hope that he will take the bold and commendable step of selecting the most ambitious of those and committing to allow the people who live in Scotland to view BBC Scotland through their own experience and in a way that reflects their own lives.

3.42 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am pleased to contribute to this debate. I want to focus on just one aspect of the White Paper—the proposal to modernise the licence fee by closing the iPlayer loophole, requiring all those who access BBC on-demand content to pay the licence fee. That will have a real impact on our students.

I have already asked questions about how the proposal will impact on students living away from home. The response was that the Government consulted on adding on-demand programme services to the TV licence framework and that, under the new proposals, all individuals will need to be covered by a TV licence if they stream or download TV programmes through on-demand services provided by the BBC. The response went on helpfully to state:

“If an individual has a licence already, then they are automatically covered to watch BBC on-demand services under the new proposals.”

I was already aware of the latter point, and that is the issue with students living away from home. I asked whether any assessment had been made of the potential effect on students, but there was no reference to that in the response, and I can only conclude that no assessment had been made.

Legally, if a student is living away from home and has a television in their room and that room is a lockable, self-contained unit, they need a TV licence. However, most students do not have televisions in their rooms so they do not need to purchase a TV licence. What many students will, however, have in the room is a computer or an iPad on which they will access BBC programmes online, many for research or study purposes, and it would seem that the proposed closure of the iPlayer loophole will now require the students to be in possession of a TV licence, adding yet more expense to an already phenomenally expensive education.

The Government claim to have consulted on the continued provision of the licence fee and found “significant support for reform or modernisation”.

On this basis, they have “committed to modernise the licence fee to include BBC on-demand programmes”.

Yet an examination of the consultation results shows that 59.8% of responses said that no change was needed, with only 15.1% supporting reform, including closing the iPlayer loophole. In addition, an analysis of the Radio Times survey appears in the White Paper and the startling fact is reported that 3% of respondents indicated that, “there should be some sort of licence fee reform—including closing the iPlayer loophole.”

So, 3% and 15.1%—it is hardly a positive mandate for action, is it?

Yet on the basis of that minority view, the Government have ploughed on regardless and are now proposing to make the change without any evidence of having assessed the impact on those likely to be adversely affected. Certainly, having looked at the list of groups feeding into the consultation, I can find no group representing students—no National Union of Students or similar body was in evidence.

Although the Secretary of State consulted sources as diverse as Glasgow City Council and Sir Lenny Henry, he forgot to consult 2.5 million students in the UK. Students feel so strongly about this issue that there is a change.org petition calling for students to be made exempt from paying for a TV licence to watch BBC iPlayer on demand. The petition was started by a student at Loughborough University, who says:

“I am acutely aware of the huge sums of money required for a student to live and study away from home...Today’s students will leave University with an average debt of about £45,000. A TV licence would add £436.50 during a 3 year course, adding yet more debt to an already unaffordable education.”

That student points out that the Government has not been kind to students financially, chronicling the increase in tuition fees in 2012 and the fact that the Government have now scrapped maintenance grants for poorer students, replacing them with loans and thus making them build up yet more debt. She believes it is about time that the Government did something positive for students in the UK. I agree with that student and I am supporting her campaign.

The petition so far has 17,405 supporters, many of whom have left comments pointing out the Reithian principles of the BBC: to inform, to educate and to entertain. Surely we would wish our students to access the first two principles and tolerate the fact that, yes, they may also be entertained at times without its adding to the mountain of debt that they leave university with.

I mentioned before that the National Union of Students was not among the bodies that had engaged with the consultation, but I have consulted with the NUS and I will finish with the words of the NUS vice-president of welfare, who said to me today:

“The iPlayer offers access to BBC radio, for which a licence fee is not required, and to archive material, for which there could be strong academic reasons necessitating access. This change would unfairly prohibit continued free usage of the services. And, at a more basic level, with the gap in available financial support and the average cost of living for students running to thousands of pounds a year, the idea that students have spare cash to cover this proposed additional cost is bordering on the ridiculous. The simplest solution is to offer an exemption for students who solely access BBC iPlayer, and we support calls on the Government to revisit this decision.”

I support the NUS’s view. I urge the Secretary of State to rethink the closure of the iPlayer loophole and to do something positive for our students by making them exempt from it.

3.49 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) on introducing a new angle to the debate.
My uncle Will, a clergyman of strong opinions for whom I had a good deal of respect, used to argue from the 1970s that the BBC was run by communists. A more common view, though, is that the BBC is a great British organisation or institution and, like most great British organisations, it is as much a product of historical accident as of design, a point made earlier by the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound).

I hesitate to call the BBC a national treasure, but it is certainly internationally respected, largely because it is not simply consumer-driven or obviously pursuing its own agenda. It acts as though it has obligations and values—duties to inform, educate, foster cultural development and encourage democratic thought, new ideas and understanding of traditions and history. That is probably why we have the diversity of programmes and more creativity and risk on the BBC than we get from commercial broadcasting. Oddly enough, that is profitable for the BBC. If it did not have those obligations, there would be no case to provide it with public funds.

The BBC model is ultimately paternalistic—which is why, mixing metaphors, it got called “Auntie”. As we have already established, parents and aunties are seldom impartial, and we may wonder in a post-modern way whether we ever get impartiality right. However, we want a public sector broadcaster to make the effort, which means building the right sort of challenge into the system.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that from a Scottish point of view, despite the limited devolved powers that the BBC has, which my hon. Friend mentioned, the BBC is inordinately pleased with itself, who are inordinately pleased with themselves will not want a public sector broadcaster to make the effort, which means building the right sort of challenge into the system.

John Pugh: We would make exactly the same point in the north-west, which is why we are so glad that the BBC was persuaded, sometimes kicking and screaming, to come up to Salford. A public sector broadcaster that degenerates into a clique of like-minded individuals who are inordinately pleased with themselves will not do the trick. We all recognise that the BBC has diversity issues and may also have complacency issues. Just because the BBC is criticised from both sides of the political divide, as it clearly is at present, does not mean that it is getting things right. In most other walks of life, universal condemnation is not an automatic sign that a good job is being done.

Much of the challenge should come from the public, as indeed it does. Much of the challenge will come from other media, as indeed it does. Some should come from Parliament. The Public Accounts Committee has wrestled for some time to get to the bottom of the BBC accounts and found great difficulty in doing so. The PAC has had difficulty getting to the bottom of only two issues—one is Saudi arms deals and the other is the BBC finances. If there is to be effective challenge, it must be hard-wired into the system. If it is not in the culture itself, as it should be, there must be a structure beyond feedback programmes that facilitates it.

I do not see a case against Government appointees being part of that structure. Why, after all, should the Government not have a view? The important thing is that the Government’s influence is not large, decisive or determining, and must always be transparent. Sometimes pseudo-independent figures aligned with Government on boards and trusts—referred to earlier as leftie luvvies—are more worrying than overt Government representation. Behind-the-scenes influence can often be corrosive. There are current allegations that the BBC is running scared of covering the Tory election expenses issue because it is fearful of what the Government may do.

Sadly, I think this Government would prefer to have things both ways—covert and overt influence, stuffing the structure with Government placemen, using charter renewal as a disciplinary tool, and using traditional dark arts to hobble the BBC, where possible. It is our duty here to argue for as much transparency and accountability as we can get. That is the only genuine way in which we can safeguard independence, but transparency must be twofold. It must be about what the BBC does and funds, and also about what leverage the BBC have and exercise.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): We have had a high-quality and thoughtful debate. I am pleased the Secretary of State was able to take a break from his true love—campaigning in the EU referendum—to be here. He will have heard Members on all sides speak with overwhelming positivity about the BBC’s contribution to, and place in, Britain and the world. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) emphasised that in the Welsh context and the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) did so in the Scottish context. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) highlighted the BBC’s importance to students. I hope the Minister will address her concerns.

Members on all sides voiced their concerns about the charter renewal process, the editorial independence of the BBC, its financial independence and the BBC’s future mission. I agree with the position of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on Motorhead, but I am afraid I cannot share his complacency about the review. Many Members, in particular the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones), the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), spoke of the good work the BBC has done and continues to do, and the value of public service. We heard about the cultural power of the BBC, the power it projects around the world and the millions of people for whom it is the only reliable window on the world. Several hon. Members spoke of the key role that our public sector broadcasters play in supporting our creative industries, the continuing success of the BBC and its role as one of the cornerstones of our £84 billion creative industries. That is something we on the Labour Benches celebrate.

I want to dwell for just a moment on the importance of the cultural sector not only here in this bastion of privilege but in every home and on every high street. The BBC is instrumental in that and it is public. We on the Labour Benches do not have an ideological problem with successful public sector organisations. Just like the 73% of respondents to the charter renewal consultation who supported the BBC’s continuing independence, the
two-thirds who said that the BBC had a positive wider impact on the market and the three-fifths who agreed that the current system of financing is functioning well, we on the Labour Benches, see a flourishing BBC and think: how can we support it and make it even better?

The Secretary of State instead seems to have set out to deliberately diminish the BBC, undermine its finances and independence, and insist that the BBC in some way distances itself from successful popular broadcasting. This change is nothing to do with equipping the BBC for a new age of digital technology and changing methods of media consumption, something the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) rightly emphasised, and everything to do with hobbling a great British institution.

We are not arguing that the BBC is perfect. I have participated in several debates this year alone about the BBC’s poor record on diversity, be it black and minority ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or regional. Concerns about this were voiced in several interventions. The BBC’s licence fee funding means it must provide something for everyone. It is an existential principle of its very being—or Beebing—and I am pleased that its recently launched diversity policy is an attempt to reflect that. We shall watch with interest. When the BBC gets it wrong, it is right that we are critical, but we must also celebrate when it gets it right, and it gets so very much right—that is why it is the greatest broadcaster on earth.

A great deal of concern has been expressed in the debate and outside the House about the effect of the charter on the BBC’s independence. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland spoke passionately about the impact on its editorial independence. The charter changes the BBC’s governance and regulation, and those changes have been described as the biggest in the organisation’s 94-year history. The Opposition have made it clear that it is simply not acceptable for a board that will have influence on editorial output to have up to half its members appointed by the Government. [Interruption.] Government Members are shaking their heads, but that is the case.

Julian Knight: Does the hon. Lady not recognise that that influence actually comes post-production—for example, if there is a controversy? That is perfectly right and proper.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but it is quite an established principle of regulation—I worked for Ofcom, the regulator, for a number of years—that post-production influence will have a chilling effect in this case. The fact is that there will be editorial influence.

As I declared, I have an interest, having worked for Ofcom. It must be remembered that the Prime Minister once vowed to abolish it, but, rather than abolishing it, the Government have heaped new responsibilities and powers on it, creating a super-regulator in some respects. However, will they furnish it with fee resources or ensure that it has the internal boundaries that are needed to carry out such important functions? Spectrum may not be as sexy as “Strictly”, but it requires a good deal of focus, resource and energy to get it right, and we want to make sure that the resources are in place so that that happens.

The Secretary of State said earlier that previous Administrations had appointed members to the board, and that was the subject of an intervention, but he failed to mention that, in the past, the board has not had direct influence on the BBC’s editorial content, and that is a point that he and the Minister must address.

Other Members have spoken today of the threat to the financial independence of the BBC, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn eloquently set out how that threatens services. Burdening the BBC with financing free television licences for over-75s has already threatened its future independence and is a worrying precedent—an independent organisation being co-opted into delivering Government policy. The proposal to allow the National Audit Office access to the BBC’s commercial arm could derange its commercial operations, further undermining its finances and independence.

It is our BBC, and it belongs to the people—every household pays for it. However, the Government are messing with the fundamentals of our Beeb, not to equip it for the digital age, or to enable it to fight the new global behemoths or better represent our diverse society, but because it is a public sector success story—and that undermines the crooked ideology of this freewheeling Government. I urge the House to support the motion and to protect our BBC.

4.4 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): This is a great opportunity to respond to this important debate. I thank all hon. Friends and hon. Members who made such effective contributions. We heard the brilliant speeches that we would have expected from the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson); my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), who was employed by the BBC; the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones); my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who was educated by the BBC—all the people who have benefited from the BBC are on the Government side of the House; the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomerie (Glyn Davies), who rightly talked about the importance of S4C, of which he has been a doughty champion throughout; the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard); the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who spoke up for students; and the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh). They were all ably bookended by the formidable spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), whom I have now shadowed for six years.

I bow to no one in my love and respect for the BBC. I am of course currently immersed in “Versailles”. To anyone who wants to understand the dominance of the British media, let me say that it comes to something when the French have to make a 10-episode series about one of the most important episodes in their history in English so that it can be shown on the BBC. Quite right! Who wants Brexit when, if we remain, the French have to make all their programmes in English?
I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire, who said that the BBC was as important to him as his own family. I go to bed every night with the BBC. I cannot get to sleep unless Radio 5 Live is playing on my clock radio. This gives me an opportunity to congratulate Nihal Arthanayake, who was newly appointed today as a presenter on Radio 5 Live, as was Emma Barnett. Those are two important announcements about new presenters on Radio 5 Live—a really formidable station.

In the short time I have available, let me address some of the points that were raised. One of those is the attempt to run an argument that the BBC’s independence is somehow threatened by the new unitary board. As you are well aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, the governors of the BBC were appointed by the Government. We saw how the previous Labour Government behaved when they appointed a crony to be chairman of the BBC and appointed a Labour donor to be director-general of the BBC, and then when the BBC displeased them, they ran them both out of town. The BBC Trust is appointed by the Government. The majority of members on the new board will be appointed by the BBC. The nations and regions members will be appointed by the Government, under an independent appointments process. The excellent report by David Clementi commissioned by the Secretary of State gives a very thoughtful analysis of the best way of appointing members to the board, and I urge hon. Members to read it. There is no attempt to threaten the independence of the BBC; in fact, the position of the director-general as editor-in-chief is strengthened.

There was a lot of talk from hon. Members about the importance of the nations and regions. Again, that is strengthened by the White Paper. The BBC itself is taking important steps to enhance its coverage in the nations and regions. In the great nation of Scotland, for example, there are new drama and comedy editors, important partnerships with stakeholders such as Creative Scotland, the creation of a centre of excellence for factual programming, and of course the all-important news review.

There has been talk about the break clause, with claims that this a charter review by the back door. We are simply recognising how things in the media are changing. The structure we are putting in place is an 11-year charter that gives the BBC a great deal of independence for the forthcoming decade, but we know that technology is changing. Just look at the SNP Front Benchers on their BlackBerrys and their iPads: they are consuming media from all over the world. This is the challenge that the BBC faces. In five years, they may be watching things through virtual reality goggles. At that point, we will want to sit down with the BBC and say, “Do we need to change anything, because everybody is watching everything through virtual reality?” This is a perfectly sensible attempt to review how the charter is working and whether the BBC needs more help in this multi-media world. I think you would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that is the right way forward.

I am pleased that many hon. Members mentioned diversity, which is deeply important to them, to me, and indeed to the viewers of the BBC. It is vital that we recognise that the charter review, thanks to the Secretary of State, has put diversity into the charter for the first time. That really is an important milestone.

I recognise that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton raised concerns about the iPlayer loophole, but we want to close the iPlayer loophole precisely because we want to help the BBC. As more and more people consume the BBC on tablets and on mobile phones, it is important that the licence fee is also able to modernise.

The White Paper—it has, I am pleased to say, been widely welcomed by Members from all parts of the House—addresses the needs of the BBC, strengthens its independence, takes the charter out of the electoral cycle, recognises the importance of a distinctive BBC and highlights the importance of diversity. It has, quite rightly, been welcomed by the BBC.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 286.

Division No. 14]

[4.10 pm]

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Kevin
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blenkinsopp, Tom
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Chwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Craddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Danczuk, Simon

Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
Dochtery-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughy, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrell, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Argar, Edward  
Andrew, Stuart  
Allen, Heidi  
Allan, Lucy  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Owen, Albert  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Onwurah, Chi  
Nicolson, John  
Newlands, Gavin  
Murray, Ian  
Mullin, Roger  
Mears, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
Morden, Jessica  
Morrison, Grahame M.  
Mulholland, Greg  
Marsden, Mr Gordon  
Masksell, Rachael  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair  
McGarry, Natalie  
McGoivan, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McLaughlin, Anne  
McMahon, Jim  
Meale, Sir Alan  
Mears, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
Morden, Jessica  
Morrison, Grahame M.  
Mulholland, Greg  
Mullin, Roger  
Murray, Ian  
Newlands, Gavin  
Nicolson, John  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owen, Albert  
Pearce, Teresa  
Pennycook, Matthew  

**NOES**

Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Allen, Heidi  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, Edward  
Perkins, Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Pound, Stephen  
Poskitt, Lucy  
Pugh, John  
Rayner, Angela  
Reed, Mr Jamie  
Reed, Mr Steve  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Rimmer, Marie  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Ryan, roan  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shahr, Naz  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Sherriff, Paula  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smeeth, Ruth  
Smith, Mr Andrew  
Smith, Cat  
Spellar, Mr John  
Starmer, Keir  
Stephens, Chris  
Stevens, Jo  
Streeting, Wes  
Tami, Mark  
Thewlis, Alison  
Thomas, Mr Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
Thomson, Michelle  
Thornberry, Emily  
Timms, roan  
Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Umunna, Mr Chuka  
Vaz, rh Keith  
Vaz, Valerie  
Watson, Mr Tom  
Weir, Mike  
West, Catherine  
Whiteford, Dr Etheldreda  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Williams, Mr Mark  
Wilson, Corri  
Winnick, Mr David  
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
Wishart, Pete  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel  

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
Jeff Smith and  
Sue Hayman  

Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benyon, Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Bingham, Andrew  
Blackman, Bob  
Blackwood, Nicola  
Blunt, Crispin  
Boles, Nick  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Borwick, Victoria  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bradley, Karen  
Brady, Mr Graham  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bruce, Fiona  
Burns, Conor  
Burns, rh Sir Simon  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alan  
Carmichael, Neil  
Cartidge, James  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chishi, Rethman  
Hope, Mr Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Colville, Oliver  
Costa, Alberto  
Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Davies, Byron  
Davies, Chris  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, Michelle  
Donnies, Nadine  
Downer, Oliver  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Dunne, Mr Philip  
Elliott, Tom  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellison, Jane  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Graham  
Evans, Mr Nigel  
Evennett, rh Mr David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fallon, rh Michael  
Fernandes, Suella  
Field, rh Mark  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francios, rh Mr Mark  
Frazier, Lucy  

Freeman, George  
Frer, Mike  
Fulcher, Richard  
Fyeh, Marcus  
Gale, Sir Roger  
Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, Mr David  
Ghani, Nazir  
Gibb, Mr Nick  
Gillian, rh Mrs Cheryl  
Goldsmith, Zac  
Goodwill, Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, Mr James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Gymah, Mr Sam  
Hafflon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hand, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hart, Simon  
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
Heald, Sir Oliver  
Heappey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Hermon, Lady  
Hinds, Damian  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollingbery, Mr Philip  
Howarth, Sir Gerald  
Howell, John  
Howlett, Ben  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, Mr Nick  
Jackson, Mr Stewart  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, Robert  
Johnson, Boris  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, Joseph  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kinahan, Danny  
Kirby, Simon  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Latham, Pauline  
Lee, Dr Philip  
Letroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, Sir Edward  
Leslie, Charlotte  
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
Lewis, Brandon
Question accordingly negatived.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),

That the proposed words be there added.

Question agreed to.

The Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).

Resolved.

That this House notes the positive response from the BBC to the publication of the BBC White Paper which sets a clear framework for a stable and successful future for one of the United Kingdom’s finest institutions, enhancing its independence and empowering it to continue to create distinctive, high-quality and well-liked programmes and content; welcomes the open and consultative process that has informed the Charter Review including the second largest ever public consultation and the detailed contribution from committees of both Houses to the Charter Review process; and notes the Government’s intention to publish a draft Charter, in good time, for debate in the devolved administrations, as well as both Houses, before the Charter is finalised.
Business of the House

4.23 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short supplementary business statement.

Thursday 9 June—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the European Union Referendum (Voter Registration) followed by the previously envisaged general debate on carers, as determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

I will, of course, make my usual business statement announcing future business tomorrow morning.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Government for doing what we asked earlier. It is obviously important that we try to make sure that everyone who is trying to take part in the referendum is able to do so. I am grateful for the consultation there has been between the two Front-Bench teams. I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to confirm that there will be no other extraneous statements tomorrow, but only his business statement. The debate on carers is very important—it is national Carers Week and many people care about the issue.

Chris Grayling: We will see tomorrow morning, as normal, whether there is other business, but I am acutely aware that the debate on carers is a matter of great importance to people in this House. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will call Mr Wishart first. [Interruption.] Order. That is a perfectly proper way to proceed, to which no one should object. I simply say to the House that this statement is on a narrow, although very important, matter. Exchanges are therefore necessarily limited—I will not say circumscribed—to the question of the rescheduling of business tomorrow. This is not an opportunity for a general airing of opinions about overall business, still less for an exchange of views about aspects of the EU referendum question. [Interruption.] I do not know why I thought the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) might be so tempted—perhaps it is simply the cheeky expression on his face—but this is purely about the scheduled business for tomorrow, to the narrow confines of which I know the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) will stick with rigid propriety, as always.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Most certainly, Mr Speaker, and may I add our gratitude to the Leader of the House for changing the business for tomorrow? However, this situation demonstrates a deep systemic failure in our electoral registration system. It should be a gold standard, for what is probably the biggest decision that this House and this country have ever taken, yet we have descended into a panicky response to a potentially disastrous situation in which loads of people could have been disfranchised. I hope that when we have the debate tomorrow all the issues are properly aired, so we get to the heart of what actually happened and what the Government will do to make sure that something like it never happens again.

Chris Grayling: You granted the urgent question earlier, Mr Speaker, and we will have a debate tomorrow morning, so I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman wishes to make points about the process he will have plenty of opportunity to do so.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): In order to assist the House in its deliberations tomorrow will my right hon. Friend publish any precedent for any Government of any colour changing electoral law during an election period?

Chris Grayling: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who will take part in the debate, is sitting alongside me and I am sure will take note of that request, as he will want to do everything he can to keep the House as fully informed as possible.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I entirely support the decision to extend the registration period, but given the shambles that has occurred will the Leader of the House guarantee that everyone who wants to register will now be able to do so? Will he consider looking at automatic registration for the future, so that we can try to avoid these problems?

Chris Grayling: Those are really matters for the debate tomorrow, but I assure the House that the Government are seeking to ensure that all those who have been attempting to register—that is what this is about—have the opportunity to do so.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that people have had months and months to register, and that if they left it to the last minute and all tried to register yesterday that is their fault, and we should not change our regulations in the middle of a very important referendum campaign simply to suit those who have not organised their personal affairs well enough to secure their registration in good time?

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend feels very strongly about these matters; the benefit of tomorrow’s debate and vote is that he will have the opportunity to participate fully and express his views in both parts of the process.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is purely a question of the scheduling of the business. If people wish to opine on the merits or demerits of the legislation to be brought before the House they will have that opportunity tomorrow. I wonder whether that will burn off a few colleagues.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op) rose—

Mr Speaker: Obviously not you, Mr Gapes.

Mike Gapes: Will the Leader of the House make sure that the Government send out a clear message, after a decision is taken tomorrow, to ensure that people actually use their vote once they have registered and know how to do so?
**Disability Employment Gap**

4.32 pm

**Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House regrets the Government’s lack of progress towards halving the disability employment gap; further regrets that the Government has not yet published its White Paper on improving support for disabled people; notes with concern that commitments made in the Autumn Statement 2015 to help more disabled people through Access to Work and expanding Fit for Work have not materialised; further notes that the Government is reducing funding for specialist support for claimants with health conditions and disabilities through the Work and Health Programme; and calls on the Government to reverse cuts to the work-related activity component of Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit work allowances that risk widening the disability employment gap.

In my opinion and that of Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition, the Government are failing disabled people in Britain—failing to support them into work and failing to support those unable to work—and they are doing so deliberately, with calculation, care and even premeditation. It was entirely premeditated to go into the election boasting about cutting a further £12 billion from social security but forgetting to mention it would come from disabled people and those on low wages in need of tax credits and universal credit. I would like to say that we do not know why the Government are doing this, but we do know, because the Secretary of State’s predecessor told us in his tearful goodbye:

“we see benefits as a pot of money to cut because they don’t vote for us”.

It still shocks me to repeat that demolition of the Government’s one nation credentials—indicted by their own words.

I welcome the successor Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box, because all too often the last one failed to turn up in the House to accept scrutiny or difficult questions on issues such as this one, the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign or the bedroom tax. I welcome the decision he took on his first day in the job to stop the plans to take personal independence payments away from people unable to dress themselves or use the toilet unaided, and I also welcome the fact that in the same speech he said that there would be “no more welfare cuts”, but I deplore the fact that he must not know why the Government are doing this, but he do not know why the Government are doing this, but we do know, because the Secretary of State’s predecessor told us in his tearful goodbye:

“we see benefits as a pot of money to cut because they don’t vote for us”.

It still shocks me to repeat that demolition of the Government’s one nation credentials—indicted by their own words.

I welcome the successor Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box, because all too often the last one failed to turn up in the House to accept scrutiny or difficult questions on issues such as this one, the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign or the bedroom tax. I welcome the decision he took on his first day in the job to stop the plans to take personal independence payments away from people unable to dress themselves or use the toilet unaided, and I also welcome the fact that in the same speech he said that there would be “no more welfare cuts”, but I deplore the fact that he must have known, even as he made that statement, that the deepest cuts had already been made. The cuts from disability living allowance to personal independence payments, the cuts to employment support allowance, the cuts to the Work programme, the cuts to universal credit: all those sharp incisions had already been made. The effects were yet to be felt, but now, a few months down the line, the pain is evident, the harm is clear and these things can be measured in the widening gap in employment between disabled people and the wider population.

**Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con):** Will the hon. Gentleman take a step back from the rhetoric and have a look at the facts for a second? Does he not welcome the 365,000 more disabled people in work over the past two years, and the 3.3 million in total who are in employment? Will he not welcome those facts?
Owen Smith: Let me give the hon. Gentleman the facts. I welcome every job provided for a disabled person, and I welcome every opportunity for disabled people to get into work, but the facts are that the Government have gone backwards on the target for disabled people. When our Labour Government left office, the disabled employment gap stood at 28%; today, it is 34%—an increase in the size of the gap between ordinary able-bodied people in work and disabled people. That is the truth of these circumstances. What a ridiculous point. I mean the gap between able-bodied people without disabilities and disabled people. That stands at 34%—increasing on the Secretary of State’s watch and under this Government.

I will give this Secretary of State and his Government credit where it is due. I credit them for setting this difficult target to halve the disabled person’s employment gap. It was a clear pledge in the Conservative manifesto at the last election. On page 19, it said that the Conservatives would “halve the disability employment gap…transform policy, practice and public attitudes, so that hundreds of thousands more disabled people who can and want to be in work find employment.” That is a genuinely laudable aim. Labour fully agrees that if disabled people can find work and want to work, we should do everything we can to encourage and assist them in doing so. It would be good for all of us: good for them to be in work; good socially for our workplaces to be more integrated and rounded places; good economically, as reducing the gap by 10% would add £45 billion to our gross domestic product by 2030.

Unfortunately, a year on from that promise, the Government are either reneging on it or just failing to take the action needed to meet it. The volume of people currently employed who are not disabled stands at 80%, but the figure for those who are disabled stands at 46%—a gap, as I said a few moments ago, of 34%. The House of Commons Library, the Resolution Foundation and the TUC have all carried out analysis to show that the Government are making little or no progress towards the target. To hit it, they will need to get 1.5 million disabled people into work.

On the basis of the current state of activity by this Government, I cannot see how they are going to achieve it in a month of Sundays. I cannot see how they are going to get it back even to where it was at the end of the last Labour Government at 28%. It is a worse performance by this Government than that of the last Labour Government. What is even worse is that it is becoming more difficult for disabled people to get into work and stay in work because of the cuts that I want to discuss—cuts that are making it enormously more difficult for disabled people to get into and stay in work—is the PIP cut. As we know, PIP is a system of support that helps disabled people to deal with the extra costs of being disabled and to play a full part in life, which includes going to work. Eventually, when they have all been shifted across from Labour’s disability living allowance, 3.5 million people will be on PIP.

As I said earlier, the previous Secretary of State baulked at taking £1.2 billion out of PIP by changing the eligibility criteria in respect of washing and dressing, but he knew that he had already saved £2 billion by tightening the criteria relating to the move from DLA to PIP. One of the ways in which he tightened those criteria involved the mobility component of PIP, versus DLA. Crucially, he changed the measurement of people’s mobility—how far they were able to walk—from 50 metres to 20 metres, the net effect of which was, quite simply, that fewer people were eligible for the mobility component. As a result, 17,000 specially adapted Motability cars have been removed from people. [Interruption.] The Secretary of State says that I have got my stats wrong. He can tell us what he thinks the stats are shortly, but first I am going to tell him what Muscular Dystrophy UK has said, because it has an interest in the matter. It has said that it is deeply concerned about the fact that between 400 and 500 specially adapted cars a week are being taken away from disabled people, which is an extraordinary statement. Does the Secretary of State think that is right? Does he think for a second that it is even cost-effective? More important, what does he think about the impact on real people?

Only this morning, Muscular Dystrophy UK highlighted the case of a woman called Sarah, aged 29, from Norfolk. She has myotonic dystrophy, which means that her muscles are progressively wasting. None the less, she works as a nurse in a local hospital, although she needs a specially adapted car to get to work. We could all celebrate that, could we not, were it not for the fact that the Department for Work and Pensions has taken her car away.

Sarah says:

“The ‘20-metre rule’ does not assess how someone’s mobility is affected by their condition. Occasionally I may be able to walk 20 metres, but on other days...I could fall...decreasing my mobility further...I could...choose not to work, but...As a nurse, I make a difference in my role, but it seems like the DWP is trying to prevent me from doing so.

That is the human effect of the changes that the Secretary of State is overseeing.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will retract his earlier choice of words, when he separated hard-working people like Sarah of Norfolk from others—in his words—‘ordinary workers’.
Owen Smith: That was a slip of the tongue, and I regret making it. In this of all areas, we should be extremely careful with the language that we use. I did not mean to imply what the hon. Lady suggests that I was implying.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Department for Work and Pensions has a duty to monitor the impact of the PIP roll-out, given the projection by Disability Rights UK that it could cause about 55,000 disabled people in work to lose their Motability vehicles and thus their ability to work?

Owen Smith: I think it is absolutely shameful that the Government are refusing to monitor that properly. It is clear to all of us in the House that if people lose the cars that allow them to get to work, it will be harder for them to stay in work or seek employment. That, surely, is as plain as the nose on the Secretary of State’s face.

Does the Secretary of State think that taking Sarah’s Motability car away from her helps or hinders his mission to halve the disability employment gap? It seems to me that he should know the answer to that. I ask him to bring forward the review of PIP, and to think again about the 20-metre rule in particular. I ask him to look at what Atos and Capita are doing and reform their management of the system, because it is not working, and people such as Sarah are paying the price.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem is the fact that the assessment process is so dehumanising for a lot of people? This is not about human beings or about realising their full potential; it is about treating people as numbers.

Owen Smith: My hon. Friend is completely right. As we all know, the truth is that there was a set of targets for savings to be made from the social security budget. Those targets were set by the Chancellor and passed down the road to those at Caxton House, who have set about carving up disabled people’s benefits in order to meet those targets. It is frankly shameful that people are being dragooned into this process, being treated poorly and demeaned by it, and at the end being less likely to stay in work or find work. That is very clear.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Owen Smith: I will give way in a moment. I just want to make a few more points about universal credit, then I will happily give way to the former Minister for disabled people.

Let us move on to the work allowance under universal credit. This is another way in which the Government are penalising disabled people in work. One million low-paid disabled people will be on universal credit when it is fully rolled out, and thanks to the cuts to work allowances that this Secretary of State has introduced, they will all be about £2,000 a year worse off than they are at present. What does the Secretary of State think that cut will do for the life chances of those people? What does he think it will do to help him achieve his mission of halving the disability employment gap? Does he think that earning less will make people more or less likely to stay in work? I think I know the answers to those questions, which is why Labour is clear that we will reverse those cuts.

Mrs Spelman: The fact is that the Government spend £50 billion a year on benefits to support people with disabilities and health conditions. Does the hon. Gentleman not want to turn his attention to how we are going to reform the system, rather than simply harking on about how much money is being spent? I think he knows better than that.

Owen Smith: I said 20 seconds ago that one way in which I would reform the system would be to reverse the cuts to the work allowances under universal credit. That would clearly make work pay for 1 million disabled people in this country, I would start there, and I shall mention myriad other things later that the Government could do.

I would also reverse the cut to the support for disabled students. Getting qualifications is even more important for disabled students than it is for non-disabled people in this country. This summer, disabled students will be looking at their options and considering whether they can afford to go on to higher education, and they will be grossly disappointed to learn that the Government have already made it harder for them to do so through the decision to cut the disability student allowance which supports nearly 70,000 disabled higher education students.

Chloe Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Owen Smith: I am going to finish this point. I might give way to the hon. Lady later.

Can the Secretary of State tell us how many fewer disabled students will go to university this September? I would be really interested to know, but I am not sure that the Government gather statistics on that. It would be good to know whether the cutting of that grant will mean fewer disabled students going to university. Can he explain how putting up barriers to disabled students is going to help his mission to halve the disability employment gap?

The biggest barrier that this Government have raised for disabled people seeking to enter the workplace is the cut to the work-related activity group under the employment and support allowance. That is a cut of around £1,500 a year for 500,000 disabled people whom the Government are meant to be helping into employment.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I am glad that my hon. Friend has mentioned the fact that the cuts to the employment and support allowance will leave 500,000 disabled people £1,500 a year worse off. Those measures were passed by this Parliament only once the former Secretary of State had given an assurance to this House—and particularly to Conservative Members—that there would be a White Paper on a settlement package for disabled people before the summer recess. Is my hon. Friend as disappointed as I am that that White Paper does not appear to be forthcoming?

Owen Smith: I am deeply disappointed. I suspect that lots of Government Members, many of whom were sold the ESA cuts explicitly on the promise that the White
Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Owen Smith: I am going to make a bit more progress and may give way in a minute.

Let us talk about ESA. Here is what the experts, not MPs, think about the cuts to the WRAG under ESA and how they will affect employability. Parkinson’s UK says:

“The cut to the WRAG will push people...even further from the workplace.”

Muscular Dystrophy UK states that the cut “will widen the disability employment gap rather than reduce it.”

Mind’s chief executive, Paul Farmer, said

“...that the £100 million will go some way to help those people.”

and that the Government promised to beef up support for disabled people. Let me quote a few Government Members and then I will give way to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer).

I will first quote the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), who said before abstaining on the vote:

“To secure my trust, I need to believe in the White Paper and that the £100 million will go some way to help those people. That is my warning shot to the Government.”—[Official Report, 23 February 2016; Vol. 606, c. 215.]

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) said that the

“White Paper is incredibly important to the matter we are discussing, because it is the replacement for what the Government are proposing to remove.”—[Official Report, 23 February 2016; Vol. 606, c. 222.]

and the Government really need to check them. When the Secretary of State was the Secretary of State for Wales, he welcomed the Fit for Work scheme, but he has now scrapped it in my constituency. It is another scheme that is meant to be helping people, as Liz Sayce described, but it is being cut on the Government’s watch. That is the truth of the matter.

Where is this fabled White Paper? Where is it, the one that we have been waiting for all these months? Perhaps the hon. Member for Sherwood knows where the Government have it hidden and can tell us all about it.

Mark Spencer: I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for giving way. He talks about how strong the feelings are on the Government Benches and how much compassion there is around the issue of trying to get disabled people into work, but it is worth noting that the number of Government Members here to discuss the matter is more than double the number of Opposition Members. The number of Back Benchers here to support him in this debate has just gone down to single figures, which says quite a lot.

Owen Smith: Low-brow, low-ball comments such as that really do not help the debate. This is a serious debate. I am taking it extremely seriously on behalf of the Labour Front Bench, and I would expect better from even Tory Back Benchers than that sort of nonsense.

Where is the White Paper that we have been expecting? I will tell the House. A former Employment Minister—the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) may still be on the Front Bench, but I never seem to see her there any longer because I suspect she is too busy campaigning on Europe outside this House—promised it by the spring. The Secretary of State’s predecessor then turned spring into summer. This Secretary of State went one better and turned a White Paper into a Green Paper, kicking urgency, clarity and specificity down the road. It is another insult to disabled people who are seeing their incomes cut and their Motability vehicles taken away. In my view, it is yet another insult. After disabled people have been knocked from pillar to post with the cuts to ESA, PIP; universal credit, student grants and the Work programme, the Secretary of State, for all his warm words, is putting legislation to put some of those things right on the back burner. That is the undeniable truth behind the shift from a White Paper to a Green Paper. It is failing disabled people.

Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition will support the Government when we think they are getting things right, but we will stand up and be counted when they
are getting things wrong. We applaud the establishment of the bold and ambitious target to assist disabled people into work, but we will call it a lie—a cruel lie—if that promise is revealed to be a pipedream without the resources and the will to make it come true.

The Secretary of State says he wants to start a new dialogue with disabled people. Well, we are waiting to hear it. More importantly, he says he intends to make a difference and halve the gap in employment that they face. Well, I am waiting to see it.

Stephen Crabb: I have huge respect for the right hon. Gentleman. The truth is that in real terms, we are increasing the support that we give to disabled people. By the end of the Parliament, we will still be spending about £50 billion to support people with long-term health conditions and disabilities.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I struggle to understand how the Secretary of State could suggest that support for disabled people has gone up in real terms, when if someone who is currently on employment and support allowance and who is in receipt of ESA WRAG goes into work but then falls out, they lose access to that £30 a week. How can he possibly say that when he is looking at a person-centred approach to this debate?

Stephen Crabb: We can get on to that later in the debate. The truth is that ESA has not worked in the way that was intended when it was set up by the previous Labour Government. When John Hutton created ESA, it was with a view to seeing 1 million people with disabilities and long-term health conditions get back into work. It has not done anything like that. The truth is that for those people who are in the work-related activity group, there are better ways to get them the support they need and to help them back into work. The incentives are not in place.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What percentage of the workforce in this country has disabilities, or, to put it another way, what percentage of people with disabilities are part of the workforce?

Stephen Crabb: There are different ways of measuring that, but around one in six people have a disability. I will come on to explain why those figures will go up and what challenges that will present to us as a society. It is a mark of the extent of our ambition as a Government that we have a commitment to halve the disability employment gap. That is exactly the right vision to have, but are we in any doubt that the challenges are both profound and complex.

The employment rate for those who are not disabled is currently 80%; for disabled people it is 47%. That is not just a gap of 33 percentage points, but a gap in the life chances of disabled people up and down the country. It is a gap that has persisted for too long. The barriers that disabled people have built up over many years will take time to break down. I am clear that, for far too long, too many have not had the right support or been given the opportunity of work. Very often they are parked on benefits, cast aside and forgotten about. That is not good enough.

Stephen Crabb: I will make a bit more progress, but I will give way later.

Emerging from this past of unfulfilled potential, there are encouraging signs that those barriers are being dismantled and that attitudes are changing. Travelling home on the Tube the other day, I saw an advert
promoting a career with Shell—I can already see grimaces on Labour Members’ faces. That ad made it clear that Shell recognises that the more diverse and inclusive a team, the more varied the ideas and the better the business. Diversity drives innovation. The ad shows how a disabled person is as much a part of a business’s core vision of success as any other recruit. Recruiting disabled people should not be a bolt-on extra or a nice thing to do. As the ad says, the company is in search of “pioneers” and “remarkable people”. For me, this was more than a recruitment ad; it was a much wider advert for how society is changing and how disabled people are viewed. They are no longer patronised or diminished, but a core component of a well-performing business and of a diverse and successful society.

I see and hear that change for myself when I meet employers, charities and disabled people. I hear it from members of the Disability Charities Consortium and of the mental health expert advisory group. Just yesterday, when I was visiting the constituency of the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), I had the pleasure of going to a micro-brewery in Bermondsey where all the employees have learning disabilities.

**Neil Coyle rose—**

**Stephen Crabb:** Now is probably a good moment to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Neil Coyle:** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way and for visiting the fantastic organisation, UBREW, in my constituency. He has spoken a lot about ambition, but does he not think that this House and disabled people were misled about the timing of the new disability support programme from next year—at the same time as the ESA cut is going to be delivered? Does he not think that it would be fairer and more reasonable if the ESA cut was delayed until his delay to deliver the new employment programme from next year—at the same time as the ESA cut was delayed until his delay to deliver the new employment programme has come to an end?

**Stephen Crabb:** I do not think that the House was misled. The money has been made available from the Treasury and I have discussed it with the Chancellor. That money is there. What I have decided to do—I will explain this in more detail later—is to take a step back and work much more closely with disability organisations and disabled people. Rather than rush to push out a White Paper, I have decided to talk to those organisations that know the situation the best, and work in a new spirit to work up some proposals that we know will make a long-term difference. That decision I have taken not to rush ahead with a White Paper and to work more collaboratively on a Green Paper has been welcomed by disability organisations and help to create long-term support and solutions are, I believe, often local. Many Members on both sides of the House are doing excellent work and I commend the Secretary of State for his tone. One category that he has not mentioned is those who suffer from disabilities. Y oung people with a learning disability often tell me that the transition at 16 to mainstream college can be especially challenging for them, particularly if they want to go on into employment. Will he join me in supporting organisations, such as Dove House in my constituency, that want to do more to help special schools support students right through to 19, to ensure that young people have the support they need to get into employment?

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** The Secretary of State talked about the importance of having the right support for people with a learning disability. Young people with a learning disability often tell me that the transition at 16 to mainstream college can be especially challenging for them, particularly if they want to go on into employment. Will he join me in supporting organisations, such as Dove House in my constituency, that want to do more to help special schools support students right through to 19, to ensure that young people have the support they need to get into employment?

**Stephen Crabb:** My right hon. Friend, a former Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, makes a really important point and that is an organisation that I would love to hear more from. That period of transition is crucial. Those charities—we all have them in our constituencies, do we not, Madam Deputy Speaker?—often have more expertise than anybody else and work day by day in local communities, supporting people with disabilities. We need to hear far more from organisations like that.

The pride and passion that I saw displayed yesterday among the staff at that social enterprise, employing people with learning disabilities in that wonderful community of Bermondsey in south London, was a model of motivation for supporting people with disabilities. These positive experiences are reflected in the figures. Over the past two years alone, 365,000 more disabled people have gone into work, and that is a huge achievement. However, that progress has not translated into a narrowing of the disability employment gap, largely because of the enormous growth across the labour market in general. The gap will close only when we see a faster increase in the rate of employment growth among people with disabilities than across the economy generally. That is how we close the gap.

The shadow Secretary of State lauded the fact that, on paper at least, the disability gap was narrower under Labour, but that was because unemployment was soaring across the economy. That is not the way to close the disability employment gap. We need to harness the positive progress across the economy and ensure that people with disabilities and long-term health conditions are at the front of the queue to benefit from those changes in economy.

**Chloe Smith:** I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend has come on to this point. Does this not echo the broader point about what we need to do about life chances, which is not to focus on transfers over an imaginary line but instead focus on the real underlying factors?

**Stephen Crabb:** My hon. Friend makes an important broader point about how we think about poverty and disadvantage. I think that we have come a long way as a Government and across society in understanding poverty. It is not just about chasing after a target on paper; it is about understanding what is going on behind the scenes and drilling down into root causes.

The disability employment gap is national but the support and solutions are, I believe, often local. Many Members on both sides of the House are doing excellent work to encourage and support disabled people in moving into work in their constituencies. One example of that is the holding of reverse job fairs, which are important events to link local employers with specialist disability organisations and help to create long-term job opportunities for disabled jobseekers. Jobcentres up and down the country are also on the frontline, supporting disabled people’s move into work, and we are more than doubling the number of disability employment advisers in jobcentres to provide specialist and local expertise to help disabled people enter employment.

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** I commend the Secretary of State for his tone. One category that we have seen a huge increase in is people with a learning disability. 

**Stephen Crabb:** The disability employment gap is national but the support and solutions are, I believe, often local. Many Members on both sides of the House are doing excellent work to encourage and support disabled people in moving into work in their constituencies. One example of that is the holding of reverse job fairs, which are important events to link local employers with specialist disability organisations and help to create long-term job opportunities for disabled jobseekers. Jobcentres up and down the country are also on the frontline, supporting disabled people’s move into work, and we are more than doubling the number of disability employment advisers in jobcentres to provide specialist and local expertise to help disabled people enter employment.
long-term mental health conditions and who are getting back into work. I commend to him recommendation 7 of the independent mental health taskforce, chaired by the chief executive of Mind, which talks about the DWP working to direct funds currently used to support people on employment and support allowance to commission evidence-based health-led interventions to help get people with long-term mental health conditions back into work.

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am clear, as is my whole ministerial team at the Department, that the challenge of mental health is enormous and profound. We must do far more to understand it and its interaction with employment. We will be spending tens of millions of pounds in the coming years on pilots to try to understand what interventions can make a positive difference for people with mental health conditions, and I can assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to see positive change in that regard.

We are expanding Access to Work, so that 25,000 more disabled people by 2021 will be helped with the additional costs they face from working. We are ensuring that disabled people are part of our plans to increase apprenticeships, with an accessible apprenticeship task force which is providing advice on how potential apprentices with learning disabilities and other hidden impairments can take these up.

Nicola Blackwood: The Secretary of State is generous in giving way. On Access to Work and the fact that we are increasing spending on it, that increased spending will be of little value if it remains, as Liz Sayce said, the “best kept secret” in the DWP. How can we ensure that the most vulnerable and the smallest businesses, which would benefit most from it, hear about it and can gain the full value of that scheme?

Stephen Crabb: The slightly glib answer that I could give is that there is a role for all of us in this House to promote Access to Work in our communities and constituencies, but there is a broader challenge for the Department and for the Ministers as to how we get that information out. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has responsibility for disabled people, is taking the lead on that and will refer to it in his closing remarks.

Neil Coyle: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. Can he explain why the number of disabled people supported by Access to Work is lower now than it was in the last full year of Labour in government? When will he publish the figures for the number of young disabled people who are supported from the £10 million fund that was meant to have been dedicated to voluntary placements from 2013?

Stephen Crabb: I do not have the specific figures to hand, but I heard a voice in my ear from my colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), that those figures are not correct, so perhaps in his closing remarks he can respond directly to the question from the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle).

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): My right hon. Friend made the point about apprenticeships. I was interested to hear some comments from the Minister for Skills recently about the possibilities of adapted apprenticeship frameworks for people with particular disabilities and learning difficulties. We recently had a fantastic cross-party debate in this House about autism. Does my right hon. Friend agree that for people with autism, apprenticeships can offer a very good way forward if they are properly designed?

Stephen Crabb: Indeed. We have the accessible apprenticeship taskforce, which will report to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. That is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who has deep experience and expertise on these issues. I am sure autism will be one of the aspects that we consider.

We are embedding employment advisers with mental health therapies to support people with mental health conditions to receive timely and tailored employment advice. We are supporting disabled entrepreneurs through the new enterprise allowance, with over 16,000 businesses being set up by people with disabilities and long-term health conditions since 2011. Only today, I was reading about a deaf person in Gloucester who has been helped by the new enterprise allowance to set up a carpentry business. That person is no longer on benefits and has joined the many thousands of small business entrepreneurs who are so important to our economy.

These are all real, practical measures that we are taking to make a difference for disabled people, but the scale of the challenge that we face demands a broader response. The scale of the challenge is demonstrated by the forecasts and by the way our demographics are changing. More and more of us of working age will be living with some kind of health condition in the future that will need to be managed for us to stay healthy in work. Around 12 million people of working age are already living with at least one long-term condition, and that figure is forecast to rise. Mental health problems are also rising, particularly for young people. Around one in six working people have a mental health condition, and that figure rises to around one in four for jobseeker’s allowance claimants and almost half for those receiving ESA. Lifestyle factors such as smoking and obesity mean that the proportion of the working population with significant health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease is likely to increase.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Is any monitoring being done as to how many people who get into work are still in that job one year later? Sustainability is just as important as getting the job in the first place.

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Lady mentions an extremely important point. We are doing that, particularly for people with disabilities. More broadly, with our universal credit reforms, that is one of the things that we will be doing generally for people moving off benefits. The support does not end the day that they find a job. The support continues, to ensure that the employment is sustainable.

On top of the long-standing barriers disabled people have faced, there are serious long-term demographic changes. They require serious and long-term cross-sector
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The Secretary of State will know of the work done by the charity Pluss. Indeed, his colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), attended the showing of a recent video it produced about people who had returned to work. Does he agree with Pluss and me that there may be opportunities to attract more smaller employers into taking on people with disabilities if there is a tax break on national insurance, in the same way as there is a tax break on apprenticeships for smaller employers at the moment?

Stephen Crabb: It is exactly that kind of incentive that I hope the Green Paper process will explore. Those are exactly the kinds of ideas that we need to examine. My colleagues in the Treasury will obviously take an interest, but we have to think differently right across Government if we are to have any hope of closing the disability employment gap. I am particularly keen to know what small businesses think about what they can do to employ more people with disabilities.

Stephen Timms: I applaud the aspiration for consensus, which the Secretary of State has now set out a couple of times in his speech. Does he not recognise, however, that he will not achieve a consensus against a backdrop of such huge cuts in support for disabled people? The Chancellor tried that again in the most recent Budget. While the Government are cutting support so much, the Secretary of State will not find the consensus that he rightly wants to achieve.

Stephen Crabb: I hear the right hon. Gentleman’s point. When it was made earlier, I said that by the end of this Parliament we will still be spending more in real terms on supporting people with disabilities. My aspiration for the end of the Parliament is that we will be spending in a much more effective way to help to transform lives.

This new approach is not just about changing the way disabled people are supported to move into work, but how they are helped to stay in work. A disabled person may make the breakthrough into work only to permanently fall out of work and on to sickness benefits soon after. Tens of thousands of disabled people do so every few months. I completely agree with the Resolution Foundation’s report this week, which highlighted the need for more focus on supporting disabled people in work, as well as those moving into work. Prevention and early support will be key to that, which is why we are supporting people to stay in work and trying to prevent them from becoming ill in the first place. That is why we are investing an extra £1 billion a year for mental health care in the NHS to support 1 million more people to access high-quality timely care.

Our Green Paper has the potential to be an historic opportunity to harness and build on the positive changes we have seen for disabled people. It is only through this approach—working with employers, disabled people themselves, the NHS and the welfare system, and local authorities—that we can build a strategy that will work to make a difference to people’s lives, keeping them in work as well as helping to support many, many more into employment.

5.18 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) on securing it.

We absolutely agree with the Government’s aim of halving the disability employment gap, but we have serious concerns about the actions they are supposedly taking to achieve it. With just three-and-a-half years in which to achieve their goal, they are failing. The Resolution Foundation estimates that halving the gap by 2020 will require 1.5 million people with disabilities to be supported into work. I agree with what the Resolution Foundation said in yesterday’s report, “Retention deficit”, in which it highlights that work “is not right for everyone” and that the Government could damage their aims by pushing work at all costs, but that there is an opportunity in the discussions on health and work.

Opposition Members have said on numerous occasions—during and since the passage of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016—that the Government are doing things in the wrong order and are, as a result, harming their own objectives. They cut off support from ESA WRAG and universal credit work allowance, and we will now be waiting even longer before the replacement system is up and running.

I welcome the reference in the Labour party motion to the frustration over the delay in the publication of the long-promised White Paper. However, while I remain sceptical about the Government’s real intentions in their change of heart, I welcome the announcement of the Green Paper on health and work—assuming that there is a genuine consultation process, a genuine listening on the Government’s part to stakeholders and a genuine investment in the resulting service—but why were those things not done before the cut to ESA WRAG and before the cut to universal credit work allowance?

The now-not-so-new Secretary of State must quickly set out a timetable for the Green Paper consultation and for publication. We cannot allow the Green Paper to follow the White Paper. We in the SNP are deeply
[Neil Gray]

cconcerned that valuable time in which to make progress on disability employment is being lost as a result of this delay. The Tories cannot be allowed to kick this into the long grass. The Green Paper should be brought forward urgently, with real engagement with the community and voluntary sector, to shape the new framework. The Secretary of State must formally make a statement of his intentions and lay out a road map for the development of the new programme and time frame.

The Resolution Foundation also said yesterday that benefit off-flows do not always equate to sustained employment and that the Government’s policy is focusing too much on their rhetoric about getting people off benefits, while not supporting people who are currently in employment to keep them in it. The Resolution Foundation has made a number of recommendations, which I hope the Government will read and consider.

The Secretary of State rightly said he wanted to turn the discussion on social security away from statistics and towards the people involved, and I have some people who desperately want to be listened to and who have agreed to have their cases raised today. These people highlight the issues being faced by disabled people throughout the social security, access-to-employment and workplace processes. Their stories highlight how they are being let down.

At the end of last year, I was contacted by a young woman with autism, who was being forced through round after round of assessment, form-filling and evidence-offering. She was in receipt of PIP and had only recently taken part in the assessment process for it when she was told she would need to go through a work capability assessment and to submit evidence to receive ESA, which she was being cut from. She had to compile and submit all the same evidence a few short months after the same Government Department had requested it. She had to go through very similar and, for her, equally traumatic assessment processes for the same Department for which she had done it a few short months prior. For anyone, that would be an upheaval and an unnecessary burden, and it would result in increased anxiety, but for someone with autism, it is painfully traumatic.

Most galling for me, however, was that my constituent’s placement was put at risk by the decision over ESA. She would not be able to continue if she failed the WCA and was forced back on to JSA. That is why removing ESA WRAG is so damaging to the prospects of those who are on the cusp of finding employment, but who need that extra support and additional resource to get there—in the case of someone with autism, for instance, so that they can finance a familiar taxi, rather than use the daunting, potentially dangerous and unknown world of public transport—and to stay on a training placement, which builds their confidence towards the workplace.

The National Autistic Society has said that its research shows that only 15% of autistic adults are in full-time paid employment. It says the Government cannot rely on an improving economy alone to ensure that disabled people, including autistic people, share the same employment opportunities.

Michael Tomlinson: The hon. Gentleman is citing some good cases, as he always does when this issue comes up for debate, but does he not agree that the underlying problem with ESA was that only 1% of those on the programme actually went into work, when 60% or more wanted to find work? The programme simply was not working. Does he recognise that?

Neil Gray: Absolutely, but I also recognise that cutting off support cuts off the access to work available to some people, including the constituent I described, and puts the cart before the horse.

The changed system should have been put before the House for debate and scrutiny before the cuts to ESA and universal credit were applied. That was simply ludicrous, and I suspect that we are now going to pay the price. Mencap estimates that “less than two in ten people with a learning disability are in employment”, despite, in its estimation, “eight out of ten being able to work with the right support”, and a majority wanting to work. The key phrase is “being able to work with the right support”. Mencap’s criticism is that the “support is often not available or those giving that support often do not understand learning disability.”

My nephew and his parents have been through the wringer to get support for him for almost all his life. He is approaching his 17th birthday and is sitting his GCSEs in Lancashire—I wish him well as he goes through that. He has cerebral palsy, which limits his mobility but has not limited his communication skills—far from it. Getting the right wheelchairs, accessing school transport and getting additional support when he needs it at school has been a constant fight for the family, and now he is anxious about what happens as he transitions from school into work. This is what he said to me when I asked him, ahead of this debate, about entering the employment market:

“I’m not sure what I can ask of an employer, for example, if I want to work at an Apple Store but all the tables are too high for me to reach can I ask the employer to make the tables accessible to me? I also sometimes worry that employers may choose another applicant for a position because they believe it would be easier to employ them, even if I am the best person for the job. I would however like to say that when I went for the interview for my apprenticeship my school were very supportive, but that may be because they already know me and I’ve been there for the past five years.”

That tells me of the lack of confidence that many disabled people have about entering the employment market. My nephew is the most gregarious, confident and engaging young man you could wish to meet, yet he feels he will be held back at work. He feels—unsurprisingly because of the way he has had to fight for support throughout his life—that he will have to ask employers for help: that he will be a burden on his future employers because of his disability, and that that will lead to him losing out.

That tells me, and it should ring loud and clear to the Government, that for the employment gap to be halved and for people with disabilities get fair access to employment we need to address how we treat them in all areas of social security support. Making them feel as though they have to fight for help and support that should be their right and expectation damages their long-term prospects and confidence to enter the employment market.
Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Surely we should not just pigeonhole people who are suffering disability into individual areas but ensure that they have the confidence to be able to get into employment and participate in the wider community.

Neil Gray: I find nothing in the hon. Gentleman’s comments that I can disagree with, but the fact is that they do not have that confidence at the moment. That is clear from the examples I am giving and from the expert third-sector organisations. They do not have the confidence because of the way they have been treated throughout their lives in having to fight for appropriate wheelchairs and go through traumatic work capability, PIP and DLA assessments, which they find demeaning. The whole process reduces their confidence not just to enter the workplace but to maintain a dignified level in society. I take his point, but there is far more for us to do.

This view is echoed in many ways by Sue Bott, deputy CEO of Disability Rights UK, who said:

“It is bad enough that the government spends so much of its time and resources on finding ways to deny disabled people “benefits and support but then not to put measures in place that would increase employment opportunities really is a double whammy for disabled people. The fact is that it is only when we see a government seriously committed to equality will we get progress.”

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Last Friday, I saw a constituents, a 37-year-old man with Parkinson’s disease, who had gone through a PIP assessment. The assessment report described him throughout as “it” rather than “him”. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is an example of exactly how the approach he advocates is not being put into practice under this scheme?

Neil Gray: That is absolutely sickening, and it should reduce us all to shame. That goes to the heart of why we have said throughout the election campaign in Scotland that when we create our social security agency we will put dignity and respect at its heart for those very reasons. Sadly, in some cases—not all, but some—those things have been lacking.

There was another case that I wanted to highlight about the work capability assessment, but time is pressing. Suffice it to say that the failings of the assessment stage make it far more difficult for the Government to achieve their goal of supporting disabled people who, with the correct support and guidance, would be able to find employment. Jobcentres, which are there to provide such help and support, are dealing with people who are not capable of working because of their ill health and disabilities, but who have mistakenly been sent there as a result of the flawed ESA decision-making process.

Another disabled constituent of mine who is in work contacted me regarding problems with the progress of his DLA and PIP application. He informed me that he had had numerous problems with the process. Despite supplying detailed medical evidence of the effect the health problems had on his life and the type of support he requires—the evidence clearly highlighted why that support was needed—he was told that he had to attend an assessment with ATOS. My constituent requested that that be carried out at an assessment centre, but was sent a letter by ATOS telling him, in language that he found threatening, that it would need to be a home visit.

Given that my constituent is trying to maintain a full-time job, the unavailability of weekend appointments makes it very difficult for him to adhere to strict appointment times during the week. The assessor did not attend on the day that was eventually scheduled. When my constituent inquired about that, he was told that no appointment had been made for him. This led to ATOS stating that it would consider the application on the basis of the evidence that my constituent had supplied, which left him understandably confused about why that had not been done in the first place. Supporting people with disabilities who are already in work is essential to ensuring that the disability employment gap is not widened still further. The Resolution Foundation referred directly to that in its report yesterday.

In conclusion, I hope that the Secretary of State will reflect on the personal testimonials that I have presented, as others across the House no doubt will, as he progresses towards the Green Paper. SNP Members are committed to seeing disabled people supported into employment when they are able to be, but that can come about only through appropriate support, and not simply by honouring the rhetoric of getting people off benefits and into work.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In order to try to accommodate all 10 hon. Members who have indicated to me that they would like to catch my eye, I am afraid it is necessary to start with a limit on Back-Bench speeches of six minutes each.

5.32 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I shall keep it quick, Mr Speaker. It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. I was genuinely pleased when I saw that the Labour party had selected the disability employment gap as the topic of its Opposition day debate, because it seemed so out of character. Why would the Labour party try to have a consensual Opposition day debate when it is all about hurling insults at each other? As ever, the shadow Secretary of State did not let me down. He did not talk about the disability employment gap at all. He gave his usual speech about disability, and he mentioned all the points that he tends to make about disability. The debate could have been called simply “Disability”. He started to refer to what he called the disability gap, and I have no idea what that even meant. It could have meant almost anything. It was a peculiar avenue to go down.

The shadow Secretary of State is quite right, on one level, to hold us to account for a manifesto pledge, but there is a certain irony in the fact that he is holding us to account for a pledge that the Labour party chose not to make in the last election. It was not clear from his speech whether the Labour party has made a commitment to halve the unemployment gap.

Owen Smith indicated assent.

Paul Maynard: I am pleased to see the shadow Secretary of State nodding his head. It is a little churlish of him to criticise us for not narrowing the gap in the first year since the election. He is quite right to point out that the gap has broadened—[Interruption.] It really annoys me
that the Opposition Front-Bench team always think that the best way to address any speech by a Conservative Member is to sit and give a running verbal commentary on everything we say—a monologue to their imaginary friends sitting on the Front Bench. [Interruption.] Will the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) be quiet for a minute? I am sorry to have to shout at her. I listened very patiently and quietly—[Interruption.] I do not want a conversation with her; I am asking her to listen to my speech. I sat patiently and listened to the shadow Secretary of State. I did not engage in a running commentary. [Interruption.] If she wishes to step outside and argue with me now, then we can do so. All I am asking is for the hon. Lady to show me a common courtesy and to listen to what I am saying, not issue a running commentary. [Interruption.] Yes, I know that my time is running down, but I place great importance on standards of politeness in this Chamber. If I choose to use my time in trying to enforce those standards, that is my choice and it is not for her to comment on it.

Jim McMahon: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman has given way. Inadvertently, that will give him an extra minute, which he will be very grateful for. With all due respect, he will not have seen from where he is sitting that, during the opening speech in this debate, his Front Benchers were making the same running commentary against Labour Members. That is perfectly reasonable as part of the debates that take place, but I do not think it is reasonable for him to offer to take outside a Member of the official Opposition.

Paul Maynard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. As you always remind us, Mr Speaker, we are responsible for what we say in the Chamber. My point to the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was that rather than interrupting my speech, I was more than happy to continue the debate about proper standards of addressing Members in the Chamber after we had completed our speeches. On that note, I think we will move on.

I was touched by what the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) said about his nephew in Lancashire and his perception of engaging in the jobs market. That spoke to me quite a lot because there was a time when I often felt I would be a burden to an employer. An implicit assumption built into how I viewed the world was that, for some reason, employers would somehow not want to touch me with a bargepole, that I would have to be better than the best and that the hurdle would always be that much higher. I very much understand his mindset.

To me, the biggest challenge in trying to overcome the disability employment gap is that some of our assumptions about what will happen to us in the workplace are so low to start with that it is very hard to give people the confidence to engage in the process. One of my concerns—this is partly why I agreed to participate in the review organised by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People—is my belief that percentages can be a very difficult way to measure what is actually going on. We had a very helpful contribution from the Labour party to the review. I welcome the fact that it felt able to make a submission, and I hope it will do so on the Green Paper as well. The contribution was actually interesting. Again, it focused on percentages—the percentage of people with a disability who are in work or engaging in an apprenticeship—but such figures are always hampered by the fact that those are self-declared disabilities. Many potential applicants simply do not want to acknowledge somewhere on a form that they have a disability in the first place, in case it affects the employer’s perception of how they will be treated during any interview process.

Michael Tomlinson: On my hon. Friend’s point about confidence, does he agree that that is not just the confidence of the applicant, although that is absolutely vital, but the confidence of employers to take on disabled people and people with disabilities? As the Secretary of State set out, reverse jobs fairs and such things can help employers to have the confidence to take on employees with disabilities.

Paul Maynard: It is very important that we use such opportunities to allow employers a broader range of mechanisms to test whether someone is suitable for a job, over and above a simple face-to-face interview.

I will not go into the findings of our review because they have not yet been agreed or sent to the Minister, but some themes strike me as particularly important. One relates to the very useful occasion when we saw Departments—the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions—working together and, with shared objectives, trying to iron out the differences between them. That alone was very worth while.

It was interesting to see that, despite how much the Government have already changed to improve the situation, employers and potential employees are not aware of what has changed. We may have changed regulations in Parliament, but are we adequately communicating such changes to the outside world so that people know they can take advantage of them?

There is always more that the Government can do in setting a good example. All Departments take on apprentices. I would like something written into each Department’s plans to state what percentage of apprenticeships should go to people with various types of disability. Some important points raised were not about learning or developmental disabilities, but about other hidden impairments such as hearing loss, and I hope that can be built on in any future examination of what goes on.

I welcome the Green Paper, although it is not mentioned in the Opposition motion. For me, the Green Paper is a real opportunity to reset a conversation that I think has gone away during the years that I have been in this place—surely I am not the only person who is pleased to hear about a fundamental reassessment of the work capability assessment. We set so many hurdles between a disabled person and the job they want that it can make things that much harder. There are two separate assessments—one for ESA, and one for DLA or PIP—and time and again we put hurdles in people’s way. I would far rather try to reduce the number of assessments and make them more about how the state can help the individual. It should be much more personalised, and about acting as a gateway to all the different types of help that should be available.
There is much evidence to show us what works, and supported employment, indented training qualifications and supported internships have by far the best outcomes, although they are also the most costly to deliver per individual. The challenge for the Government is how to square that circle in the medium term. We know what helps to get people into a sustained job—the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) was right to stress that it needs to be sustained—but often, getting the job is not the challenge; it is about enabling a person to stay in that job and thrive in that place of employment. The Government can do a lot more on that front, and the Green Paper is a chance to reset the clock. I cannot wait to get stuck in and contribute.

5.41 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Government’s pledge to halve the disability employment gap is an important step towards recognising that many disabled people want to get back into work. As has been said, however, if they are to have any chance of success, the Government must recognise and act on the significant barriers to employment that many disabled people face, including keeping jobs for the long term. They must also recognise and acknowledge the contribution that disabled people make in their communities through voluntary work—this should not just be about paid work—and everyone who is not able to work should have the support they need, including financial support, to lead a dignified life. To a certain extent dignity has been lost from the argument, and we need to bring it back to the centre.

The Government must also make it clear exactly who they expect to work. Many stable and able disabled people are already in work, and the challenge is to get the long-term sick, the terminally and chronically ill, and people with what could be called those disabilities that are hardest to accommodate, into employment. As the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) said, however, that is often the most expensive solution.

If the Government are expecting the chronically ill, the long-term sick and people with complex disabilities to carry on in paid employment, they must provide the support needed for that to happen. That support should not just be for individuals who are unwell or disabled; it should also be for the employer. Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) vividly demonstrated how important that is and how difficult it can be. People with long-term illnesses and unstable conditions and disabilities, as well as those with learning disabilities and mental health problems, may be unable to work at the same pace as other employees. They may need more time off or flexibility, or they may need to work at home, and many employers might not be comfortable with that. Progressive, fluctuating disorders such as Parkinson’s disease have symptoms that can fluctuate during the day, and particular support is needed for those with such conditions, and so that their colleagues and employers can manage that work environment.

The Government should also look at their own record in employing people with disabilities. According to Leonard Cheshire Disability, only 8.9% of civil service employees are disabled, and at senior levels that drops to 4.5%. That could be improved, not only through direct employment but by the Government looking at their procurement policy. They should expect not just contractors but subcontractors to demonstrate their commitment to employing disabled people.

As has already been mentioned, proper careers advice, training and access to apprenticeships are also critical. Young disabled people are four times more likely to be unemployed than their peers. As we all know, the Government have said that they will fund 3 million new apprenticeships over the course of this Parliament. Those have to be accessible to long-term ill and disabled young people and people with serious mental health problems. I am aware that the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys is carrying out a review of disabled people’s access to apprenticeships; I ask for the Secretary of State’s assurance that any recommendations made in that review will be taken seriously and acted on to improve the current situation, and then monitored, to make sure that we are making proper progress.

I know that this subject has been talked about a lot already, but I want to put on the record my concerns and those of many of my constituents about the planned cuts to employment and support allowance. I have seen no evidence whatever that the cuts will help disabled and long-term ill people back into work. On the contrary, the evidence I have read shows that they are more likely to push people further away from paid employment.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): We know that one third of disabled people cannot afford to eat on the current levels of ESA work-related activity group support. What impact does my hon. Friend think the further cuts will have on their ability to get closer to the workplace?

Sue Hayman: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The problem at the moment—I see this constantly in my own constituency—is that people with disabilities are really struggling to make ends meet. In my constituency, there is the added problem of access to transport: with cuts to bus services, many disabled people are unable to get into town and attend support classes as they used to. That is particularly concerning.

Recently a constituent came to one of my surgeries right on the edge of tears—that is difficult for any of us to see. He was upset because he had just found out that he had failed the mobility part of his PIP assessment. He had a job and needed his car to get to work. He showed me a letter from his GP confirming that for many years he had not been able to walk more than 50 metres; I am not a doctor, but it looked pretty clear to me. The assessor, however, had decided that my constituent could walk 200 metres. Why or how I do not know, although I do not imagine that he made him do it for the assessment. I therefore ask the Secretary of State to look at the quality of assessment and of the assessors. If my constituent had lost his car, he would have lost his job. If we are working to get disabled people back into work the last thing we want to do is undermine them in that way.

5.48 pm

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I think most Members would accept that Governments of all colours have not done enough to support disabled people into work. This debate centres on whether the commitment made by this Government to halve the disability employment gap is progressing quickly enough,
and in the right way. Looking simplistically at the numbers, which many Members have touched on today, there are now 365,000 more disabled people in work than two years ago, and more than 3.3 million in work in total, so we have made a good start. But we would all agree that it is not enough, and guess what? We believe that we should be working on this together. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) has just left the Chamber, because I was so disappointed in his tone; I know he can do better.

We have accepted that we need to do things differently, so a Green Paper and a fresh new approach are exactly what we need. But we cannot rush that. I am disappointed not to have seen the Green Paper yet, and the disability charities I have spoken to are also eager to see it, but we need to decide whether tweaking existing systems and policies to meet a deadline is better than taking our time and getting it right. I do not think that it is. After all, any changes we make will affect the most vulnerable in society. I know that the new Secretary of State is determined to get this right, and disability charities have conveyed that sense to me too.

Although speed must not be our only goal, we must, I am afraid, keep in the back of our minds a deadline we have created for ourselves. I am sorry to say that the decision to cut the ESA work-related activity group before the White Paper had emerged was wrong; I regret the Government’s decision. It would give an incredible boost to the disabled community if they were to commit to freezing that decision just until the White Paper is agreed. If we can, we should. It should be a positive, ambitious and anticipated document. It is not enough for a Government simply to provide the financial and healthcare support for everyday living; we need to do everything we can to unleash the untapped potential skills and hopes of people with disabilities.

When I spoke to a gifted IT graduate with learning difficulties, she did not want to be protected from society; she wanted to be out there helping to build it, so why on earth could she not find a job? As a member of the Work and Pensions Committee, I have seen how the existing Work programme has simply not worked for disabled people. It is hugely successful for those closest to the jobs market, but not for those with physical or mental health issues. As our jobcentres evolve to support universal credit, so our work coaches will need to perform comprehensive triaging right from the beginning and provide a dedicated path of support from day one. People must not be allowed to sit on the merry-go-round of the system for two years before anything positive happens to them.

We need to make much better use of small third-party providers, such as the Papworth Trust in my constituency, which is one of the most highly regarded disability charities yet is running mainstream Work programme services because the payment method for specialist work choice provision is commercially unviable. That is ridiculous. Specialists know how to support disabled people and to identify what they can do, whereas much of the current pathway to employment focuses on what they cannot do.

The White Paper needs to look at the whole world of a disabled person, so if the Secretary of State does not mind, I am going to add a few things to his list. Do they have good accessible housing? What about the social care to support them at home and to help them get up and get out the door? It is not just about the employment services. We have to understand what they need. It is not enough just to treat the benefit application processes; the entire journey through ESA and PIP needs looking at again, and that should be coupled with a cross-departmental assessment of everything a disabled person needs to fulfil their potential.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree then that placing medical professionals in doctors surgeries is counterproductive, as people are likely not to seek medical care for fear of being reported to the Department for whatever illness they have got?

Heidi Allen: Forgive me—I am honestly not seeking an extra minute—but I genuinely do not understand the question. Did the hon. Lady mean medical professionals in jobcentres?

Carolyn Harris: No, doctors surgeries.

Heidi Allen: Perhaps we can have a conversation later, because I do not understand the question. I am sorry.

Departments need to work together—hell might freeze over—and perhaps share budgets. Having the right housing, for example, is the absolute beginning of a disabled person’s journey to work. If the fund available to deliver the Work and Health programme is significantly less than those for its predecessors, the Work programme and Work Choice, we will need to be smarter about how we spend it. Let us target young disabled people before they leave school. I heard the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) talk about his nephew. It is absolutely wrong. We should be getting in there and grasping people’s potential before they come to feel they cannot achieve. That is so wrong.

What about people who have only just gone on to ESA and disabled people who are in work? As we have heard, it is considerably more difficult for disabled people who have been out of the workplace for a long time to get back in. We need to get in there while their self-esteem is still high. I was once out of work for more than a year. It is flipping hard, and it is significantly harder for a disabled person. Access to work must also mean access to work experience and job interviews. You do not put fuel in a car when you have reached your destination; you need fuel for the journey to get there. And as we have discussed, people need to know about it too.

Would it not be great if we could design the process around the person, rather than pushing individuals with differing complex needs through a process just because the process was there first? We need to stop pushing square pegs through round holes; only then will we achieve our ambition of halving the disability employment gap. If the Secretary of State continues to demonstrate a willingness to make that happen, he and the Government will have my support.

5.55 pm

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I speak as someone who worked in the coalmines for 20 years and as a care worker for 16 years. I am also someone whose family has been devastated by muscular dystrophy and who
has spent some time being unemployed or off work due to ill health. Throughout my life, I have come into contact with Departments of Health and of Social Security and the Department for Work and Pensions in their various forms. As a trade union representative, I have represented people at tribunals and sat as a wing member of tribunals, so I understand very clearly the history of Government relations with the welfare state.

I am glad to have a consensual debate, as I want to speak mainly about my experience as chairman of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, but it is right and proper for the shadow Secretary of State to highlight that at last year’s general election the Government went to the people with a pledge to cut £12 billion from welfare budgets and refused to explain from where they were going to take the money. That is a simple fact. It is not rhetoric or scoring party political points; it is absolutely true.

I was glad to hear the Secretary of State say that he wants to work across government and across agencies. He twice mentioned the role that local authorities can play. I would be delighted if Gateshead council could play a role in helping to get disabled people back to work. If, however, 48% of a local authority’s budget is cut over six years, it will be stretched to the limit unless something is done to close the gap and try to provide help.

I want to talk specifically about the information that has been given to the all-party group on muscular dystrophy by the young people who came together under the title of the Trailblazers. I know that the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) is a strong supporter of that group and has done tremendous work, so I was pleased to hear him speak today. These young people have clearly said that they have real concerns. They produced a report, “Right to Work”, in which they said clearly that young people should have the right qualifications and skills and exactly the same opportunities to gain paid employment—whether or not they are disabled.

Often these young people with ambitions are restricted by the inbuilt prejudices that they encounter in the workplace. The report shows that fewer than half of the disabled people in the country—48.5%—are actually in employment, in comparison with 78.8% of able-bodied people. They believe that the best way to address that is by giving as much support to individuals looking for work as is given to businesses and organisations already working.

The group also believes that the abolition of the work-related activity component of employment and support allowance has and will continue to put disabled people at a significant disadvantage. Almost half a million people are currently in receipt of the WRAG component, and it helps disabled people to get their interviews and to ensure that they are fit and healthy enough to get to work and stay in work. This abolition means that people with muscle-wasting diseases have had removed from them the support they need for sustainable, long-term and gainful employment, and it is likely significantly to widen the gap at a time when we are all saying that we want to close it.

When members of the Trailblazers went around the country to find out what was the reality, they found some basic things. They found far too many recruitment agencies that people were physically unable to reach because they were inaccessible up a flight of stairs. They were told that all jobs were available online. As Government Members said earlier, what happens if people are trying to go online, but the desk is set at a level from which it is difficult to operate the computer, or if people do not have access to a computer? These are the sort of basic issues that we should be working together to put right.

Some of the people carrying out the work for the report—disabled young people themselves—went for office-based proficiency tests, but instead of being based in the place where they were working, some of the interviews were happening in places such as coffee shops, where many other customers were milling about. How on earth can people show how proficient they are in circumstances like that? Trailblazers said that that while disability employment advisers were a hugely positive resource, it believed that they should all be given an enhanced level of disability awareness, so that they would recognise when disabled people came looking for a job that they might need to look at things in a very different way.

Some disabled young people seeking jobs face a dilemma: they must decide whether or not to disclose that they have a disability; obviously, not all of them will have a visible disability. They worry about the possibility that if they disclose their disability, there will be prejudice against them before they even get through the door. It should be made clear that they should have the right to decide whether or not to disclose their disability, rather than being told that they must state “I am disabled” on the form, and fail as a result. If they do that, they will already be behind the curve. Trailblazers said that when young people went for interviews, they should be given support so that they felt that they had been invited for a genuine interview, and were not just there to make the numbers up so that someone who could tick the boxes.

I ask the Minister to talk to those people, listen to them, learn from them, and apply the lessons.

6.1 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Sadly, as the Secretary of State said earlier, for far too long successive Governments have labelled disabled people as those who are unable to work. However, I believe that, through their actions, the present Government are busting that myth. A great number of disabled people want to work: indeed, I am sure that the majority want to do so. They are extremely capable of working, and want to experience the feeling of self-worth that earning a wage brings.

We heard from the Secretary of State that 365,000 more disabled people had moved into work in the past two years, and we heard further statistics from other Members. However, although the fact that more than 3.3 million disabled people are now in employment represents a great step forward, it is not enough yet. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who is no longer in the Chamber, spoke eloquently of how often numbers do not tell us the true story.

In January last year, the Prime Minister called for Britain to become a nation of full employment, and I am sure that his pledge applied not just to able-bodied people but to those who are disabled as well. If that is to happen, however, many workplace barriers need to be
broken down. Sadly, many of the barriers are put up by employers, probably unknowingly. It is amazing how many business premises, while they may be wheelchair-friendly in that they allow people in wheelchairs to get into the building, do not enable them to get around once they are inside. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) described very well the barriers that prevented people not just from getting into a shop, but from working there. He was talking about a small environment; many other workplaces are huge, and the barriers are still there.

However, this is not just about need for premises to be wheelchair-friendly. Many disabled people are fully mobile, but have other work-limiting conditions. For instance, a recent survey revealed that 35% of business leaders did not feel confident about their businesses employing a person with hearing loss. As our workforce age, disabilities such as hearing loss will increase rather than decreasing. The Government provide support for businesses through the Access to Work scheme, but I am afraid that too many employers are totally unaware of its existence. I ask the Secretary of State to consider ways of promoting support for disabled people and their employers.

In 2013, the Prime Minister launched the Disability Confident campaign, which encourages employers to recruit and retain disabled people so that both employer and disabled person can realise their potential. Disability Confident works with employers to show that employing disabled people is good for the individual, good for the business, and good for society. By highlighting the business benefits of inclusive employment practices, the campaign aims to remove barriers to work for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

I am aware that the Government are working with more than 120 employers who have committed to being active partners in the Disability Confident campaign, but that is not enough. It is time now to engage with many more businesses of all sizes—small, medium and large—to ensure that more employers really understand the benefits of employing someone with disabilities and start to break down those workplace barriers. In March this year, I held a jobs and community fair, and next year I shall be extending it to a jobs, community and disability fair, in order to be more inclusive myself.

Today’s debate has been as much about equality as about disability, and I hope that in a small way it will have brought about the will to ensure that we strive for equality irrespective of age, sex, colour or disability. This Government can quite rightly be proud of their record on getting more disabled people into work, although I am sure that they want to do more and not rest on their laurels, I am sure that they want to do more to narrow the gap, to ensure that even more people can proudly provide for their families and be proud to take home a pay packet at the end of every month.

6.5 pm

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I congratulate those on the Opposition Front Bench on calling this debate and the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) on leading it earlier. If there is one lesson we can draw from today’s debate, it is that it is much easier to talk about closing the disability employment gap than it is actually to close it. I have lost count of the number of debates we have had in this place over the last few years about the shortcomings of the work capability assessment; the well-documented failures of the Work programme; the devastating impact of the new sanctions regime on people who are found fit for work or work-related activity but cannot then comply with the conditions attached to their employment and support allowance or jobseeker’s allowance; those whose support has been cut in the transition from disability living allowance to the personal independence payment, including thousands who have lost access to their Motability vehicles, in some cases compromising their ability to get to and from work; and most recently, those who are going to receive £30 a week less in employment and support allowance or lose their work allowance.

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions have borne the brunt of austerity cuts in recent years, yet in that time there has been no tangible improvement in the rate of disabled people’s employment. There has been an assumption on the Government side that the support we have offered to sick and disabled people in the past has discouraged them from seeking work. Last year, the Chancellor went so far as to talk about “perverse incentives” when he was trying to justify cutting the incomes of some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities, but there is absolutely not a shred of evidence that cutting support has helped disabled people to find work. Quite the reverse: I am sure that almost all of us have encountered sick and disabled constituents who have fallen through the safety net of social security altogether.

I think the Government recognise that their reforms have failed many disabled people and failed to address the barriers to employment faced by many disabled people who could and would work with the right support. We were promised that we would have a White Paper long before now, but here we are in June and still waiting; the proposal has been batted off into the long grass. I am disappointed about the further delays, but I actually welcome the tacit acknowledgement that this whole project needs a lot more reflection. I share the view that we need a lot more input from disabled people, a lot more work with employers, and a very different approach that is centred on individuals. Yet more punitive austerity is not going to cut it; it will just cause yet more misery for disadvantaged people.

The consultations in advance of what is now going to be a Green Paper will provide an opportunity to get disabled people round the table with the wide range of voluntary organisations that represent their interests, so that those organisations can really listen to them. The consultations will also provide a chance to talk to employers about how they can best be supported to recruit and retain a disabled workforce. This will be a chance to do much better, and I really hope that this time round the Government will do things very differently. No one is pretending that this is easy. Part of the challenge is that when we talk about disabled people’s employment, we lump together as a group people who are every bit as diverse as society itself. We need to see the whole person, not the condition. We also need to recognise the wide variations in employment support needs.

We need to recognise that other aspects of a person’s life, such as whether they have qualifications, skills and work experience, will have a significant impact on their
job prospects. We also cannot ignore the fact that the wider inequalities in our labour market—such as those associated with gender, age or ethnicity—intersect with and often compound the barriers associated with disability. Perhaps most significantly of all, we cannot ignore wider labour market conditions and the simple availability of work. At a time when insecure, temporary, part-time work is becoming far more prevalent for everyone in low-paid jobs, high-falutin’ talk about sustained employment for disabled people becomes a bit of a moot point.

There is much talk about changing employer attitudes. While I wholeheartedly agree that we can and should be doing much more to help employers take on and retain disabled staff, progress has been painfully slow, and the take-up of schemes such as Disability Confident has been pretty paltry. We have seen some degree of cultural change over recent years in terms of flexible working and not only for disabled people. Some larger employers have led the way in employing disabled people and carers in sustainable ways—it is important to mention that during Carers Week—but we have to be honest about how far cultural change can take us and how greater flexibility poses serious challenges for some sectors and for smaller businesses in particular. If the Government are serious about changing attitudes, that needs to be backed up with resources. We need to make it much easier and affordable for employers to do more to support their disabled staff and to keep them in work.

Like others, I read the Resolution Foundation’s report on retention in deficit this week. It contains several useful, practical suggestions that merit much user attention, including the idea of keeping a person’s job open for up to a year after the start of sickness absence—much like maternity leave—which could help people to stay in work. That could also be of huge benefit to people recovering from serious illness or surgery, but it will work only if employers are recompensed, as is suggested, by reimbursing statutory sick pay costs for firms that support their employees to make a successful return to work. Those things are worth exploring further.

Crucially, the Resolution Foundation also recommended making early referrals to whatever scheme replaces the Work Programme for people who find that they are unlikely to be able to return to their previous job. If we continue to wait until someone has become long-term unemployed before making targeted interventions, we will miss the boat. People often lose confidence and social contact if forced to leave work and can fall further away from the labour market. I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that and about incentives for small businesses.

We have heard a different tone from the Government today. That is welcome, but it is hard to reconcile it with the reality of brutal cuts in income and the dehumanising experiences of recent years for disabled people. The Government will have to make a radical change of direction if they are to make any real difference to disabled people’s job prospects and to restore dignity to the whole process.

6.12 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): The Secretary of State said plainly that it is important to get the tone of such discussions right. By and large, that is what we have done in this afternoon’s debate. I was much taken by the contribution of the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), who talked about his nephew. I found it very moving, and he got the tone exactly right, because this should be about individual people. Similarly, the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) also got the tone right. What a contrast that was with the tone used by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith), in his entirely inappropriate opening remarks.

The wording of the Opposition motion just smacks of opposition for opposition’s sake. The manner in which it was proposed by the Opposition Front Bench showed the truth, which is that it is politically opportunistic and partisan. It was entirely unhelpful for the tone of the debate and for the people whom we are seeking to assist. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys questioned the exact nature of the debate and said the shadow Minister just seemed to be starting a general discussion rather than looking specifically at the points, so in that spirit I will look specifically at the motion, clause by clause.

The motion starts by stating that the House regrets the “lack of progress towards halving the disability employment gap” but that does not add up. We are helping more people with a disability to get into work than ever before. Some 365,000 more disabled people are in work now than two years ago. More than 3.3 million disabled people are in employment in total, which is an increase of 150,000 in the past year alone. Some Members made comments about the exact figures of the disability employment gap, but as has been pointed out, the reason for the discrepancy is that the rate of employment is so much higher under this Government than it was under the Labour Government.

Anna Turley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Heaton-Jones: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will not, because I understand that we are only about 20 minutes away from the closing speeches and I want to give everyone the opportunity to speak.

Secondly, the motion says that the House “regrets that the Government has not yet published its White Paper”. That does not even take account of the Secretary of State’s clear statement that he now intends to bring forward a Green Paper. I am surprised to hear the Labour party say that we should be doing this quicker, because its usual complaint is that we do not listen enough. Now, it appears to want us to rush out proposals without talking to the people we should be listening to. A proper consultation in which we talk to people with disabilities and the third-party, voluntary and charity sector organisations that represent them will take time. It is absolutely right for us to do that.

The motion goes on to note “with concern that commitments made in the Autumn Statement 2015 to help more disabled people through Access to Work and expanding Fit for Work have not materialised”.

I have the autumn statement here. It is clear in its commitment that there will be “a real terms increase in spending on Access to Work…to help a further 25,000 disabled people each year remain in work”.

Disability Employment Gap 8 JUNE 2016 Disability Employment Gap
It talks of
“expanding the Fit for Work service”
and of
“over £115 million of funding for the Joint Work and Health Unit”.
I say gently to the Labour party that the autumn statement is still in place. We are still in the period that it covers. I do not understand why Labour is suggesting that we are in some way reneging on it, when the period is still current.

Jo Stevens: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Heaton-Jones: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will not give way for the reasons I have given. I am sorry.
The motion
“further notes that the Government is reducing funding”.
That just does not add up. We are increasing spending on disability support. In the last Parliament, spending rose by £3 billion. We are now spending £50 billion on benefits alone to support people with disabilities and health conditions.

Last Friday, I attended a meeting of the North Devon and Torridge disability access forum. It was an extraordinarily positive meeting. Yes, it has concerns about the people it represents, but it wants to have a positive way of working with me and, through me, with the Government. That is typical of the positive attitude in North Devon. In Ilfracombe just two months ago, I organised a Disability Confident event, which the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People attended. It was an extraordinarily positive event that showed what can be done when people get together and work for the good of the majority of people. That is what we should be doing.

Oliver Colvile: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Peter Heaton-Jones: I will give way.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend agree that this issue affects the whole of Devon, not just North Devon?

Peter Heaton-Jones: It would have been remiss of me not to give way to a Devon colleague. I agree with him entirely, of course.

In the last two years, 365,000 more disabled people have moved into work. About £50 billion every year is being spent on benefits alone to support people with disabilities or health conditions. The Government will continue to spend more than Labour did in 2010 in every year between now and 2020. Benefits related to the additional costs of disability have been uprated every year.

We are well on our way to securing the Government’s manifesto commitment to halve the disability employment gap. This Government are doing more than the Labour party, which proposed the motion today, ever did. This is opposition purely for opposition’s sake, and we should consign the motion to the No Lobby where it belongs.
social enterprise and support for those with disabilities and for employers who wish to offer them employment. We in this House should also be leading by example, by promoting jobs and apprenticeships at Westminster for disabled people to train them in all aspects of running this House.

The issue of Motability cars has been raised by my constituents. Recently, I had a constructive meeting with Lord Sterling on this issue, and if possible I would like to have further discussions on the matter with the Minister. We are talking about a lifetime to independence and people must have it maintained. I stress the importance of involving disabled people at every stage of this Green Paper. The people who know what they need and what works are service users. I am pleased that, at the next meeting of our all-party parliamentary group, the Secretary of State will be in attendance alongside the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise and the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People—the big three—so we hope to make progress. It is also important that the BIS Minister is there, because people with disability make not just very good employees but very good employers. We must take this forward.

I hope to work constructively with everyone in the House. This is a key issue. Getting it right will not only have an immense impact on the quality of life of individuals but will be extremely important for our society as a whole.

6.25 pm

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I thank those on the Labour Front Bench for calling this debate on disability and the employment gap, because it is all very much part of what I hope we on the Government Benches stand for—that is, being one nation and ensuring that we talk about life chances, which were firmly included in the Queen’s Speech.

I am one of very few Members on the Conservative Benches to represent a totally inner-city constituency. I do not have a single piece of countryside in my constituency—with the exception, perhaps, of a rather wet meadow that is the Ponderosa pony sanctuary—although it has lots of parks and things like that. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, which is a very large number. That figure is now down to 3,000—perhaps 5,000—people working in the dockyard and elsewhere.

The city was badly bombed during the war, but we have a great sense of resilience, which is incredibly important. The work that has been done by the Government, the local enterprise partnership and the city council—by both political parties, I must add—to ensure that we got a city deal that will deliver 1,500 new skilled jobs is very good. It is not the case that because someone is disabled they cannot do a skilled job. After all, people have lots of opportunities to do that.

I have been working with a man called Chris Leonard who runs an employment agency called Mego, which specifically considers the lower-skilled. We came to the conclusion that to bring the number of claimants down even further, we must focus on those people suffering from mental health issues, such as depression. Too often, we do not think about that. Issues such as alcoholism, drug taking, neurological conditions and, of course, smoking produce that, so we must work very hard to ensure that those people can be helped back into work. I am also very keen to ensure that people suffering from neurological issues and other such conditions have access to the pharmaceutical products that they should have.

Last year, quite a few people wrote to me about ESA and I had quite a lot of sympathy with what they were saying. It is important that we ensure that they are encouraged to get into work by becoming involved with voluntary organisations and so on. The Government have been doing a good job of encouraging people to get involved in voluntary organisations. If anybody living in Plymouth, in the constituency or the city, wants to go and help the hedgehog sanctuary, that would be a brilliant idea. As everybody knows, I am a great fan of the hedgehog and have been doing a lot of work in that regard.

The Government need to make sure that people will not be isolated. We should encourage them to get back into community life. I have been doing a lot of work with the local jobcentre and last Friday I met a gentleman there who came to see me. He was quite young and obviously had real issues to do with autism. In Plymouth we are campaigning for an autism pre-school, because we have to start early in people’s lives to get them used to the idea. That young man had no confidence before he arrived, but staff were deeply surprised that he learned to engage with people, and he had even learned to shake my hand when he left. It is extremely important to instil such confidence.

It is important to ensure that skills testing takes place and that people in schools take an interest in the community. I pay tribute to Stoke Damerel community college for the work it does on dementia, which has become a big issue in the city. The more we can do to make sure that people can get back into work, the better.

6.30 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to speak briefly in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport...
(Oliver Colvile). I want to use the opportunity to describe the experience of one of my constituents, who came to see me because of her concern and frustration about the Fit for Work scheme that is mentioned in the motion.

My constituent is a highly trained occupational therapist with decades of experience. She was employed by Fit for Work, the company under the umbrella of Health Management Ltd which is part of Maximus, the company to which the Government have awarded a lucrative contract to work with people with disabilities to get them back into work.

When the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was the Secretary of State for Wales, he announced that the Fit for Work service was to be provided in Wales. The service was to provide support and advice to employed people if they had been or were likely to be off work for four weeks or more. According to Government statistics, about 48,000 Welsh workers a year are off sick for that length of time. Fit for Work was to be gradually rolled out across Wales and England. It was seen as a particularly important scheme in Wales, where a higher than average proportion of the workforce is employed in smaller companies, which do not have occupational health services to support absent staff.

The then Welsh Secretary said:

“The Fit for Work initiative will give tens of thousands of people across Wales the support they need to return to their jobs more quickly. This is clearly good for the Welsh economy.”

GP surgeries in Wales were to offer patients a referral to the service, which included an in-depth assessment, followed by a personal return to work plan and managed support to get back to their jobs. That was in June 2015.

My constituent came to see me because, as she put it, both as an employee of Fit for Work and as a taxpayer she was concerned about how that contract was being delivered. She started working for Fit for Work in November 2015, a few months after the Secretary of State’s announcement, at the centre in Nantgarw in the constituency of the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith). However, by April 2016 Fit for Work was making staff redundant because of insufficient referrals of clients, and the centre was closed.

My constituent asked me why the Government were not supporting a service that they had instigated. Twelve months after the start of the scheme the public, GPs and employers did not appear to know about it on any kind of meaningful scale. It was inadequately advertised, so it is little wonder that the number of referrals was too low. She told me that Fit for Work did only a few employer engagement activities. The implementation was poorly managed and badly promoted. Matters even got to the stage where highly qualified medical assessors—case managers like my constituent—were taken off assessments with clients and told to ring round employers to tout the service.

Fit for Work had been predicated on 13,500 referrals a month, but the service was getting only about 450 referrals. Not only had it been badly advertised and implemented, but the process that case managers undertook was not effective in helping people achieve the aims of the scheme. My constituent described it to me as very standardised and commoditised. Speed and light touch were its hallmark.

The assessments were expected to be carried out very quickly, which had the effect of diluting the wealth of professional experience that my constituent could bring to her role. Assessors were expected to complete six assessments a day. She told me that she struggled to even do two or three properly because of the time it took. Everything is done over the telephone. Calls are meant to take 45 minutes and the referrals were supposed to be for people who had, for example, back pain, depression or anxiety and had been off work for four weeks. However, some of the people being referred had been off work for two years and their problems were much more complex.

I was just thinking about how one would try to gain, in 45 minutes, not only the trust of the person but sufficient information to understand properly their condition and the context they were living in. To do the assessment properly, my constituent felt it required preparation, including: reading all the information from the employer and the GP; making the telephone call; gathering the information from the client; considering all that evidence; considering what a return-to-work plan might look like; transcribing that information; and giving recommendations and an opinion within the production of that return-to-work plan. She told me that to do that properly would take three hours.

The targets set for the Fit for Work programme had the effect of removing much of her clinical judgment from the process. Fit for Work auditors would listen in on the calls with clients and tell the case manager whether the call they had made had passed or failed the requirements of the process—not whether it would deliver a proper return-to-work plan. It was very difficult to pass the test. She described the scheme and its implementation as being entirely data-driven, rather than people-driven. On his appointment, the Secretary of State said, laudably, that he wanted to ensure his Department realised there was a human being behind every DWP number. This direct account from someone who was employed to deliver his Department’s scheme flies in the face of that.

My constituent left me with a message for the Secretary of State. She says she is convinced of the need for this service. It could help a lot of people to get the right help and get back into work sooner after illness or injury. Her team was a fantastic group of highly skilled, empathetic and knowledgeable health professionals. They had very many valuable strengths and experiences to make people’s health and wellbeing better, allowing them to return to work at a time that was right for them. They were not utilised. They lost their jobs, the centre was closed and that support did not materialise.

6.36 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): May I first start with apologies from my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith)? He is attending a debate on the EU with the former Secretary of State, taking the opportunity to consider that issue in relation to its impact on disadvantaged people.

We have had a very interesting debate, with many well-informed and well-argued speeches. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and wish his nephew with cerebral palsy all the very best with his GCSEs. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) talked about her constituent who had gone through the
PIP process and how it was affecting her ability to work. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) gave a characteristically brave and honest speech, which went to the heart of the employment rate for disabled people—particularly the lack of evidence for many of the measures the Government have introduced. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) focused on the disability employment gap and the variations relating to different conditions—a very important point. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) described in detail her constituent’s dreadful and deskilling experience of working for the Fit for Work programme. The process focused on data, not people. We need our interest to be focused on people.

About 12 million people in the UK are living with a disability, an impairment or a limiting, long-term illness: 5.7 million are of working age; 5.2 million are over the age of 65; and 0.8 million are children. Although 4 million people with disabilities are working already, another 1.3 million are fit for work and want to work, but they are currently unemployed. However, as we have heard, the gap in the employment rate for disabled people, compared with non-disabled people, has grown under the Government to 34%—a 4% increase since they took office. Given that the vast majority—90%—of disabled people used to work, that is such a waste of their skills, experience and talent.

As study upon study has shown, the Government’s pledge to halve the disability employment gap rings hollow, with estimates that it will take until 2030 to do that at the current rate. The shelved White Paper, with the promise of a strategy defining support for disabled people, is yet another broken promise. Although I recognise that the Green Paper is coming, why did that not happen in the first place? Why has there been this delay? What needs to happen? Addressing these issues, including the disability employment gap, needs political will and leadership. The Labour party’s disability equality roadshow will work with disabled people, their carers, disabled people’s organisations and providers across the UK, listening to them and developing with them policies that address their needs and that will work. However, we will also engage the public at large, providing an alternative to the Government’s negative narrative and casual inaction.

If 90% of disability is acquired, why are we doing so little to help employers retain skilled and experienced employees who may become poorly or disabled? We need practical measures to support disabled people at work, enabling them to thrive, and protecting them from prematurely leaving the labour market. Some disability charities have recommended more flexible leave arrangements, as well as extending the Access to Work programme. Clearly, if the Government increase the 37,000 or so who used Access to Work last year by another 25,000, that will still be only a tiny, tiny proportion of the 1.3 million people who are fit for work.

The Disability Confident scheme needs to be rebooted. The latest revelation that only 40 mainstream private sector employers across the UK have joined it since its inception three years ago shows that it is, to put it mildly, completely inadequate. What measures are in place to measure the scheme’s efficacy? Where employers work hard to recruit and retain disabled employees, how does that apply to their procurement policies and supply chains?

More needs to be done to help disabled people back into work. As we have been arguing for over a year, the work capability assessment needs to be replaced with a more holistic, whole-person assessment. The current system that assesses eligibility for social security support is not fit for purpose and should be completely overhauled. I welcome some of the change in language on disabled people on this matter. That needs to be reflected in departmental and Jobcentre Plus performance indicators that do not just focus on getting people “off flow” as a successful outcome. Since so many of the same people imply. Collectively, those things tell us who they think is worthy or not. The Government have made their views abundantly clear. Their sweeping cuts to social security support for disabled people—including the recent ESA WRAG cut of £1,500 a year—total nearly £30 billion since 2010 to 3.7 million disabled people.

The Government’s overhaul of the work capability assessment manages to be both dehumanising and ineffective, and it has been associated with profound mental health effects, including suicide. Their sanctions policy targets the most vulnerable, bringing people to the brink, and some have died under it. The PIP debacle is making it harder for disabled people to stay in work. There is also the closure of the independent living fund. I could go on and on. This is happening across all Government Departments—Business, Innovation and Skills; housing; Transport; Education; Justice; and Culture, Media and Sport. Disabled people are being completely marginalised.

Michael Tomlinson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Debbie Abrahams: I am sorry, but I will not. As I said, I have a lot to say.

What needs to happen? Addressing these issues, including the disability employment gap, needs political will and leadership. The Labour party’s disability equality roadshow will work with disabled people, their carers, disabled people’s organisations and providers across the UK, listening to them and developing with them policies that address their needs and that will work. However, we will also engage the public at large, providing an alternative to the Government’s negative narrative and casual inaction.

Richard Graham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Debbie Abrahams: I am sorry, but I will not—I have a lot that I want to say.

The Government set the tone for the culture of society explicitly through their policies and laws, and more subtly through the language they use and what they
also have PIP assessments, we should also look at how we could bring these together. It is pleasing that the Government say that they are considering this.

Instead of the increasingly punitive sanctions system, more appropriate support needs to be provided. It is essential to maintain and increase specialist disability employment advisers in jobcentres. There is currently one adviser to 600 disabled people, and even if that is doubled to one to 300, that is still a very low ratio for the Government to be working to. I would also like their role to be extended to working with businesses. The current commissioning and payments system for the Work programme and other welfare-to-work programmes also needs rethinking. We need to improve specialist support, looking at what works. Work Choice, while it has better outcomes than other programmes, may not be the only solution. The individual placement and support scheme for people with mental health conditions is another example. As I have said before, there needs to be greater integration between Departments—not just between the DWP and the NHS but with BIS and economic development. For example, if someone who has musculoskeletal conditions or mental health issues has to take time off work, they need appropriate early intervention to help them get back to work. That is not happening at the moment. We need to understand the bottlenecks in the local system that my impact on this. We need to reflect on the drive for “flexible” labour markets and what this means for supporting people with long-term and fluctuating conditions back into work, and most probably out of work and then back into work, and so on.

There are clear geographical variations in the disability employment gap, but also in the strength of local economies and the availability and types of jobs. It is well established that the prevalence and geographical pattern of sick and disabled people reflects the industrial heritage of our country. Contrary to the Government’s “shirkers and scroungers” narrative, incapacity benefit and ESA are recognised as good population health indicators. Local economic conditions, whether the economy is thriving or not, will determine how readily sick and disabled people will be able return to work. Geographical analysis shows that people with equivalent conditions in the economically buoyant London and south-east are more likely to be in work that those in Northern Ireland, Scotland, the north-east, the north-west, and Wales.

It is over 70 years since legislation was first introduced to prohibit employment-related discrimination against disabled people. Sadly, we are still fighting to address this discrimination and the inequality in employment that disabled people still face. Changing attitudes and behaviour needs cultural change and it needs leadership, and we will provide it.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): It is a great pleasure to conclude this debate, which has been a positive and constructive debate on a very vital subject. I think it is fair to say that on the majority of the issues there is genuine cross-party consensus. We have identified the challenges that we face and we are looking to find as many opportunities as possible to move forward. I am proud to serve in a Government where the Prime Minister personally committed us to halving the disability employment gap. Our Secretary of State has shown a genuine passion to understand, listen and engage with the stakeholders—those with the first-hand experience of how we can identify the opportunities and overcome the challenges. I am confident that we will continue to make a real difference in this vital area.

In the past two years alone, 365,000 more disabled people have entered into work. This is crucial for a number of reasons, as I find when I engage with stakeholders, particularly young stakeholders. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) mentioned his nephew who is taking his GCSE exams—I join in the good luck messages to him. That summed up exactly why this is so important. Disabled people rightly wish to be judged on their ability, not their disability. I say that as an individual who has not only employed disabled people but benefited from doing so.

We have to look at businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) highlighted one of the key areas, which is that we have a skills shortage in this country. If businesses have the confidence to make the necessary changes—often, they are small ones—they will benefit. If more disabled people can get into work, disabled people and businesses will benefit. It is a genuine win-win situation. Key for the Government, and key in my role, is to make sure that we showcase talent, share best practice and create genuine opportunities.

I will quickly whizz through some of the highlights of the work that we are already doing. There is a real-term increase in support to help those with disabilities and long-term health conditions to seek work. We are reforming Jobcentre Plus. We have the hidden impairment toolkit and additional training. We have doubled the number of disability advisers. We have commissioned the £43 million mental health pilots, including the collocation of improving access to psychological therapies.

The new Work and Health unit rightly brings together the greatest minds in DWP and the Department of Health—something that has been greatly welcomed by our stakeholder groups. In that, we have already commissioned pilots on the innovation portfolios with a real focus on mental health support, the personalised pathways and the peer-to-peer support that our stakeholders repeatedly highlight as crucial. Disability Rights UK has helped to lead on those pilots. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who does great work as the chair of the all-party group on disability, also recognises the importance of peer-to-peer support.

With the reforms and the introduction of universal credit, the area that I am most excited about is having a named coach for the first time. As individuals navigate their way over the challenges of getting into the workplace, they will have a named coach to support them to find work and to get additional support. When they are in work, for the first time they will have continued support to help them to achieve genuine career progression.

I welcome the increased focus from the Health and Safety Executive, for which I am also responsible. Its title includes health and safety, and on safety it is world leading—for foreign countries and foreign businesses pay for our expertise in improving safety—but there is also a real focus on the health side, recognising that we lose
131 million days a year to ill health. There will be a huge amount of additional work in that area. The HSE has fantastic business engagement. Businesses of all sizes—small, medium-sized and large—proactively engage with it, and we want to utilise that.

Mr Robin Walker: While my hon. Friend is on the subject of health, does he agree that disability sport can play a huge role in not only supporting the health of people with disabilities but building their confidence and helping them to prepare for work? Does he agree that we should do all we can to support initiatives such as the International Centre for Inclusive Sport at the University of Worcester?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I absolutely agree, and it was a great pleasure to join my hon. Friend in visiting Worcester arena, which showcased how inclusive design right from the beginning has made a genuine difference and created more opportunities. That was one of my favourite visits as a Minister.

The new employment allowance has helped more than 16,000 disabled people to start their own business, and with Access to Work we have secured funding for an additional 25,000 people. We are close to launching the digital service to bring Access to Work online, which will please employers and those who seek to claim. We have introduced specialist teams. We have the mental health support service, and we are doing further work to support apprentices, particularly those with mental health conditions. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) highlighted the need to increase awareness, and she is absolutely right. All too often, this has been Government’s best-kept secret. I commissioned work through KPMG to look at how we can better increase awareness so that we can, as quickly as possible, fill the 25,000 additional places. As many speakers have highlighted, it is not just about the Government; we have to look at employers, because employers will create those opportunities.

Neil Coyle: Before the Minister moves away from the role of the Government, can I just say how refreshing the disability organisations I am proud to have worked with over the years have found it to have a new Secretary of State, with a new and more engaging agenda, who is willing to acknowledge that there has been significant failure over the last six years at the introduction of new and better schemes?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. I find it refreshing that the Secretary of State is willing to engage, because we are talking about the individuals who see those opportunities and challenges from day to day, and who can provide us with constructive solutions. The Green Paper, which I will talk about later on, is a real opportunity for them genuinely to shape how we will improve opportunities.

We want to help encourage employers to provide such opportunities so that those who choose to engage with the Work programme, with Work Choice and with charities do not continue in the loop—yet another 12-week course to be told how to prepare a CV and go through an interview—and lose confidence as they move further away from the jobs market. The key is that if we can create those opportunities, more people will be able to get into work.

Our Disability Confident campaign has now signed up over 600 employers, and we are recruiting over 100 a month. This is about sharing best practice and signposting, but we will go further. We are working on plans with greater asks of particularly the larger employers to make sure that they include as many people as possible from their supply chain in such training days.

Several Members have highlighted reverse jobs fairs. It was a great pleasure to visit the one held by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones). This is about bringing together all the organisations doing a huge amount of work to support disabled people in their respective communities to meet small and medium-sized businesses that are often unaware of the huge wealth of talent in the country and the support that would help people into work. I am proud that a cross-party group of over 50 MPs have signed up to hold their very own reverse jobs fairs. I thank each and every one of them because it will make a difference.

We have commissioned small employer engagement pilots, in which we are sending out representatives to talk to small and medium-sized businesses—doorstepping them, asking them to put on the kettle, and saying, “Look, we are here to support you. We can signpost you to genuine talent to fill your skills gaps.” The pilots are still in their early days, but I am very excited by the positive outcomes achieved in matching skills gaps with people who wish to work.

Some speakers talked about how vital apprenticeships are. They give people a genuine opportunity to develop real, tangible skills that will lead to work. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who has chaired the joint taskforce set up by the Minister for Skills, the BIS Minister with responsibility for apprenticeships, and me. The taskforce will make sure we can open the apprenticeship commitment—the Government want 3 million more people to access the apprenticeships scheme during this Parliament—to more people with disabilities, particularly those with learning difficulties who find the entry requirement of grade Cs in GCSE maths and English to be a hurdle too far. Again, I am very excited about this. We set up a one-month taskforce, and its work was completed yesterday. We will look at its recommendations, and we intend to act as quickly as possible.

This is about the importance of localising and tailoring our solutions, and we are absolutely committed to that. Several speakers highlighted the fact that only 6% of those with learning disabilities will typically achieve meaningful, tangible outcomes. That is totally unacceptable. When I visited Foxes Academy in Bridgwater, which was featured on Channel 5, I learned that over 80% of its students have been able to find work, of which 45.6% are in paid employment. That is because it has the equivalent of an apprenticeship scheme, with supported working. It works with employers to identify skills gaps and it provides the necessary training. That is something we can replicate and that I want the taskforce to highlight, and I am excited about its potential.

I attended the launch of the Resolution Foundation report yesterday, and I pay tribute to both Laura and Declan, who did a huge amount of work on it. The report highlights a lot of important issues, especially...
about the retention of disabled people in work, which is particularly important given that we have an ageing workforce and that 83% of people with a disability have developed that disability with age. It is right to look at all those areas to help keep as many people as possible in work. It is far easier to support people to keep them in work than it is to get them back into work.

To turn to the Green Paper, I know from my engagement with them that the stakeholders are genuinely excited at this opportunity. They understand that they will make a tangible difference to what the Government are doing, and I hope that that will secure support.

I want quickly to respond to some of the points made by the shadow Secretary of State. On mobility, there are 22,000 more people accessing the mobility scheme than before PIP was introduced. On the 20-metre rule, it is not as black and white as whether someone can do 19 metres or 21 metres; it is about being able to travel a distance reliably, safely, in a timely manner and repeatedly. On the assessment process, I urge the shadow Secretary of State to visit a centre and sit through an assessment to see what happens. There is too much hearsay, and not enough genuine knowledge. On DLA, let us remember that only 16% of claimants accessed the highest rate of benefit compared with 22.5% under PIP. We are targeting that only 16% of claimants accessed the highest rate of benefit compared with 22.5% under PIP. We are targeting the money at the most vulnerable, and that is why the numbers are increasing and the money is being spent.

I say to the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) that it is right this is done on a cross-Government basis. It has to be joined up and we genuinely need greater understanding. I say to all those who contributed to this debate that it has been an important and positive one.

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put.

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 262.

Division No. 15] [7 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Kevin
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blenkinsop, Tom
Bowis, Phillip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Danczuk, Simon
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Tom
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Fitpatrick, Jim
Felio, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendy, Drew
Heptburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollem, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keely, Barbara
Kerevan, George
Kinahan, Danny
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Macqattarg, rh Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, John
McGarry, Natalie
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mears, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrison, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Spellar, rh Mr John

Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Macqattarg, rh Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, John
McGarry, Natalie
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mears, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrison, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Spellar, rh Mr John
Question accordingly negatived.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West Midlands Combined Authority Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 28 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(Mel Stride.)

The Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 15 June (Standing Order No. 41A).

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 28 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(Mel Stride.)

Question agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we come to the Adjournment debate, I propose with the agreement of colleagues to suspend the sitting of the House for approximately five minutes in order that a photograph—perhaps more than one photograph—can be taken on what is, I think, a momentous occasion. It is an occasion of commemoration and of celebration. The bells will be rung a minute or two before the sitting is due to resume.

7.15 pm
Sitting suspended.

7.24 pm
On resuming—

Women and the Vote

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I requested this Adjournment debate as yesterday marked exactly 150 years since the philosopher and Member of this House, John Stuart Mill, moved the first mass petition to the House of Commons on behalf of women claiming their right to vote. The largest paper petition ever received by this House was, I believe, the petition to end the transatlantic slave trade. That victory made it clear that public petitioning was then, as it is today, a means to take this House by storm, to grab our attention and to bang on the Government’s door requiring change.

In 1866, Mill believed that the time was right. Change in this House resulted in the recognition of the right to vote of men who rented property as well as of those who owned it. Mill had already written, though not published, his great work, “On the Subjugation of Women”. The first petition from an individual woman was submitted to this House in 1832, but the petition in 1866 represented the first organised campaign. It was the beginning of the movement that was to change our country.

Those Victorian times, despite the presence of a woman monarch, held mixed fortunes for women. One of the signatories to the petition, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, was refused access to medical training, and even when a Paris university granted her a qualification, the British medical authorities would not ratify it and allow her to practise. Women were told at the time that education itself was damaging to their health. Education, Mr Speaker! How could any of us be sitting on these Benches now without education in one form or another? Yet in 1866, it was considered perfectly reasonable to oppose women voting because of their supposed lack of education and their unfitness to receive it. Other signatories, Barbara Bodichon and Emily Davies, were the driving forces behind opening up higher education for women. Those women were fighting to have their voices heard, their interests recognised and their opinions weighed with the exact same scales that were used for men.

Today we have debated the right to vote in the upcoming EU referendum—perhaps the most extensive and significant exercise of democracy in the history of this country. Millions of women will be voting, in the same numbers as men. In fact, at the last election there was a 66% turnout among women, which was almost identical to the male turnout. The future direction of this country, our collective potential and our future successes will be down to women as well as men. That is the lesson that I believe we should take from the 1866 petition. Ludicrous though it seems to have to say it, there never was any lack of intelligence, aptitude or desire on the part of women to be involved in politics, and there is not now.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. She is right to point out that we have made progress—192 women now sit in this Parliament—but we need to see more progress at the next election. Does she, like me, feel that we need the sort of progress that we made in 2015, when we saw a 30% increase in female representation in this place? Should we not be striving for the same progress next time?
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): And in 1997, when we had all-women shortlists.

Alison McGovern: I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for that intervention. I know how hard she has worked in her own party to bring forward advances for women. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) has also just mentioned the advances made in 1997.

Women did not just have to fight for the right to vote; they had to fight for the right truly to be themselves, whatever that means. They had to fight, as we have to fight, for the right to exist as others do, and to make choices about how to realise our ambition and serve our country. So what holds us back? Well, for a start, let us look at this EU referendum. It is a decision that will affect us all, but the debate has too often been dominated by male voices. It has been a debate in which the ever-changing opinion of one male Tory Back Bencher seems to take precedence over the views of a whole host of women in the Cabinet and shadow Cabinet. I am not going to make many friends among Tory Back Benchers this evening—at least not on the male side.

On representation, we may have parity of votes, but we certainly do not have parity of voice. Public debate too often excludes women or shouts them down. The point is that we may have made huge progress over the last few decades on the number of women MPs, on women in the Cabinet and on all sorts measures, but there is so much still to do, because not everyone is able to realise their true value and—even worse—there is still violence.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I asked the hon. Lady beforehand if she would give way, and I congratulate her on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. There were suffragette groups and movements across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Starting in the 1860s, there were 20 suffrage groups in Northern Ireland before the first world war. Does the hon. Lady feel, like many inside and outside this House, that there is a need to remember historical importance? Tonight is an example of getting the historical importance right. Is there not a need to remember each and every year and to do the same in education in schools as well?

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind intervention. It is certainly true that there is progress to be made for women across the whole United Kingdom, definitely including Northern Ireland.

I believe that the reading by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) of the names of the women killed by men this year will be a significant moment for this House that few who heard it will forget. As Women’s Aid has highlighted, however, women who have fled to refuges to escape domestic violence remain disfranchised because they are unable to register anonymously. Thousands of women, whose voices are crying out to be heard, are silenced because of arcane regulations.

Mr Speaker, you were present last night at the lighting of “New Dawn”, a work of art which was commissioned to mark the anniversary of the 1866 petition. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), my colleague on and Chair of the Speaker’s Advisory Committee on Works of Art, who led the project brilliantly. The artist, Mary Branson, has created a beautiful installation, lit in the colours of the votes for women movement. It is a special work of art, representing not just an individual, but an idea, and not just an idea, but a force of change. Any number of worthy people could have been represented—any number of the signatories to the petition, the anniversary of which I am marking this evening—but I am unsure that that would have been right, because political change is never down to an individual. Political change happens because all of us change our minds. It happens when we stand up for that terribly simple idea, one which we know in our heart to be true but which is often forgotten, that every one of us is equal. The many discs, lit up by the tide of the Thames, represent the sweeping power of change and the light of hope.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for agreeing to give way when I approached her earlier today, because the anniversary is important from an Oldham perspective. I am leading the fundraising campaign for a statue of Annie Kenney, who was a working-class suffragette leader and an inspiration to many. I also want to reflect on the fact that although there is no doubt that men can be part of the problem, that does not mean that men cannot be part of the solution. It is important that we work together to remind people of the sacrifices that were made by so many.

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I commend his efforts to remember a working-class member of the fight for women’s votes.

The new work that we lit up last night is bold, daring, and imaginative. It is a tribute, yes, but it will also serve, just as the archway leading from Members’ Lobby to the Chamber does, as a reminder.

You may know, Mr Speaker, that there were protests outside this building last night, in part against the violence that I mentioned that too many women still face. I say to those who protested last night outside St Stephen’s entrance and shouted with furious anger, “Dead women can’t vote,” that they are right to be angry. They are right to be angry with violent men, but all of us must choose how we use that anger: whether to hold our placard and do no more or whether to take up the right that our sisters fought for not just to vote, but to hold office and seek the real power to take decisions on behalf of women and men.

In 1866, women hammered on the door of this place because they had no other choice. Hammering on the door was the only way to make their voices heard, to stand proud and to say, “Here we are. These are our numbers. We have the right to be valued and we count.” This is the real point about 1866: it was never about equal votes for women; it was always about equal worth for women. A new dawn, Mr Speaker, but a very old fight—a fight that is as alive in 2016 as it was 150 years ago.

7.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) on securing this important debate and on an outstanding speech. In fact, she has made a lot of friends on this side of the House.
[Caroline Dinenage]

The 150th anniversary of the Kensington Society petition is an excellent opportunity to take stock of how far women have come in social, economic, cultural and political life. As the hon. Lady rightly said, it is also a time to consider how very far we still have to go. I also congratulate her on the digital debate she led this afternoon on this very issue. That is another new way of engaging with people and hearing their views. I followed it with great interest. As MPs, we must take on this mantle, take on these views and concerns, and work to end sexism and discrimination in every part of our lives.

The petition back in 1866 called for women to be given the same political rights as men. Shocking though it seems now, that was a very radical thought back then. Every woman in this country owes a massive debt of gratitude to those early suffrage campaigners, who did so much to advance the cause not only of women’s political rights, but other rights too. As the 310th woman to have been elected to Parliament, this subject resonates with me, as I am sure it does with all 190 of my female colleagues around the House.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for raising this subject for debate. I am listening to what the Minister is saying about representations of the suffragettes. Does she agree that while the new artwork is fantastic and must be welcomed, anyone who walks around this building realises how hugely influenced it is by men and how many men and statues of men there are? Anybody who goes to the cupboard of Emily Wilding Davison will realise how poor a tribute it is to what she and others did. Perhaps there is more that we can do across these Benches to promote the work of the suffragettes and other women in this Parliament.

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady is absolutely right; we need to take every opportunity we can to promote the fantastic work of those who came before us and those who fought and died before us to secure the privileges that we enjoy today.

I am delighted that Parliament commissioned the new permanent work of art to commemorate women’s suffrage. I know that the hon. Member for Wirral South was on the Committee led by my hon. Friend—and real life friend—the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I pay tribute to the Committee for its work.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I could not resist intervening. The hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) made a really serious point. The thing that strikes me is that we have a parliamentary art collection of 8,000 works of art, fewer than 200 of which represent women in any shape or form. Although my Committee works hard to improve on that, we are sometimes stymied by the media. I was struck by the article in “The Sun” online that criticised the new artwork. Is it not incumbent on all of us to try in some small way to make this place feel more relevant and warmer for women?

Mr Speaker: I suppose that even newspapers have the privilege that we enjoy today.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, it is incumbent on all of us to make this place look a lot more like the people we represent out there in society. The new artwork, “New Dawn”, will be seen not only by MPs and peers, but by many members of the public. I spoke last night to one of the gentlemen who was involved in the creation of it and he told me that it will last for up to 300 years, so long after we have all shuffled off, many people will appreciate the work and be as inspired by it as I am.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the cause of women is international, and that it is truly wonderful that, today, a woman is the presumptive Democratic party nominee for President of the United States? That will mean so much to our daughters and our granddaughters right across the globe.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, absolutely. Hillary Clinton has talked about a massive glass ceiling being broken. Previously, she has spoken about women’s issues being the pet rock in the backpack of some of our politicians. No longer will women’s issues be that pet rock; they will be front and centre of all political parties’ intentions in the future.

One hundred and fifty years on, the world is a radically different place. I am sure that those early campaigners would be pleased to see that we now have not only the vote, but women in Parliament as well. I am sure that, like me, they would feel that 191 female MPs at the moment is still not enough.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): May I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for her excellent speech? Reference was made to the choices that women can make in terms of how they use their voices. I ask the Minister if she would take this opportunity, off the back of this debate, to remind some of her male colleagues who seem to think that women need to “understand” what they are saying that perhaps our way of understanding is that we have a different viewpoint on things, and that sometimes our opinions are worthy of listening to and may actually be right.

Caroline Dinenage: It is our different viewpoint on things that makes us most valuable.

I am very proud to be a member of a party that had the first woman to take her seat in Parliament. I am very proud to be a member of a party that had the first female Prime Minister, and to be part of a Government where a third of the people attending Cabinet are now women.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the work of Baroness Jenkin, whom many of us who have recently joined this place have to thank for the enormous amount of support she has given women candidates in trying to become MPs?

Caroline Dinenage: Well, yes. We all want to see more women here. In that quest, mentoring is one of the most important things that we can do, and the noble Baroness has been an absolutely outstanding mentor for so many of the women who are among us today. In the other
place, there are now 210 female peers, the highest ever number. Two of the three devolved Administrations are now headed by women—

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) rose—

Caroline Dinenage: I will give way in a moment. Last year, 44% of new public appointments went to women.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: I will in a moment, but first let me say this. I am delighted that, in my local council of Gosport, nearly 40% of our councillors are female, and I pay tribute to every single one of them.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will she join me in appreciating the fact that, in Scotland, the three leaders of our main political parties are women, and that we have a gender-balanced Cabinet and gender-balanced nominations for our convenerships to the Parliament?

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, absolutely. That is very much to be celebrated.

Barbara Keeley: I hope the Minister will join me in paying tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). She has been a remarkable leader of this party at times and has almost got to the role. She certainly played her role in Prime Minister's questions. I hope we can think of her as we applaud these other remarkable women.

Caroline Dinenage: Absolutely. The right hon. and learned Lady is also very much to be celebrated. It is a shame that she is not here so that I can thank her personally.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: May I make a bit of progress? I really want to talk about the lasting change that starts with education. Girls are now outperforming boys at school and outnumbering boys at university. We really need to ensure that success in school translates into career success. To do that, we need to free women and girls from the pressure to conform to restricted choices in aspirations. There are no longer such things as boys' jobs and girls' jobs; there are just jobs. That is why the Government are working so hard to broaden girls' career choices by encouraging more of them to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and maths. Those are the skills that our economy needs and those are the career choices that will narrow the gender pay gap, which, I am proud to say, is now narrower than it has ever been, and it is the Prime Minister's ambition to eliminate it altogether within a generation.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) rose—

Caroline Dinenage: I will make a little bit more progress. We have published regulations that will increase transparency around the gender pay gap, and we expect employers to start publishing the required information from next April. We have been working closely with business on these regulations at every stage, and we will provide a package of support to help employers calculate, understand and address their gender pay gap areas.

It is also vital that we continue to gain positions of leadership and influence in business. I am delighted that Lord Davies's target of 25% of women on the boards of FTSE 100 companies has been met and exceeded. Across the whole FTSE 350, the proportion of women is more than double what it was in 2011. Backed by the Government, this business-led approach is working. The work is not over. We need to promote the business-led 33% target for FTSE 350 boards. I am delighted that Sir Philip Hampton and Dame Helen Alexander will be bringing their wealth of business experience to a new review into the executive pipeline.

Many of the initiatives I have mentioned have been led by the Government Equalities Office. I am immensely proud to be a GEO Minister alongside my colleague the Secretary of State for Education, and to continue the work that has been done by making sure that in everything we do we make the UK a better place for women to live and work.

I am also proud of how the Government lead the way internationally on promoting women's rights. I was honoured to lead the UK delegation to the convention on the status of women in New York earlier this year, which involved delegates from across the world. It was striking how many common issues were raised that affect women globally. Economic empowerment, the violence against women and girls mentioned by the hon. Member for Wirral South, and political representation are all issues for women across the world.

The progress we have made on these issues has not simply been given to us. It has been fought for every single step of the way and there is still such a long way to go to achieve the genuine equality we all want to see. The hon. Member for Wirral South spoke powerfully about the speech made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) earlier in the year. Two women a week still die at the hands of an ex-husband or partner, and although we have made so much progress in increasing the number of convictions and prosecutions for domestic violence, every single one of those women is a woman too many.

Mims Davies: I speak as the 380th woman elected to Parliament; we all have our number. We heard about American politics, and, as we heard from Madeleine Albright, there is a special place in hell for women who do not support other women. In this wonderful debate, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) made a point about the safety of women in the context of refuge, of homes and of having a voice. Will my hon. Friend, as women's Minister, ensure that we as a Government will take that very seriously?

Caroline Dinenage: Absolutely. Protecting those who are vulnerable or under threat is fundamentally one of the most important things we can do as a Government, but it is not just about women. As the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) said earlier, men are powerful agents for change in gender equality. It was a man who presented the petition to Parliament 150 years ago and men can still be part of the solution.
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Great progress has been made and it is touching and amazing to hear the list of achievements, but does my hon. Friend agree that many women are still being put off engaging in politics and leadership, mainly by the negative and nasty mudslinging style of politics and campaigning that we are sadly seeing in the course of the referendum debate? We need, together with our men, to do something about that.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, and we have already heard about the parity of voice that is so important in this and many other campaigns. We all have a role to play in inspiring the next generation of women to take these seats and we can do that only if we present a face of Parliament and of Government that women aspire to be part of.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): We have referred to the number of women currently in Parliament, but there are still more men in Parliament than there have ever been women in Parliament. We need to point that out on the record. Many hon. Members know that I am a surgeon. I started training as a surgeon in 1982. In 1978, as a medical student, I was told that I could not be a surgeon because I was a woman. At an interview I was asked about monthly mood swings as a problem for a surgeon. I replied that I had worked for consultants with daily mood swings, and that monthly mood swings would be an improvement. Hopefully, we have come a long way, but there are still probably fewer women surgeons than women politicians, so we still have a long way to go.

Caroline Dinenage: We have all met men like that. The hon. Lady is right. We need to keep up the fight, we need to talk about the issues that matter to us, we need to encourage the women around us to get politically engaged, and above all we must encourage them to go out and vote. That is the right that those early suffragettes fought for and we must all use it. As the next big decision facing the UK is put to the vote shortly, I am sure hon. Members on the Opposition Benches share my desire to ensure that women are at the forefront of that, and that their votes count.

Question put and agreed to.

7.50 pm

House adjourned.
First World War Commemoration

1. Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the greatest possible engagement by children and young people in the commemoration of the first world war.

Mr Evennett: I totally endorse the hon. Gentleman’s comments. I will have a word with the Leader of the House and you, Mr Speaker, as the responsible authorities, but I would certainly back such a debate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): All our first world war programmes, including the school battlefield tours, the great war debate series and the 14-18 NOW culture programme, are designed to engage children and young people. Only last week, young people played a prominent role in our commemorations to mark the Battle of Jutland. I was delighted to be in Orkney and I commend the young people who participated. On 30 June and 1 July, we will commemorate the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, when young people will again play a key role at national events taking place at Westminster Abbey, in Manchester and at the Thiepval memorial in France.

Stephen Metcalfe: My “Forget Never” project, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is already getting young people from across Basildon thinking about the important events of 100 years ago. Will my right hon. Friend therefore join me in encouraging more young people to get involved in commemorating the Somme by calling on all remaining schools in Basildon to sign up to this project so that their students might also benefit from its opportunities?

Mr Evennett: I endorse my hon. Friend’s comments and am delighted to hear of the fantastic work being done in his constituency. I endorse all efforts to encourage young people to engage with the programme and to discover history. Young people can also get involved in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s “Living Memory” project in their local area and find out about events near them run by schools and not-for-profit organisations that are part of the Imperial War Museum’s centenary partnership.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It is important that young people engage with the commemorations, but it is also important that we in the House do so too. Does the Minister share my concern that, just a few weeks ahead of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, we do not have a planned moment to debate the matter in the House? My concern is shared widely across the House. If he agrees, will he use his good offices to raise the issue with the Leader of the House so that Members might have that moment here to reflect on this important moment in our history?

Mr Evennett: I welcome the Department’s work to engage young people and am delighted to hear of the fantastic work being done in his constituency. I endorse all efforts to encourage young people to engage with the programme and to discover history. Young people can also get involved in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s “Living Memory” project in their local area and find out about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s “Living Memory” project in their local area and find out about the wider implications of world war one, such as the Balfour agreement and the redrawing of boundaries in the middle east, and how, in Europe, it sowed the seeds for world war two?
widely we also want to make people, particularly young people, aware of our 20th century history, of people’s experiences and of the tragedy of war.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): Will the Minister congratulate everyone who was involved in the first world war, including those from the rest of the world, particularly Ireland—for us in Northern Ireland—but also the Indians, the Africans and all those who were part of it, so that children might learn that it included most areas of the world and that an awful price was paid by many?

Mr Evennett: Indeed. It is very important, for the empire and the Commonwealth, to recognise the contributions of all parts of the communities in the four nations of our country and particularly people from Commonwealth countries such as the Indians, the Canadians, the Australians and the rest. This lies at the heart of what we are trying to do, as we commemorate all those who participated in the Somme.

Leveson Inquiry

2. Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): When part two of the Leveson inquiry will commence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Whittingdale: The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Criminal proceedings connected to the subject matter of the Leveson inquiry, including the appeals process, have not yet completed. We have always been clear that these cases must conclude before we consider part 2 of the inquiry.

Christian Matheson: Let me pin down the Secretary of State. Are we saying that when criminal proceedings have finished, there will be a part 2 or there might be? He told us on 3 March that a decision “about whether or not Leveson 2 should take place”—[Official Report, 3 March 2016; Vol. 606, c. 1097]—will be taken afterwards. Is it when or whether?

Mr Whittingdale: This will need to be considered in detail once those cases have been concluded. There are still areas that were not fully explored in the original inquiry. There have obviously been events since the original inquiry, not least the proceedings in the courts. All these matters will need to be taken into account when we consider how best to proceed after the conclusion of those cases.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Secretary of State was one of three Chairs of Select Committees, along with myself and the now Lord Alan Beith, who went to see the Prime Minister and we were given a cast-iron guarantee that there would be a part 2. I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says about criminal proceedings, which is exactly what the Home Secretary said on 16 December, but there is no reason why we should not have a timetable to prepare for the eventuality. These cases cannot go on for ever—even in our criminal justice system. There has to be an end. May we not have a timetable and perhaps the selection of a head of the inquiry so that we can begin that very important process?

Mr Whittingdale: I am delighted to hear that the Home Secretary and I are singing from the same hymn sheet on this matter. I have talked to her about it, but that was at a time when it looked as if the cases were going to come to a conclusion in the reasonably near future. Fortunately, or unfortunately, new cases have been brought, and one or two of them have not even started yet, which makes it very difficult to put a timetable on developments. I obviously agree with right hon. Gentleman that these cases cannot go on indefinitely, but they are already going on rather longer than was initially anticipated.

Tourism

3. Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support the tourism sector. [905291]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Prime Minister’s five-point plan for tourism sets out how this Government will help to grow the British tourism industry. The year 2015 set new records for inbound visits and spend, but we are not complacent. To boost tourism in England further, the Chancellor announced a new £40 million Discover England fund at the last spending round. This will support visitors to discover even more of England’s hidden gems.

Cat Smith: The Secretary of State may be aware of the many great tourist attractions in north Lancashire along the Fylde coast, including the historic Lancaster castle with stunning views over Morecambe bay and the area of outstanding natural beauty, the forest of Bowland. Does the right hon. Gentleman feel that the tens of thousands of jobs that are supported by tourism in my area are helped or hindered by the potential threat of fracking wells appearing in north Lancashire?

Mr Whittingdale: I very much share the hon. Lady’s appreciation of the beauties of the Fylde coast and the north-west. Fracking offers terrific opportunities for accessing further low-cost energy, and I do not believe that it should represent any threat to the tourism industry. I would like to take advantage of this moment at the Dispatch Box to pay tribute to the fantastic work of the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr Evennett), who is responsible for tourism. He has done a great job. We look forward shortly to welcoming back to her role the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), but my right hon. Friend has done a fantastic job in her absence. I have no doubt that he will continue to advocate sports, tourism and heritage in the extremely effective way that he has over the last few months.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Our coastal communities are particularly important to the tourism sector, but they are also the communities that have been particularly badly affected by our membership of the EU over the last 40 years. Can the Secretary of State give an assurance that the initiatives he mentioned will be directed particularly at coastal communities?

Mr Whittingdale: I share many of my hon. Friend’s views on our membership of the European Union, although I have to say that I do not think EU membership has a great bearing on tourism. People come to this
Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Has the Secretary of State had any recent discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive about Tourism Ireland, that strange body which is responsible for marketing the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland overseas? There is concern in Northern Ireland about the possibility that its identity will be lost and it will be unable to benefit from the inflow of tourists visiting the rest of the United Kingdom, although it currently has a tremendous amount to offer them.

Mr Whittingdale: I am aware of the slightly different arrangements for the promotion of tourism in Northern Ireland, although I have had no discussions with the Minister responsible for it. I think he has only just arrived. I look forward to meeting him in due course, and I shall be happy to talk to him about the issue then.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I join the Secretary of State in applauding last year’s success, when a record number of people—36.1 million—visited the United Kingdom. As he will know, 67% of those visitors were from the European Union and 74% were from other European countries. Will he join me in saying, “Thank you, Europe—thank you, our European colleagues—and please come more and spend more”?

Mr Whittingdale: I am extremely happy to join my hon. Friend in saying that. My view is that this country would prosper better outside the European Union, but that is in no way reflected in my attitude to our fellow citizens in Europe coming to visit us in the UK. I hope that they will continue to do so in ever-increasing numbers, whether or not we are in the European Union.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister—for whom I have great respect—use his common sense, ground his boss and bring him to Yorkshire, so that he can talk to real people in the tourism business who are dreadfully worried about the impact of our leaving the European Union on jobs, investment and so much else? Yorkshire is a prime tourism destination, and we do not want to harm that.

Mr Whittingdale: Yorkshire is indeed a prime destination for tourism, and it has so much to offer. I have been going around the country—I am off to Devon and Dorset today and tomorrow—to promote tourism and heritage again, and I will do all that I can to persuade domestic and foreign visitors to come to Yorkshire and the rest of our great nation.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the people of Devon and Dorset will soon realise how lucky they are.

Rugby Union

5. Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): What plans his Department has to promote the community benefits of rugby union.

Mr Evennett: I take this opportunity to congratulate Devon RFU on the work that it has been doing to provide so many opportunities for people to get involved in the great game of rugby. Across Devon, Sport England has invested £319,632 to upgrade, improve and repair nine grassroots rugby clubs since 2010. As I have said— Interrupt. The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) should listen. We listened to her yesterday when she was waffling on about the BBC, so she should listen today to get some facts. We are focused on getting more people from all backgrounds involved in sport and physical activity.
John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Talking about the BBC, rugby union is only one of many sports covered by the corporation with its editorial independence. Has the Minister taken time to reflect on yesterday’s BBC debate, reviewed today’s press coverage and realised that Government interference in editorial issues such as the proposed “Scottish Six” is deeply unwelcome?

Mr Evennett: I was here listening to the debate yesterday, and I commend the excellent speeches of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): With the support and the help of the Minister’s Department, we had the first ever mixed ability rugby world cup in my constituency last year. Will my hon. Friend’s Department continue to help and support mixed ability rugby, and will he use his good offices to extend the mixed ability format, which has been so successfully run in my constituency, to other sports as well?

Mr Evennett: I have noted what my hon. Friend has said, and I know what a champion he is for his area and his constituency. We very much believe in inclusion and getting as many people involved as we possibly can. I will look at what he has to say and reflect on it.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Has the Minister had a chance to look at the success of schemes such as Rugby Get Onside, which is run by Saracens Rugby Club with young offenders at Feltham? Rugby has a great role in rehabilitating young offenders. Will he discuss that with the Justice Secretary and consider the role that rugby can play as part of his Department’s reforms of prisons?

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, and I will certainly do that. Rugby is a fantastic game that brings together all sorts of different people from different backgrounds and has great opportunities for community.

Broadband

6. Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to accelerate the roll-out of broadband in (a) rural and (b) urban areas. [905294]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am very pleased to tell you once again, Mr Speaker, how well the rural broadband programme is going. We have reached our target of 90%, with 4 million homes passed, and we will reach our target of 95% by the end of 2017.

Huw Merriman: My constituents in the parishes of Dallington, Brightling, Mountfield, Ashburton and Penshurst will welcome the Government’s new legal right to fast broadband. May I ask the Minister whether the reasonable cost test will be benchmarked against, first, the realistic cost to install in rural areas that are not currently connected to fast broadband and, secondly, the cheapest cost that any provider would charge rather than the cost that BT Openreach may calculate?

Mr Vaizey: We will certainly consult on the reasonable cost test, and it may well be that a number of providers do provide the universal service obligation, which will potentially provide welcome competition. That will be open for consultation once we have passed legislation, which I know will have the support of the whole House.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Earlier this week, I received an email from the Minister, which helpfully informed me that 3,198 premises in my constituency—that is 8% or nearly one in 12—are not currently planned to be connected to superfast broadband. What has the Minister got to say to the sizeable number of my constituents who face the prospect of never being able to access an adequate broadband connection?

Mr Vaizey: I would say to her constituents that we said that we would get to 90% by the end of last year, which we achieved, and that we would get to 95% by the end of 2017, so we have been completely transparent about what we are planning to do. We are now consulting on a USO precisely to help those constituents of the hon. Lady who are not in the rural broadband programme. We are bringing in important changes to planning in the digital economy Bill, which I hope will have the support of the Opposition Front Bench team. She should congratulate the Government because the way the contracts have been constructed means that almost £300 million is coming back, so we are going to go further than 95% and reach more of her constituents. She should be telling them that rather than complaining.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Residents in Denford are extremely frustrated at the lack of progress in securing superfast broadband. Will the Minister encourage Superfast Northamptonshire and BT to redouble their efforts to get Denford connected?

Mr Vaizey: I will certainly do that.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): What discussions are the Minister and his officials having with Welsh Government Ministers and officials about the universal service obligation to ensure that we can have joined-up thinking when the Bills, which I support, come through? To cement this relationship between the Welsh Government and the UK Government, may I repeat my offer of Ynys Môn as the location for a pilot scheme?

Mr Vaizey: I would happily work with the hon. Gentleman and the Welsh Government. I have always found him and the Welsh Government to be congenial colleagues in regard to the roll-out of superfast broadband.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): We know that the Secretary of State wants to leave the European Union, but his Minister appears already to have left the United Kingdom to inhabit some fantasy “Broadbandia” in which everything is, in his words, an “unadulterated success”. For the rest of us in the 21st century United Kingdom, however, the reality is different. One in five broadband users still has less than half the speed that Ofcom classes as acceptable, and 70% of smartphone users in rural areas have zero access to 4G. Rather than living in “Broadbandia”, the rest of
us are living in “Broadbadia”. Will the Minister stop fantasising and acknowledge the view of the Countryside Alliance:

“This rural broadband betrayal is devastating”?

Mr Vaizey: I know that the hon. Lady will want to join me in commemorating this important day, which is the 33rd anniversary of Margaret Thatcher’s landslide election victory in 1983. In that year, there was no broadband and the Minister you see before you was sitting his O-levels. The Secretary of State, however, was on the great lady’s battle bus.

The hon. Lady might quote the Countryside Alliance, but the gardener Robin Lane Fox wrote an article in the Financial Times, which I know she reads, in which he talked about a move to the rural arcadia brought about by our broadband roll-out programme. He said that, like Falstaff, he was looking forward to dying babbbling of green fields because he could live in the countryside with a superfast connection. Let us remind ourselves that Labour had a pathetic megabit policy, and that is still its policy. Let us also remind ourselves that we are two years ahead of where Labour would have been, and let us talk up the success of this programme instead of constantly talking down great broadband Britain.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman’s performance is greatly enjoyed, not least by the hon. Gentleman.

EU Digital Single Market

7. Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential benefits for the UK digital economy of completing the EU digital single market.

[905296]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): As I was saying, we have a great broadband Britain in a great European Union. Britain sits at the centre of the digital single market, which, if it is implemented, will increase GDP for Europe by 3%, or some £300 billion.

Stephen Timms: This time, I think the Minister is on to something. The UK is Europe’s leading digital economy, and we have the most to gain from the digital single market. That is why 70% of techUK members and 96% of the members of the Creative Industries Federation want us to remain in the European Union. Will the Minister have a go at persuading his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State how damaging it would be for digital jobs in the UK if we left the EU?

Mr Vaizey: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a mind of his own, and he quite rightly often takes the view that it is not worth listening to me, which is probably why he is such a successful Secretary of State. I do wish he would listen to me on this issue, however, because tech and digital companies do benefit from our membership of the European Union and they will continue to thrive if we stay in the EU.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the internet has been a huge source of economic growth in this country and that the last thing it needs is to be stifled by the Brussels bureaucrats, which is exactly what will happen under the proposals in the EU’s single digital market strategy?

Mr Vaizey: That intervention reminds me that this is the 41st anniversary of the first radio transmission from the House of Commons, and quality interventions such as that keep the British public listening to and watching our proceedings. However, I do not think that the Brussels bureaucracy is stifling. In fact, 500 broadcast companies are based in Britain precisely because of European regulations.

Conflict Zones: Cultural Heritage

8. John Howell (Henley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the protection of cultural heritage in conflict zones overseas.

[905297]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The protection of cultural heritage affected by acts of destruction is a priority for this Government. The Government are providing £30 million for a new cultural protection fund, and the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill, which will enable the UK to ratify the 1954 Hague convention and accede to its two protocols, had its Second Reading in the House of Lords earlier this week.

Mr Whittingdale: We certainly benefit from my hon. Friend’s expertise in this area. He is absolutely right: this country has long been a strong advocate of cultural protection, but the perception of our commitment has perhaps been undermined by our failure until now to ratify the 1954 Hague convention. I am delighted that we will be doing so through the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill, reinforcing our position as one of the leading voices in advocating the importance of cultural protection around the world.

Domestic Tourism

9. Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in (a) the level of and (b) regional variations in the level of domestic tourism.

[905298]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): As I have already said, there is good news on domestic tourism. The number of overnight trips in England in 2015 was up by 11%. Five regions—the east midlands, the west midlands, the south-west, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London—saw double-digit growth in domestic overnight trips on the previous year. Last year, there was positive growth in tourism in the east of England, including in both inbound and domestic visits and stays.

Will Quince: As you know, Mr Speaker, Colchester is the oldest recorded town in Britain and our first capital city. We have Roman walls, Britain’s only discovered Roman circus, and the largest Norman keep in Europe. May I invite the Minister to visit Colchester to see the amazing tourism potential that our town has to offer?
Mr Evennett: I commend my hon. Friend for being a champion for his city of Colchester. It is a place of huge cultural significance and history, and I encourage tourists to discover what is on offer there. I thank him for his invitation, which sounds like a fantastic opportunity, and my office will see what my diary permits regarding future visits.

Mr Speaker: Colchester also has a very good university.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): As someone who spent several years as a bus driver, I know that one factor that encourages tourism is integrated ticketing on public transport. Will the Minister have a word with the Secretary of State for Transport about amending the Bus Services Bill to allow more integrated services and to enable councils to run bus services?

Mr Evennett: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not in my remit and is not for me to comment on. I can say, however, that the Chancellor has been rather generous with his spending on transport in this Parliament—50% higher than in previous years. We want to ensure that visitors have the confidence to explore Britain using public transport.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, we only have a new cathedral in Lichfield: the original, built in 650, burned down, so our current cathedral was built quite recently, in 1280. What can we do to encourage people to visit places such as Lichfield, which, beautiful though they are, are regarded by bus and coach companies as slightly off the beaten track?

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend has been a tremendous champion for his constituency over many years. Thanks to the Chancellor, we have the £40 million Discover England fund to incentivise the development of world-class itineraries. I hope that my hon. Friend’s area and others like it will be looking to make applications to see that we get tourists to their parts of the world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response so far. We have an increasing number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland, not just because Liam Neeson is voicing the tourism adverts or because we have the Titanic, the SS Nomadic and the Giant’s Causeway, but because more people are holidaying at home. What can we do to encourage people to visit places such as Lichfield, which, beautiful though they are, are regarded by bus and coach companies as slightly off the beaten track?

Mr Evennett: I know the fantastic opportunities that there are for tourist visitors to go to Northern Ireland and see what is on offer. We are trying to encourage people to have holidays at home—staycations—but we are also working with the devolved authorities to try to promote tourism, along with VisitEngland, Discover Northern Ireland, VisitScotland, Visit Wales and VisitBritain, so that we have a joined-up approach that shows the fantastic offer we have in our four countries of the United Kingdom.

Mr Evennett: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not in my remit and is not for me to comment on. I can say, however, that the Chancellor has been rather generous with his spending on transport in this Parliament—50% higher than in previous years. We want to ensure that visitors have the confidence to explore Britain using public transport.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, we only have a new cathedral in Lichfield: the original, built in 650, burned down, so our current cathedral was built quite recently, in 1280. What can we do to encourage people to visit places such as Lichfield, which, beautiful though they are, are regarded by bus and coach companies as slightly off the beaten track?

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend has been a tremendous champion for his constituency over many years. Thanks to the Chancellor, we have the £40 million Discover England fund to incentivise the development of world-class itineraries. I hope that my hon. Friend’s area and others like it will be looking to make applications to see that we get tourists to their parts of the world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response so far. We have an increasing number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland, not just because Liam Neeson is voicing the tourism adverts or because we have the Titanic, the SS Nomadic and the Giant’s Causeway, but because more people are holidaying at home. What can we do to encourage people to visit places such as Lichfield, which, beautiful though they are, are regarded by bus and coach companies as slightly off the beaten track?

Mr Evennett: I know the fantastic opportunities that there are for tourist visitors to go to Northern Ireland and see what is on offer. We are trying to encourage people to have holidays at home—staycations—but we are also working with the devolved authorities to try to promote tourism, along with VisitEngland, Discover Northern Ireland, VisitScotland, Visit Wales and VisitBritain, so that we have a joined-up approach that shows the fantastic offer we have in our four countries of the United Kingdom.

Football: Television Rights

11. Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): If he will take steps to ensure that football supporters from all nations of the UK have non-paying access to watch their national team play on TV.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Ofcom code on listed events ensures that key sporting events are made available for free-to-air channels. Our sport strategy, published last year, made it clear that the Government do not propose to review that list.

Gavin Newlands: Like every other football fan on these islands, Scottish fans are looking forward to Euro 2016. We have our wallcharts at the ready and will be watching keenly. During qualification, however, we were unable to watch significant matches, including those against the world champions, Germany, on free-to-air channels. This month, we will be able to watch matches such as Romania versus Albania and Iceland versus Austria. How can those fixtures be regarded as of national interest when those of our national teams are not?

Mr Whittingdale: Scottish football fans will have the choice of the three home nations that have qualified in the championships to support, and I am sorry that on this occasion Scotland did not make it through. However, the question of which matches are shown by which broadcaster is essentially one for the sporting authorities. The limited list applies only to a very restricted number of sporting events, but beyond that it is for each sporting body to decide how best to strike the balance between maximising revenue for their sport and reaching as large an audience as possible.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will want to wish the teams of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland all the best in the European championships. Football shows us that we have more in common with our European neighbours than divides us, as I am sure the Secretary of State will agree. That was demonstrated by the singing of the Marseillaise at Wembley in defiance response to the attacks in Paris. In that spirit, will he join me in urging fans to enjoy the tournament peacefully, whether they are travelling to France or watching in the company of their friends at home or in public places, and to assist the police and security services in trying to ensure that we have a safe and secure tournament?

Mr Whittingdale: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman and I am grateful to him for putting the case as he has done and giving me the opportunity to endorse everything that he says. We look forward to the matches in the championships to come and we wish all the home nations success. I have a second interest in that I drew England in the departmental sweepstake and will be supporting England in their match against Russia, which, sadly, was drawn by the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), so she will have torn loyalties. We hope nevertheless that that match and every other match pass peacefully and to the maximum enjoyment of those participating and watching.
Topical Questions

T1. [905308] Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Since the last DCMS oral questions, Andy Murray has reached the final of the French Open and boxing has lost its most famous and greatest exponent, Muhammad Ali. The South Bank Sky Arts awards in June honoured British talent, including the Minister for Culture’s favourite rapper, Stormzy; and I am sure that the whole House will be looking forward to the Euro championships, which begin in France on Friday, and will join me once again in wishing success to all the home nations taking part.

Will Quince: Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and Arts Council England are all contributing to the Mercury theatre’s £8.8 million expansion plans. Does my right hon. Friend agree that investment in the arts is an investment in our local economy and that we should all get behind these exciting and impressive plans?

Mr Whittingdale: I certainly do join my hon. Friend in that. I think he was 10 at the time, but he might recall that I represented part of Colchester in the House of Commons, so I am very familiar with the Mercury theatre. I am delighted to hear about the investment in its expansion. I think that any investment in the arts brings real benefits, not least in economic terms, for the local community. I wish the Mercury continuing success into the future.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): On Tuesday, the Secretary of State told the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in his evidence that there had been no discussions within government about Channel 4 privatisation, and that the examination of such an option had not been started by 9 September 2015; when he had previously answered questions before the Committee. However, in answer to an FOI request on 27 April, received in my office, the Department confirmed that he himself met the Minister for the Cabinet Office to discuss Channel 4 reform options on 3 September—six days before his appearance in front of that Committee. Can he explain the discrepancy?

Mr Whittingdale: Yes. The first discussion that I had with the Cabinet Office Minister was about Channel 4 and what possible options there would be for its future. At that stage, no decisions had been taken. Following that, the Department did begin to look at whether or not there was a case for having a fundamental examination, and the decision to go ahead with that was actually taken after my appearance before the Select Committee; it was taken later in the month of September.

Maria Eagle: Well, on Tuesday, in answer to questions from the Select Committee, the Secretary of State was asked whether or not any discussions at all had taken place before 9 September, and he replied—I have the transcript—“No not within government.” That seems to me a clear discrepancy, and it seems to me he may have misled the Committee, and I invite him to correct his evidence to it now on this very important matter, which matters to a lot of us in this House—the future of Channel 4.

Mr Whittingdale: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady that the future of Channel 4 is an important matter. Whether or not the discussion with the Cabinet Office Minister, which took place on 3 September, constituted the beginning of an examination, when actually a decision was not taken to begin that examination until about four weeks later, does not seem to be a centrally important matter in the future of Channel 4. We did decide that it was sensible to carry out an examination. That examination is still under way. We have still not yet reached decisions about the best way forward for Channel 4, but I look forward to having that discussion with Channel 4 in the very near future.

Will Quince: If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to his efforts particularly to bring about the stadium for Cornwall, which the Government are committed to. As he knows, I have already held two meetings with interested parties in Cornwall, which he was able to come to. I understand that good progress is being made, and that a draft planning application is now going before the council. I hope that that will lead to progress, and that we will see commencement of work on a stadium in the near future.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): After the huge success of the London Paralympics, we all saw how Paralympic sport can inspire. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating my six Worcester constituents, who have been selected to represent ParalympicsGB in the wheelchair basketball at the Rio Paralympics?

Mr Whittingdale: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): I should be absolutely delighted to do so. I think it is very important that we wish all our athletes great success in Rio. The Paralympics are just as important as the Olympics and we wish them all success in their ventures.

T2. [905312] Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): On Tuesday I met Jean Cameron, the project director for the Paisley 2021 bid for UK City of Culture, for the third time. Despite my asking the Deputy Leader of the House a few weeks ago to give
of Art at the start of each Parliament. The Committee makes targeted acquisitions that reflect the interests of the House, and makes changes to the presentation of works of art to promote engagement by the visiting public. The Committee has already decided to give further consideration in the current Parliament to the representation of the collection of parliamentarians of black, Asian or minority ethnic origin.

Chi Onwurah: In the six years that I have had the privilege of serving in this House, I have often felt that the dead white men in tights who people the walls of this Palace follow me around, sometimes into the Chamber itself. As the answer to my parliamentary question showed, there are only two representations of BAME people in the whole of this Palace. In a few weeks, children from English Martyrs Primary School in Newcastle will make the journey to visit Parliament. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that they should be overawed and impressed by the Palace, but feel that they are part of its present as well as its future?

Tom Brake: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady’s point. She will, I hope, be pleased to hear that on 5 July the Advisory Committee will discuss this very subject. I hope the Committee will be able to provide her with a clear action plan that will help to address her concerns.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is vital that we embrace diversity at all levels to ensure that history is remembered correctly. We have portraits and statues of Queen Victoria in the House of Lords. Does the Commission agree that Members and visitors, particularly the latter, are astounded by the architecture, colours and sheer splendour of the Palace, and that there is unlikely to be anyone who leaves feeling negative or even discriminated against?

Tom Brake: I am happy to agree with that comment.

House of Commons Employees

2. Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What discussions the Commission has had with trade union representatives on the terms and conditions of employees of the House. [905330]

Tom Brake: The Commission delegates to the Executive Committee responsibility for negotiating changes to terms and conditions of House staff with the recognised trade unions. The House is currently in pay negotiations for the financial year 2016-17 with the unions representing staff in the main A to E pay bands and the catering pay bands. These negotiations are being undertaken in the context of the general pay constraint within the public sector and the requirement for the pay of House staff to remain broadly in line with that of the home civil service.

Christian Matheson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. I am concerned to learn that certain members of the catering department are having to work double shifts in order simply to make ends meet. Can he confirm that, as part of the pay negotiations, staff will be paid the London living wage, not the Government’s bogus living wage? Does he agree that perhaps paying
an extra 5p or 10p for a cup of coffee or a meaty wrap would be money well spent if we were paying our staff correctly?

Tom Brake: I am happy to confirm that staff are indeed paid the London living wage, and to ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a response to his question about double shifts. I am also happy to raise his suggestion that a tariff should be applied to sandwiches in this place to ensure that pay is raised in the way he has indicated.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Northern Ireland Question Time

3. Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): If he will introduce topical oral questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): We gave this matter careful consideration, but the Leader of the House recently wrote to the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee stating the reasons we will not be introducing topical questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As a consequence of devolution, the range of issues that are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office is narrower than for most other Departments. The introduction of topical questions might lead to a situation in which some questions fall outside the range of the Secretary of State’s responsibilities.

Danny Kinahan: I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for that answer. I do not want to stop all of us playing a part in each other’s areas and constituencies, but when we look at Question Time we see that the same questions are repeated, which minimises the number of Members who can get in. Topical questions might be another way of increasing participation and having more varied questions.

Dr Coffey: Each Member is responsible for the questions they submit. Because of the way the process of tabling questions works, the Table Office is able to ascertain whether a question relates to a devolved matter or is the responsibility of a UK Government Minister answering at this Dispatch Box.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Would not one way of increasing participation in Northern Ireland affairs, especially by Northern Ireland Members, be to have more frequent meetings of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee?

Dr Coffey: That is an interesting suggestion. It is not one to which I can commit, but I will certainly take it away.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I appreciate the comments of the Deputy Leader of the House. However, in relation to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, I suggest that members of the public are entitled to expect members of the Government representing those posts to be subject to the same level of scrutiny as their peers around the Cabinet table. I therefore hope that further consideration will be given to introducing topical questions for all those areas.

Dr Coffey: As I have already indicated, we have given this matter careful consideration and, for the reasons I have set out, decided that it is not appropriate to introduce topical questions at Northern Ireland Question Time—and that would also be true for Wales and Scotland.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): In response to the rather disappointing answers from the Deputy Leader of the House, may I ask whether she will consider introducing topical oral questions for Scotland and Wales?

Dr Coffey: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place; I think that this is the first time he has asked a question from the Dispatch Box. I genuinely want to put across quite carefully the level of consideration that we have given to this matter. The Table Office is a very useful filter that enables us to ask questions that are in order. The risk is that Members could end up being ruled out of order while trying to ask their topical questions, which would not be good for their reputations either.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Parliamentary Estate: Refurbishment

4. Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): How much was spent on the refurbishment of the north entrance to the parliamentary estate in the last Parliament.

Dr Coffey: As I have already indicated, we have given to this matter careful consideration and, for the reasons I have set out, decided that it is not appropriate to introduce topical questions at Northern Ireland Question Time—and that would also be true for Wales and Scotland.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Some £55,958 was spent in the last Parliament, and £240,997 has been spent to date in this Parliament. The total forecast budget for the project is £423,902. All those figures include VAT.

Diana Johnson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. My point is about cyclists being excluded from the Curtis Green entrance, even though it is on the new cycle super-highway. Given the need for cyclists to be able to negotiate busy junctions safely, and the fact that they have to use the Derby Gate and Carriage Gates entrances, what assessment was made before the decision was taken not to allow them to use the Curtis Green entrance?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am quite happy to investigate that matter and to write to her setting out the reasons for that. As a cyclist, I too would certainly like to see enhanced cycle facilities and entrances to the Palace.
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): It is not just a question of cyclists being able to enter the estate; it is a question of the danger to cyclists. As a car turns in—I have had this experience in a car—it has to cut across the cycle lane and there is a real risk that, if the driver is not really attentive, a cyclist may hit the car and be in danger of death.

Tom Brake: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is certainly important that car drivers are attentive to the risks cyclists face every day as they cycle through London.

**LEADER OF THE HOUSE**

The Leader of the House was asked—

**Divisions**

5. John McNally (Falkirk) (SNP): How long the House spent voting in the 2015-16 Session. [905334]

6. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): How long the House spent voting in the 2015-16 Session. [905335]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The Government do not collect this information and do not have the information available. However, the House publishes a record of the time taken on all types of business in the House, and that will be available in the next Sessional Return when it is published in due course. As has been published, hon. Members had the opportunity to participate in 269 Divisions during the last Session, but the total time taken for all business that gave rise to one or more Divisions was 471 hours and 46 minutes.

John McNally: We will all be aware that on Monday night we began voting on the Investigatory Powers Bill at 8 pm and finished voting at 11.14 pm. Members’ meetings and other engagements were disrupted for three and a quarter hours for only four votes. Our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament are able to vote on all Divisions at once. What consideration has the Deputy Leader of the House given to a daily unified decision time?

Dr Coffey: The Government made sure that on Monday a decent amount of time for debate was protected rather than compressed. On having a decision time, as in the Scottish Parliament, I suggest that separating decisions on an important piece of legislation from the discussion of them is not to the benefit of that discussion. We should try to ensure that we vote on matters that the House has debated. As we have seen in many debates, people have changed their minds as a consequence of listening to what was said.

Alan Brown: One of the defences the Leader of the House has previously given for the current voting system is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby.

Dr Coffey: The Government do not collect this information and do not have the information available. However, the House publishes a record of the time taken on all types of business in the House, and that will be available in the next Sessional Return when it is published in due course. As has been published, hon. Members had the opportunity to participate in 269 Divisions during the last Session, but the total time taken for all business that gave rise to one or more Divisions was 471 hours and 46 minutes.

John McNally: We will all be aware that on Monday night we began voting on the Investigatory Powers Bill at 8 pm and finished voting at 11.14 pm. Members’ meetings and other engagements were disrupted for three and a quarter hours for only four votes. Our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament are able to vote on all Divisions at once. What consideration has the Deputy Leader of the House given to a daily unified decision time?

Dr Coffey: The Government made sure that on Monday a decent amount of time for debate was protected rather than compressed. On having a decision time, as in the Scottish Parliament, I suggest that separating decisions on an important piece of legislation from the discussion of them is not to the benefit of that discussion. We should try to ensure that we vote on matters that the House has debated. As we have seen in many debates, people have changed their minds as a consequence of listening to what was said.

Alan Brown: One of the defences the Leader of the House has previously given for the current voting system is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby. The thing is that guys on the SNP Benches is that it allows Members to grab a Minister in the voting Lobby.
Dr Coffey: All Members’ votes in this House count. The process is very clear. The change that we introduced ensured that matters that are devolved must now have the explicit consent of English Members. On the Wales Bill, the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that we are transferring powers from this House to the Welsh Assembly, creating a stronger Welsh Assembly, and as a consequence we believe that all Members should be involved in that discussion.

Mr Speaker: I call Helen Hayes—not here.
The International Syria Support Group has made it clear that in order to create the best environment for negotiations between the Syrian parties back on track. The International Syria Support Group’s plans to commence airdrops to besieged areas in Syria are in place to begin airdrops if they are needed, but needing the aid and for those delivering it. The UN has more effective, more efficient and safer, both for those remaining that airdrops are a last resort. Land access by the United Nations to the majority of areas is clear that in order to create the best environment for talks to succeed, there needs to be a comprehensive cessation of hostilities leading to a full ceasefire, and sustained, unfettered access for humanitarian aid. Talks are now paused because progress on both those tracks has been insufficient. That is why we are pressing hard for an end to the current violations of the cessation of hostilities, the majority of which are down to the Assad regime. It is also why we need to see an improvement in humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas inside Syria. Both these points were agreed by all members of the International Syria Support Group in Munich in February this year.

However, in the light of the continuing dire humanitarian picture, at the most recent ISSG meeting in Vienna on 17 May, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary proposed humanitarian airdrops by the UN World Food Programme in besieged areas in Syria if access could not be achieved by road by the beginning of June. That deadline has of course now passed. We welcome the arrival of some limited aid in Darayya and Muadhamiya over the last few days, and we note, too, that the Syrian Government have agreed in principle to allow land access by the United Nations to the majority of areas requested for the month of June. Such progress as we have seen is undoubtedly the result of international pressure, including from the possibility of airdrops. Nevertheless, it is now crucial that the ISSG should hold the Assad regime to account for delivery of these commitments.

United Kingdom officials are meeting their ISSG counterparts and UN officials in Geneva today to continue that work, and the UN is pressing the Assad regime to allow airdrops if access by road is not permitted. We remain clear that airdrops are a last resort. Land access is more effective, more efficient and safer, both for those needing the aid and for those delivering it. The UN has plans in place to begin airdrops if they are needed, but it is clear that in a complex and dangerous environment such as Syria, this will not be straightforward. We will continue to support the UN in its efforts, but if the regime is not willing to allow sufficient land access or airdrops to those in desperate need, the ISSG should consider very carefully what steps might be taken to deliver the aid that is so desperately needed.

Diana Johnson: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. As the Minister has pointed out, this is a clear humanitarian issue. There are 582,000 people living in besieged areas in Syria. The conditions for the men, women and children in these areas is beyond what many of us can comprehend. In the words of the UK’s special envoy to the UN, “It’s a concept from medieval times: starvation as a weapon of war and purposefully withholding lifesaving medicines.” That is what the Assad regime is doing. As the Minister confirmed, the British Foreign Secretary gave a deadline for that to stop, and that deadline expired a week ago. Since then, aid has reached a few areas, but that aid has not always included food, and we know that children are still starving.

The Foreign Secretary said that the International Syria Support Group would commence airdrops into besieged areas if aid was not allowed in by 1 June. He argued that that had the support of Iran and Russia, and he indicated that their support would be sufficient for airdrops to commence. Yesterday, however, the UN briefed that it had made a request to the Syrian Government to commence airlifts, not airdrops. It seems as though airlifts or airdrops are subject to the whim of the Assad regime. The Foreign Secretary made a promise to the people in those besieged areas and sent a clear message to the Assad regime.

As the humanitarian situation appears to be bleak and the position of Assad seems to have been strengthened, will the Minister answer these four questions? First, the current proposal appears to be for airlifts to be led by the World Food Programme, with the consent of the Assad regime. Can the Minister confirm whether there is a timetable for that to happen? If there is no consent from the Assad regime, what will happen next? Secondly, what happens if the Syrian Government refuse permission for that to happen? Thirdly, is the position of Iran and Russia the reason why airdrops have not occurred? If so, did the Foreign Secretary overstate their position on 24 May, or did they subsequently change their position? Finally, what implications does the Minister think the ISSG’s failure to agree to airdrops has for the Syrian peace process?

Mr Lidington: On the hon. Lady’s last point, there is no question but that the appalling humanitarian situation inside Syria makes it more difficult to have any hope of rebuilding a modicum of trust that might lead to political progress. I agreed with her description of what is going on inside Syria on the ground, and of the attitude taken by the Assad regime. I do not think anyone should be under any illusions about the fact that it is deliberately using the denial of access to humanitarian aid as a political and military weapon.

It is important that the United Nations, which is accepted by all as impartial and peaceful in intent, should be in the lead both in the talks with the regime and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
the nature of the military conflict inside Syria and the nature of the air defences, both Syrian and Russian, that are available, the best outcome would be agreed terms of access, either over land or by air, for the World Food Programme assistance. That is what was agreed and is happening with regard to an area that is being besieged by Daesh forces in one part of Syria. That would be better than other powers trying to intervene.

As I said earlier, if the Assad regime does not deliver on its commitments, the ISSG will have to return to this matter. We will have to take stock during today’s meeting in Geneva of how far the talks between the UN and the Assad regime have taken us and what chances there now are. Iran and Russia made commitments earlier this year to support the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people who are in need. Those are the powers that have influence over Bashar al-Assad and his regime, and it is their responsibility to use that influence to save the lives of these people who are in such desperate need of assistance.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I intend to run the exchanges on this question until 11 o’clock, but not beyond that. I know that colleagues will take their cue from that advice.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Minister is right that Russia is the key to this. Only Russia can persuade the Assad regime to acquiesce. What steps are the Minister, the Department for International Development or both of them together taking to put pressure on Russia to do just that?

Mr Lidington: Russia is the key player in terms of influence over Assad and, of course, the key sponsor of Syria’s military capability. We use every opportunity, both within the ISSG, of which Russia is a full member, and in other diplomatic exchanges with Russia at official and ministerial level, to emphasise the importance of Russia delivering on the commitments she has made.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Some towns in Syria have not received food aid since 2012. We have an absolute moral responsibility to protect civilians who are suffering the wider effects of a conflict in which the UK is now an active participant. No expense has been spared in dropping UK high-tech missiles on the country, but it is bread, not bombs, that the people in Syria need, and it is incumbent on us to do all we can to make sure that they get it. May I ask the Minister why eight days have passed since the UN deadline, with no tangible action? Are we really asking the Minister, the Department for International Development or both of them together taking to put pressure on Russia to do just that?

Mr Lidington: It is the United Nations that is talking to the Assad regime about getting access, the United Nations that has the good offices to make those approaches, and the United Nations that is in charge of delivering the humanitarian assistance. That is the way forward that we judge at the moment is most likely to lead to a successful outcome that is safe for those receiving the aid and those delivering it.

There are parts of Syria where high-level airdrops of humanitarian assistance might be of help if we could not get overland access, but that is not a precise way of giving help. There are other parts of Syria where the nature of the conflict, or the densely populated urban character of the communities we are trying to help, means that we would have to bring in helicopters and could not rely on high-level airdrops at all. That again emphasises the complexity of the task and why the best outcome, for all its imperfections, would be the UN securing access, with the agreement of the regime, either over land or, failing that, for airborne assistance.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What material support is the United Kingdom giving the United Nations in preparation for access being granted, as we hope it will be?

Mr Lidington: As my hon. Friend knows, we have committed very large sums—£2.3 million—to humanitarian assistance in the crisis in Syria and its neighbouring countries. We are ready to provide additional support, if the UN wants it, for an expanded airdrop operation in the besieged areas.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): As the Minister knows, the holy month of Ramadan began on Monday. There are millions of Syrian refugees in the countries immediately adjoining Syria. Will he confirm that our humanitarian efforts are continuing, so that those people are helped where they are, rather than having to make the perilous journey to the Greek or Turkish border?

Mr Lidington: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of this. After all, people in the camps moved across the Aegean last summer because the United Nations was not getting sufficient funds to maintain either food rations or hours of schooling at previously agreed levels. We are certainly committed, and we are pressing all the countries and international organisations that, at the recent London conference on Syria, committed themselves to spending more to deliver on those pledges fully and promptly.

We welcome the opposition High Negotiations Committee’s suggestion that there be a Ramadan truce inside Syria. We hope that that might be an opportunity to stop further bloodshed.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is depressing that starvation is again being used as a weapon of war, particularly when one man, President Putin, could make one phone call to his friend, President Assad, to remove many of the barriers to international aid. Assuming that the UN gets permission to deliver international aid, have we offered the use of British military bases, particularly those in Cyprus, to allow that delivery to happen quickly?

Mr Lidington: We have not been asked to provide that kind of assistance to the UN. Obviously, we would consider any request that we received from the UN seriously and sympathetically, but my understanding is...
that the UN would prefer to use civilian airports, because that would emphasise to all parties the humanitarian, rather than political, nature of the flights.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Bashar al-Assad’s father-in-law lives in London. He is a retired doctor. He used to boast—he has boasted to me—that he had considerable influence over his son-in-law. Has anyone in the Foreign Office met Bashar al-Assad’s father-in-law? That might be one additional approach that we could try.

Mr Lidington: I do not know whether there has been a recent conversation with Assad’s father-in-law, but I will ensure that that point is noted in the Foreign Office, and will perhaps write to the right hon. Lady.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): The UN said on Thursday that helicopters would have to be used as air bridges in 15 of the 19 besieged areas because they are densely populated. In reality, the UN, working with the World Food Programme, would use helicopters, which need permission to land. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that means that it is vital to use diplomatic channels to urge Russia to insist that Syria open up those channels?

Mr Lidington: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. This is an important test of Russia’s professed commitment both to the UN and its humanitarian aid work, and to a political solution in Syria.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): If Assad and Russia’s shameful blocking of aid by land and air continues, will the Government redouble efforts with our allies to ensure that Assad is eventually brought to justice for crimes against humanity and war crimes?

Mr Lidington: The first objective must be to secure humanitarian assistance to those who are in desperate need. Then we need to achieve a strategy for a political settlement in Syria. When that is in place, there will indeed need to be a time when individuals who are responsible for the most appalling crimes can be held to account.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes important points, and I am pleased that I agree with everything he says—not something I have usually done of late when he has been at the Dispatch Box. Will he join me in praising the work of our former colleague, Stephen O’Brien, who is now the United Nations emergency relief co-ordinator in this area?

Mr Lidington: I am very happy to do so. Stephen was a good friend of mine when he was a Member of the House, and while he served here he had a sincere and enduring commitment to international development and humanitarian assistance. He is showing real dynamism and leadership in his work on behalf of the UN.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The Opposition are right to raise the nightmare of the humanitarian consequences of this situation, but are not the Government absolutely right to proceed with the greatest caution in a situation with wholly unpredictable consequences, and particularly to reject the facile solutions of military interventions, even when they are put forward by a past Prime Minister with a record of shooting first and thinking later?

Mr Lidington: In terms of this urgent question, the key objective must surely be to find the means by which we can get humanitarian aid to those who need it as quickly and effectively as we can; I hope that we can all agree on that point.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The question of what Russia can do has already been raised. Can the Minister provide examples of what the Russians may have done so far, or give any positive news, that would suggest that they may be about to change their approach?

Mr Lidington: I would like to be more encouraging in my response, but so far the Russian approach has been frankly disappointing. The United Nations has been allowed access to help people who are besieged by Daesh forces, but those people are loyal to the Assad regime, so the Russians and the regime have been happy to allow that humanitarian assistance. A real test of Russia’s intentions is whether it will bring to bear the pressure that it could on Assad to act before the people we are talking about suffer further.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has confessed that children are dying for want of food and medicine. May we concentrate on the primacy of the United Nation’s role, and on those fantastic people in the International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières and Save the Children who have real expertise? Is he regularly consulting those people on the ground?

Mr Lidington: The Department for International Development is in regular contact with those organisations, as is the United Nations, which has long-standing relationships with all international humanitarian non-governmental organisations. As the hon. Gentleman will know, a large proportion of the British Government’s aid assistance to humanitarian causes in Syria and the surrounding states is channelled through precisely the organisations he has listed.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The vexed complexities that the Minister has referred to, and the acute sensitivity of current UN efforts, are understood by the Syrian refugees whom I met in my constituency on Sunday, and they explained the dire plight of their starving compatriots. Their basic question to me as a Member of the House is this: why can powers not marshal the capacity and resolve to supply the means of life, given that we have shown that we can deploy the means of death?

Mr Lidington: One must take into account the military realities on the ground. We are talking about a regime in Syria that is besieging most of the communities whose plight we are discussing. The regime has formidable air defences of its own, and Russia has deployed its own air defence measures inside Syrian territory. For that reason, we believe that the safest and most effective means of providing humanitarian access would still be for the
UN to agree terms under which that aid can be delivered. If that proves not to work, we must return to this issue, as I have indicated.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): The conditions on the ground are clearly very challenging. As the Minister has said, many of the besieged areas are built-up, urban areas with no suitable space for a drop zone, and obviously high-altitude drops could harm people on the ground. Will he continue therefore to press for access for aid delivered by truck convoy and helicopter?

Mr Lidington: Yes, we shall, and we will continue that in Geneva this afternoon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement. According to the UN, 600,000 people are in danger of starvation, but the Syrian Government say that airdrops are not necessary because there is no starvation, so there is clearly a difference of opinion. We need to secure support from the Syrian Government and the Russians. We in Britain pride ourselves on our tradition of helping others, both domestically and abroad. If we cannot secure land access and if the only way is by air, will the Government support the UN in pushing ahead with that to ensure that there is not a humanitarian crisis and that people do not starve?

Mr Lidington: Yes. It was my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary who pressed at the previous ISSG meeting for airdrops to be considered as a last resort, and if we cannot secure the access that the UN, with our support, is seeking, we will have to return to that possibility.

### Business of the House

10.56 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):

The business for next week is as follows:

**Monday 13 June**—Conclusion of the remaining stages of the Policing and Crime Bill (day 2).

**Tuesday 14 June**—Second Reading of the Wales Bill.

**Wednesday 15 June**—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on the economic benefits of the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union. The debate will arise on an Opposition motion.

**Thursday 16 June**—As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, we go into recess until after the referendum, so the House will not be sitting.

**Friday 17 June**—The House will not be sitting.

The business for the week commencing 27 June, when we return, will include:

**Monday 27 June**—Motions to approve Ways and Means resolutions on the Finance Bill, followed by Committee of the whole House of the Finance Bill (day 1).

**Tuesday 28 June**—Conclusion of Committee of the whole House of the Finance Bill (day 2), followed by motions to approve Ways and Means resolutions on the Finance Bill.

**Wednesday 29 June**—Opposition half day (3rd allotted day—part one). There will be a half day debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced, followed by a general debate on the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

**Thursday 30 June**—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

**Friday 1 July**—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 4 July will include:

**Monday 4 July**—Estimates (1st allotted day). Subject to be confirmed by the Liaison Committee. At 10 pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

Chris Bryant: Let us start with a brief quiz. What is the shortest ever piece of British legislation? Answer: the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, which in 27 crisp words enabled women to stand for Parliament for the first time. As we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the campaign for women’s representation, it is worth remembering that the campaign is often long but the moment of justice is short and very, very sweet.

What a week it has been: torrential rain; floods in the SNP offices; downpours in the lifts; thunder and lightning—very, very frightening. Clearly, God is very angry with the leave campaign. The Prime Minister was on the Terrace on Tuesday evening enjoying a sneaky fag—no, not that kind—and some congenial company, but then he was mostly chatting with Labour MPs because Tories will not talk to him any more. In fact, there has been so much blue-on-blue action this week that the air is getting as blue as the Culture Secretary’s DVD collection.
[Chris Bryant]

The Tory Government in waiting, also known as the Justice Secretary and the former Mayor of London, have been touring the kingdom in their blunder bus like Dastardly and Muttley in the mean machine. The special thing about Dastardly and Muttley, of course, is that no matter how much they cheated—and, boy, did they cheat!—they never won a single race. On the one occasion when they nearly won, Dick Dastardly stopped just before the finishing line to pose for his picture, as it was a photo finish. How very Boris! As Dick Dastardly always said, “Drat, drat and double drat!”

When will the Leader of the House publish the Government’s response to the Procedure Committee’s report on private Members’ Bills? The House is hoping that the Government are genuine about reform, because the system, frankly, is a monumental waste of time and a fraud on democracy.

Can the Leader of the House explain something to me? He has announced the 13 days that are for consideration of private Members’ Bills, but the first one this year is not until 21 October. In previous years, it has always been in September—and early September at that. Why so late this year? It makes it virtually impossible before the end of January for any Member to get a Bill through the House of Commons, let alone through the House of Lords. Are the Government deliberately sabotaging private Members’ Bills even before they have started?

On 14 January, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) asked the Leader of the House whether the rules of the House could be changed to allow Welsh to be used in the Welsh Grand Committee when it sits here in Westminster. I understand that the language of this House is, of course, English, but Welsh is the mother tongue of many of my compatriots and constituents, so is it not time that we allowed Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee?

We are about to consider emergency legislation on electoral registration for the referendum. It is obviously a delight that so many new people have tried to register. In the last three months alone, there have been 4.5 million extra attempts. Even allowing for the fact that some of those will be people just checking that they have already registered, that is the equivalent of 63 extra parliamentary seats in areas with high numbers of students and ethnic minorities. Would it not be bizarre in the extreme for the Government to insist on the Boundary Commission using the old December 2015 register to determine the boundaries and number of seats allocated to Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England—or is this just gerrymandering?

Our Opposition day debate, as the Leader of the House announced, will be on the economic benefits of the UK’s membership of the European Union, because the last thing our very fragile economic recovery needs is the prolonged bout of uncertainty and the self-inflicted recession that Brexit would undoubtedly bring. We always achieve far more by our common endeavour than by going it alone. John Donne was right that no man is an island, and these islands are not a hermetically sealed unit. If we want to tackle climate change, environmental degradation, international crime and terrorism; if we want a seat at the table when the major decisions affecting our continent are made; if we want to shape Europe and fashion our own destiny: we have to lead Europe, not leave it.

Is it not fitting that on the Wednesday after the referendum we shall commemorate the Battle of the Somme, in which there were at least 200,000 French, 420,000 British and 620,000 German casualties? The continent that has been at war in every generation and in every century, that has spilt quantities of blood on the seas and the oceans, on the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the fields and in the streets and in the hills is now—thank God—at peace. We should not ever risk our children’s future: remain, remain, remain.

Chris Grayling: I start by marking the anniversaries of the campaigns to get votes for women and to get women into Parliament, which we are currently celebrating. I commend everyone involved in the art exhibition and new work of art in Westminster Hall and indeed all who came together in this Chamber last night for the photograph to mark the occasion. It is a very important development in our history that we should never forget. It is not so many years ago that, inexplicably, women were not given the vote and did not have the right to sit in this House. To our generation, that is incomprehensible. It is a change that always should have happened, and I am very glad that it did.

With apologies to the Scottish nationalists, I offer my good wishes to the England, Wales and Northern Ireland football teams in the European championship that is due to start this weekend. I very much hope that all of us here will cheer on all the home nations as they play their matches in the weeks ahead. [Interruption.] I am asked what this has got to do with the Leader of the House, but half the things that the shadow Leader of the House mentions have nothing at all to do with the business of the House—talk about pots and kettles, Mr Speaker! [Interruption.]

If I can shuts up the shadow Leader of the House for a moment, let me confirm something that he would like to hear. We will be flying the rainbow flag from the top of Portcullis House to mark Pride weekend in London from 24 to 27 June. It looks like that has shut him up, Mr Speaker.

On the boundaries issues, let me remind Members that the current boundaries are based on figures from the 2001 census. In no way is that fair; in no way is it right and proper. In future, the boundaries will be based on figures that are updated every five years, and it is right and proper that, given concerns about the nature of our register, reforms be put in place to ensure that it is robust, appropriate and honest in a democracy.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the private Members’ Bills report. We will respond to it shortly, as is due process.

I have given question of the Welsh Grand Committee careful thought, as I said I would a few weeks ago in the House. English is the language of the House of Commons, and it would cost taxpayers’ money to make a change at this point. I therefore think that English should continue to be the language of the House, although if someone who cannot speak English arrives here, we may need to look at the issue again.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned next week’s Opposition day debate on Europe. I was delighted to see that, notwithstanding the lively debate we are having in this country at the moment, the April figures for our
manufacturing sector showed an improvement, which is a sign that the economic improvement over which we have presided since 2010 is continuing.

I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman managed to pay a visit to my constituency this week, and to speak to my local Labour party. He was, and always is, most welcome in Epsom and Ewell. I am sure that, in the event that things become too tough in Rhondda and the threat from Plaid Cymru becomes too great, my local Labour party will be delighted to welcome him as its candidate in 2020.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Given the repeated poor performances by Govia Thameslink Railway, which are adversely affecting thousands of my constituents, will a Minister make a statement on what is being done to improve services on the line?

Chris Grayling: I am well aware of that issue, which has been raised by a number of other Members on both sides of the House. I know that the rail Minister is concerned about it, and the company should certainly be immensely concerned about it. This is obviously a difficult time because of the improvements at London Bridge, but the Secretary of State for Transport will be here later this month and I shall expect my hon. Friend and others to raise the issue then, because I know that it is causing concern to a great many constituents.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement, although I suspect that the business on 27 June may be rather more interesting than what is currently billed.

This week, Ministers appear to have been working tirelessly. It is just a shame that they have spent all their energy on attacking each other rather than running the country effectively. That is why we need an urgent debate on the Government’s abject failure to manage the online voter registration system. Amid that embarrassing disaster, the employment Minister has called the Prime Minister “shameful” and “out of touch”, and the Justice Secretary has labelled the Government’s own policies “corrosive of public trust”. Imagine what we think, Mr Speaker.

Let us also have a debate on immigration policy. Some current Tory Ministers have been touring the country declaring that when Brexit is secured Britain will kick migrants from the EU out and pave the way to letting more migrants from the Commonwealth in. Aye, we believe them—not. At the same time, other Ministers are trying to deport people like the Brain family from Dingwall, who are from another Commonwealth country. While all that has been going on, the Justice Secretary has stated that he wants to crack down on immigration to the UK altogether. Ministers are saying one thing to one part of the country, and telling a different tale to another. Just who are people to believe?

You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that the debate on the Investigatory Powers Bill earlier this week featured a range of patronising and condescending remarks by Tory Back Benchers, directed particularly at women on these Benches. That was unfortunately repeated during yesterday’s Westminster Hall debate on the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, in which I participated. There were continual suggestions that we “don’t understand”. May we have a debate on “mansplaining”, and the fact that male Tory Back Benchers are not the only ones to have been elected to the House with an understanding of difficult and complex issues? The House will then find that women are very good at it too. I shall be happy to elaborate further if the Leader of the House needs any help in explaining that to his Back Benchers.

Chris Grayling: Let me start by reminding the hon. Lady that, if I am not mistaken, a few days ago the leader of her own party criticised the European referendum campaign of which she was part. I am not certain that the SNP is entirely aligned on this one.

The hon. Lady told us about the work that the House had done this week. Notwithstanding the fact that we are having the most serious debate that we have had in this country for a generation, the House is getting on with the important business of protecting the country from the security threats we face. I was grateful to the Labour party for the constructive way in which it approached that debate, but it was disappointing that, on a matter of national security, the SNP lined up in the Division Lobby against measures that we believe are essential to protect our citizens.

The hon. Lady talks about the legal position of migrants. As we are having this debate and people will be listening to it, it is worth being very clear about what the position is. Under the Vienna convention, regardless of the referendum, the legal position of anyone who lives in another country is that their position is protected if the nature of the residency arrangements in that country changes. I do not think that any of us, on either side of this debate, should give an alternative impression to people who might be worried about their position afterwards.

I would never in any way condone patronising comments towards women in this House. However, it is perfectly fair to say that the Scottish National party does not understand the importance of defence issues to this country. Its policies make no sense. Its arguments would do damage to Scotland, economically and in defence terms, and if we challenge them on them, it is right and proper to do so.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May I come back to the thorny issue of Avon and Somerset police force? The chief constable is under investigation. He and the police and crime commissioner tried to come to see me, and they are trying to influence MPs about what is going on with the serious sexual allegation against the chief constable. He is still in post. It is causing problems with the police force in Avon and Somerset. We really need a debate in this place to find out what is happening. This is a sizeable police force, covering Bristol and the Somerset area. Unless we get to the bottom of what is happening, we may have at least a problem with justice and possibly a travesty of justice.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes his point in his customary robust way, and he clearly raises issues that will be of very great concern to his constituents and to others elsewhere in the county. The Home Secretary will be here on Monday, so he will have a direct opportunity to raise this issue with her, and I am sure that he will do so.
Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): May we have a debate in the near future on the political situation in Northern Ireland—thankfully, not because of any crisis, but because we should celebrate the fact that we are now embarking on the third term of uninterrupted devolution in Northern Ireland? We had very successful Assembly elections—certainly as far as our party is concerned. A debate will allow us time to debunk the nonsense being spoken today by the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, about the peace process and the political process in Northern Ireland being under threat if we vote to leave the European Union. Surely that is the most irresponsible sort of talk that can be perpetrated in Northern Ireland. It is very dangerous and destabilising, and it should not be happening.

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to all the political parties in Northern Ireland. The recent elections were characterised by being immensely dull, and that is a real tribute to the political progress that has been made in Northern Ireland. The fact that there was an election campaign based on detailed discussion about detailed issues—

Mr Dodds: And we won.

Chris Grayling: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his success. He will agree that we should be immensely proud of having a routine election campaign about local issues without the controversies of the past. [Interruption.] The shadow Leader of the House cannot shut up and cannot recognise the progress that has been made in Northern Ireland, and I commend everyone who has been involved in it.

Mr Speaker: Order. All this shouting from a sedentary position is very unstatesmanlike. It is not the sort of thing that I would ever have done.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Child and adolescent mental health must be a priority for local health services and every local authority. May we have a debate on what more local councils and local health authorities can do to reduce that alarming rate?

Chris Grayling: This is a subject of increasing importance. The rise in suicides among young men in particular is deeply alarming. The Secretary of State for Health takes this issue very seriously indeed and he is working on upgrading the national suicide prevention strategy. As a Government, we will do everything we can, and we are already putting additional resources into mental health treatments in the health service to try to tackle this and other problems. We are working immensely hard to tackle this.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): In regard to parliamentary representation for women, it is worth remembering that in 1912 a future Labour Cabinet member, George Lansbury, resigned his London east seat in protest against women being denied the right to vote and to be represented in the House of Commons. He subsequently fought a by-election, which unfortunately he did not win, although he came back to the House in due course. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be useful to have a debate shortly on what is happening to women abroad? Yesterday, a 17-year-old woman in Pakistan was burnt to death by her family because they disagreed with her marriage, and it is said
that 1,000 women a year in Pakistan are murdered in the same way. Despite all the progress we have made in this country, the suffering that goes on and the murder of women should be remembered, fought over and debated, and we should try in every way possible to end it.

Chris Grayling: It is a great pleasure to find something on which the hon. Gentleman and I entirely agree. The treatment of women in some societies around the world is absolutely atrocious, and we as a leading nation in the world should always seek to improve that situation. We should use what influence we have around the world to change other regimes in other countries and to create a world that is more enlightened and more supportive towards women and that treats them in the way they should be treated.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May we have a debate on blood cancer? Next week, I am pleased to be starting the new all-party parliamentary group on blood cancer—Tuesday at 2 o’clock, room N, Portcullis House—and I would be grateful if the Leader of the House considered granting time for such a discussion.

Chris Grayling: I wish my hon. Friend well in establishing his new group. The great benefit of all-party groups is the strengthening of ties between this House and those outside who are affected by conditions such as blood cancer. It is an important part of the work of individual Members of Parliament, and I commend him for what he is doing.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): When I was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry—now Business, Innovation and Skills—I was given a draft of an answer to a colleague’s parliamentary question to sign off that said that they would have a full answer by the end of autumn. The Prime Minister’s long-awaited decision on the Airports Commission is still awaited, but he said yesterday at PMQs that we would get a decision “in the summer”. Can the Leader of the House clarify whether the September fortnight is part of the summer session or the autumn session?

Chris Grayling: Formally, summer will depend upon the weather, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that the decision will come shortly. We have taken time over the decision because, rightly, Members of the House and on the Opposition Front Bench—[Interruption.] We hear them chirruping yet again. They have asked us to take immense care over the issue of air pollution in the United Kingdom, so we have been careful to consider the impact of nitrous oxide emissions around Heathrow to ensure that we get the final decision between the two choices right.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 were dealt with under the negative resolution procedure. Despite the statutory instrument’s provenance, much of it is commendable and will help in the fight against tobacco-related disease. However, may we have a debate on the paragraphs relating to e-cigarettes and vaping? ASH, Cancer Research UK, the Faculty of Public Health and the Royal College of Physicians are concerned that the paragraphs will be unhelpful in reducing the toll that tobacco takes.

Chris Grayling: I am very much aware of the issue that my hon. Friend raises. He is right that the measures have been carefully considered by the appropriate Committees of the House and have been debated and discussed in Brussels. I note his concerns and will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health understands the concerns that exist on the Government Benches and were raised through the Standing Order No. 24 application yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main).

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): We are now less than four weeks away from the publication of the Chilcot report and the former Prime Minister is back, haunting the television studios like some unwanted poltergeist, reassembling his old gang and getting his retaliation and excuses in first, all of which should give us some indication and encouragement that the report’s verdict will be damning— he has of course seen it—as indeed it should be. What will the parliamentary response be? Will there be a statement on the day of the report’s publication? Will the Opposition parties get sight of it under secure conditions? Will there be a debate in the following week? Will it be on the Adjournment? Will it be on a substantive motion? The Government have had a long, long time to think about this, and perhaps the Leader of the House can enlighten us on the parliamentary response to Chilcot.

Chris Grayling: Let me be clear that there will need to be discussions between the parties about exactly how we handle advance sight of the document, but it is of course essential that the House is able to question and discuss the report, even though it is not a Government report. I give the right hon. Gentleman the assurance that such opportunities will be provided.

As for the reappearance of the former Prime Minister in the media, it is noticeable that he has been omnipresent recently. The right hon. Gentleman might have noticed his interesting contribution today, in which he accused the current leader of the Labour party of changing it from a party of power into a party of protest, with which I, and probably even the shadow Leader of the House, agree.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Constituents of mine with relatives who have severe mental health problems often want to be close to them and to support them; however they can, but are frustrated by the understandable confidentiality that mental health professionals must observe in relation to their patients. May we have a debate on how we can protect both patient confidentiality and the understandable desire of people to do their best for relatives who are suffering?

Chris Grayling: It is a really difficult issue and one that all of us have come across in our capacity as constituency Members. A relative who wants to do the right thing may or may not be doing the right thing, and professionals have to make difficult judgments about giving relatives access to information. It is an issue to which there is no right or wrong answer, but I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Health is aware that my hon. Friend has raised those concerns and he will perhaps respond to them directly.
Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): May I remind the Leader of the House that on joining this House some of us took the Oath in both English and Welsh, so will he look again at the proposal to use Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee? Some of us did not speak English until we were aged five. Most of us are now bilingual, but nevertheless the Welsh language and its status are very important.

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the need to protect the Welsh language, and across different Administrations over the last generation extensive steps have been taken to protect the Welsh language and make it part of routine life in Wales. My question to the right hon. Lady, however, is about whether, at a time of financial pressure, it is really sensible for us to be spending taxpayers’ money in a House where the prime language, the main language, the official language is English and when we have Members of this House who talk in that language. As long as that is the case, although I have considered the matter carefully, I do not believe that we should change things.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Prime Minister has said that the EU budget has been cut, so I thought that I would check with the House of Commons Library. I do not think that these figures have been published, but according to the Library our net contribution to the European Union will increase by more than £2.7 billion this year—to £2,727,000. That does not seem to be a cut, so may we have a statement from the Government next week explaining the situation?

Chris Grayling: Fortunately, courtesy of the Opposition’s debate choice next Wednesday my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to ask questions and make a speech about these issues in this Chamber. I have no doubt, given his assiduousness in these matters, that he will ensure that he does so.

Mr Speaker: Or even his assiduity.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): As the Leader of the House will know, this Sunday marks the start of Diabetes Awareness Week. Will he join me in congratulating Diabetes UK on this important campaign? Although 3 million people have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, including me, 1 million people still do not know that they have diabetes. May we have a statement next week about the Government’s response to Diabetes Awareness Week? Will the Leader of the House personally show his support—this has nothing to do with the excitement of the EU referendum campaign—and visit a pharmacy or GP in his constituency and have a diabetes test to encourage others to do so?

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. This condition affects large numbers of people, as he rightly says, and there are people who are not aware that they suffer from diabetes. I will give him that assurance, although probably not over the next two weeks—there is quite a lot on. I will give him a commitment that I will have that test at some point over the next few weeks and months, because that would make an important point. We, as local Members of Parliament, could well follow his suggestion to raise awareness of diabetes in our constituencies.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made urgently by the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary about the Government’s position on Turkish membership of the EU? In 2010, the Prime Minister said:

“I’m here to make the case for Turkey’s membership of the EU. And to fight for it.”

In 2014, he said:

“In terms of Turkish membership of the EU, I very much support that.”

Last night, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who seems to be prepared to say anything at all to secure a remain vote, no matter how ludicrous, was saying that Turkey would never join the European Union. May we have an urgent statement to clear up this difference of opinion between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister and, in the meantime, will the Leader of the House confirm that it is still the Government’s position that Turkey should be able to join the European Union and that British taxpayers’ money is still being used to help Turkey's accession to the European Union?

Chris Grayling: I am sure that my hon. Friend’s comments will have been noted by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and, of course, the Prime Minister will be back in this House next Wednesday before we go into recess. Notwithstanding questions about timing, it is still the Government’s policy that in due course Turkey should join the European Union.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I was recently contacted by several constituents who were looking to purchase the freeholds of their properties, which were built a few years ago. My constituents had found that the developers who originally built the properties had sold the freeholds on to private investment companies, who were now asking for three or four times the original asking price to purchase those freeholds. I know there is a process to resolve these issues, but it is lengthy, complex and expensive, so may we please have a debate on what can be done to simplify that process and give people some comfort that the homes they have bought are not being used by third parties as part of some speculative investment strategy?

Chris Grayling: This issue obviously affects a great many people and, where there are set processes, it should not be possible for any freeholder to exploit an individual leaseholder by contravening the rules. The amounts payable are calculated according to a formula that is set down in law, and should not be exploitable. If the hon. Gentleman has identified cases where this is not happening and from which there are lessons to be learned, I ask him to write to me, and I will pass the matter on to my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government and ask them to take a detailed look at the concerns he has identified.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we please have a debate on how this House responds to the very diligent work of the European Scrutiny Committee? At a time when the nation is just two weeks away from taking the most important decision in a generation, it is inexplicable why there are no less than eight documents—

Chris Bryant: No fewer.
Mr Nuttall: There are no fewer than eight documents covering a range of important topics, such as free movement and the European Union charter of fundamental rights, all of which have been recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee for debate on the Floor of this House.

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker, I have a proposal for the House. We know that the shadow Leader of the House is a champion of charities. May I suggest that we all sponsor him in a sponsored silence to raise funds for his chosen charities?

On the subject of European Scrutiny Committee timetables, of course there are opportunities in the next few days, particularly next Wednesday on the Opposition day, to debate many of those issues, but I do understand the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) makes. We sought in the previous Session to make more time available for debate, and I will ensure that we look again to see that we can do that in the coming Session.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May we please have a debate about the excellent work that charities, such as KIDS in Hull, do, working with children with disabilities and their families? They provide services commissioned by Hull City Council. I am really concerned that, given the cuts to local authorities, great charities like that are now finding that their funding is being cut or reduced and that services to the most vulnerable in our communities will disappear.

Chris Grayling: It is always a great disappointment when we hear about local authorities—all too often Labour authorities—that are not innovative enough when it comes to dealing with financial pressures. There are some great councils around the country that are dealing with those pressures in a thoughtful way, pooling resources with neighbours and avoiding the cuts to front-line services that the right hon. Lady describes. I would simply ask her to urge her local authority to look for those examples and ensure that best practice keeps those services in Hull.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Leader of the House has just confirmed that it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to encourage Turkish accession to the European Union. Indeed, we are paying £170 million a year to help Turkey and four other applicant countries join. In the borough of Kettering there are about 5,000 migrants from eastern Europe, from a population of 72 million, 12 years after accession. Given that the population of Turkey is 76 million, that means that the people of Kettering face the very real prospect of having at least 5,000 Turkish migrants 10 or 12 years after Turkish accession—something that would transform the borough of Kettering. May we have an urgent statement from the appropriate Minister about why on earth we are spending £170 million a year on promoting this madness?

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend feels passionately about these issues and is making those points during the course of the campaign that he is part of. There will be an opportunity next week in this House to debate matters related to the European Union, and I am sure he will also take advantage of that opportunity to raise the issues he has brought up today.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Constituents of mine in Motherwell and Wishaw have waited well over a year for a decision on their asylum applications. In that time, they have placed no financial burden on the UK. May we have a debate in Government time on the length of time still being taken to process and to make decisions on asylum applications?

Chris Grayling: Of course, it is not true to say that asylum seekers place no burden on the United Kingdom, because we do both provide accommodation for asylum seekers and support poor asylum seekers. That money comes from somewhere; it does not come from thin air.

We are all committed to seeking to get the fairest, speediest possible system for asylum in this country. We have a long tradition of being a refuge—a safe haven—for people escaping persecution, and that should always continue, but it is important that we do not allow our asylum system to become a veil for economic migration. They are different things and they should remain so.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Humberston Fitties is a unique community in the Cleethorpes constituency consisting of holiday homes. Yesterday North East Lincolnshire Council ruled that residents will be able to occupy their homes for only eight months of the year, rather than 10 months, as has been the case for many years previously. That is partly a result of guidance or rulings from the Environment Agency and other bodies. May we have a debate to clear up the confusion between what is guidance and what is a statutory instruction from such agencies to local authorities?

Chris Grayling: I sometimes wish local authorities would make that distinction. The intention is to give them options to pursue, rather than telling them exactly what they should do. Local circumstances vary around the country, and when the participation of residents of holiday homes is lost for part of the year, that can have an economic impact. My hon. Friend has made an important point and I hope his local authority will take a long, hard look at what it must do and what is right for its area, and not simply tick a box because it thinks it must.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): A number of my constituents have suffered long delays in having their Disclosure and Barring Service applications processed, particularly where those have been processed via the Metropolitan police, and more than one has fallen into serious debt as a result of not being able to take up employment as a result. May we have a statement or a debate on how we can tackle this problem and resource the service properly?

Chris Grayling: I know that this problem crops up from time to time for all of us as Members of Parliament. I have had experiences similar to that of the hon. Gentleman. The Home Secretary and the Policing Minister will be here on Monday. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to put that question to them and ask what can be done to improve things.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): My constituent Susan Fleeting contacted me regarding the tragic case of her son Robert, who died a non-combat death while serving in the
armed forces in an English military base. Mrs Fleeting, like many similar families affected, cannot gain closure as there is no automatic inquest by jury into Robert's death. Families require that we debate this important issue so that Mrs Fleeting, for her late son, and all armed forces personnel are assured of rigour and justice in the face of tragedy.

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, anyone who loses a child in unexplained circumstances should have information and should understand what happened. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Defence is aware of the concerns that the hon. Lady has raised. She might like to write to me or to him giving more details. He will be here on the Monday after the referendum and I am sure he will be happy to take that question and give her a proper response.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The pub code, which is designed to give some measure of protection to pub tenants against the sometimes appalling behaviour of pubcos, was meant to be implemented on 28 May, but so far the Government have put nothing before the House. When will the Government bring forward a statutory instrument so that we can get the code in place to protect tenants?

**Chris Grayling:** I believe the answer is very shortly, but I will write to the hon. Lady and give her more detailed information about what is planned.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 68.

**Dr Lisa Cameron**

The motion demands the release of Kamuran Yuksek, the leader of the Democratic Regions party, who is currently incarcerated by the Turkish authorities. May we have a statement or a debate in Government time on the outrageous and unacceptable behaviour of the Turkish authorities towards the Kurdish population?

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): I refer to early-day motion 155.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Further to the question from the vice-chair of the save the pub all-party group, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), having had a year to get the pubs code in place, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills then pulled it. Tenants are being denied a legal right that is laid down in the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015. BIS is refusing to give a date for when the code will finally come in, so may we have a statement on that? Can the statement also confirm that the code will apply retrospectively to the dates set down in legislation to ensure that those who are currently being denied their legal right get it?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said, I will get a proper response to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), and I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman is copied into
it. The Secretary of State will be here on the Tuesday after the referendum, when both hon. Members will have an opportunity to raise the matter.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Leader of the House and the Prime Minister have rightly condemned anti-Semitism, yet under our constitutional set-up a Prime Minister of Jewish or Catholic faith would be expressly forbidden from undertaking some of their duties, and the monarch still has to be of Anglican faith and is expressly forbidden from being of Catholic faith. Is the Leader of the House going to bring forward any plans to change these arrangements, or is he happy with a set-up that is effectively anti-Semitic and sectarian?

**Chris Grayling:** I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but disestablishment is not on the Government’s agenda at the moment; there is quite a lot to deal with, and that is not top of our list.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): This week the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief released a report entitled, “Fleeing Persecution: Asylum Claims in the UK on Religious Freedom Grounds”. It highlights the shortfall in the number of caseworkers who determine asylum applicants on religious grounds and outlines 10 points for improvement. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement on what steps the Home Office is planning to take to ensure that caseworkers are adequately trained to assess claims by individuals seeking asylum on religious grounds?

**Chris Grayling:** This is obviously a sensitive area, and we have to take great care with it. Of course we want to provide refuge to people fleeing religious persecution, but we need to ensure that our system is robust and that the people we are dealing with really are who they say they are. Great care is already taken to do that. The Home Secretary will be here on Monday, so if the hon. Gentleman has further thoughts about what we should be doing, I suggest that he raise them with her then.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I draw the Leader of the House’s attention to early-day motion 175, which I tabled yesterday to mark the fourth anniversary of the Istanbul convention on preventing violence against women and girls.

[That this House notes that 8 June 2016 marks the fourth anniversary of the UK Government becoming a signatory to the Istanbul Convention on violence against women and girls; expresses disappointment that the Government, despite outlining their commitment to do so several times, has still failed to ratify this important convention; recognises that women still face a significant amount of inequality, with one in four women experiencing some form of domestic, sexual or psychological abuse during their lifetimes; further notes that ratifying the Istanbul Convention should ensure that a series of preventative policies will be introduced to help tackle and end violence against women, such as non-violent conflict resolution in relationships and the right to personal integrity being included in school curricula at all levels; congratulates the campaign group ICchange for their continuing work in applying pressure on the Government to ratify the convention; and calls on the Government to accede to this pressure and ensure ratification as soon as possible.]

I have sought debates on the matter through the Table Office, but with no joy. May we therefore have a debate in Government time to get to the bottom of why the Government have failed to ratify this important convention?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman has a number of different options for pursuing these issues, such as Adjournment debates or the Backbench Business Committee. I am sure that the Chair of the Committee, who is in the Chamber, has listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said. If other Members share his concern, I am sure that the Committee will consider that possibility.
EU Referendum: Voter Registration

11.43 am

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): I beg to move,

That the draft European Union Referendum (Voter Registration) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 8 June, be approved.

It will probably help the House if I restrict my remarks simply to explaining the nature of this statutory instrument, as the issues it raises will no doubt be debated in the ensuing discussion. The House will already be aware that on Tuesday night, between 9pm and 10pm, there was a huge surge of applications for registration—three times as many in one hour as have ever been experienced—and that, as a consequence, the website crashed at around 10 o’clock. Therefore, there were two hours during which it was lawful to apply to register in time to vote at the referendum, but people were denied that opportunity. The House will also be aware that it is the Government’s intention, following the strong cross-party support and the Electoral Commission’s approval, to introduce legislation to enable people to apply for registration up to midnight tonight and, if they are registered, to vote in the referendum. I want to explain to the House how the statutory instrument will achieve that.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I am listening to my right hon. Friend with great interest. He says that the website was down for two hours. What was the hourly rate of applications, and therefore what is his official estimate of the number of people who wanted to register in that timeframe but were unable to do so?

Mr Letwin: My hon. Friend asks a very good question. Unfortunately, I can give him only a very partial answer. We know as a fact that there were, if memory serves, 214,000 applications in the hour leading up to the crash. What we cannot know, because it is in the nature of the computer system that it cannot tell us, is how many people either tried or would have tried to apply during the succeeding 90 minutes or so during which they were unable to apply. The answer is therefore that I cannot tell.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Have the Government made any inquiries, assessment or technical analysis of whether there is any possibility that some malevolent attack was made on the website at that time, as opposed to there being an incredibly unusual spike in the numbers?

Mr Letwin: My hon. Friend will very much recognise that I am not a technical expert on computing, but I am advised by those in the Cabinet Office and the Government Digital Service that, as far as they can make out, there was no untoward event whatsoever. There was simply an incapacity of the system to handle that number of applications. The system is designed to be scoped to deal with a certain number of simultaneous events, and that number was exceeded during that period, so in retrospect, it was not surprising that it fell over. I should add that since that time, as the very first lesson learned, the website has been altered so that it has a larger capacity—I think almost twice as much capacity—to be able to deal with a higher number of simultaneous events than previously.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I think the question that most people want answering is: what is the rationale for extending the period for voter registration by 48 hours, given that when the system crashed it deprived people of the opportunity to register for two hours? Why not 24 hours or 72 hours—why 48 hours?

Mr Letwin: That is another very good question that I am very happy to answer for my hon. Friend. If we had been able to work out more quickly how to bring forward legally watertight legislation—in two or three hours, rather than 24 hours—it would have been possible to introduce the statutory instrument yesterday, and it might then have been possible to have an extension for a 24-hour period. We are anxious that the legislation should not be in any way retrospective, and it therefore makes sense that it should apply from midnight tonight, after the time at which this House and the other place will, I hope, have passed the statutory instrument. In the meanwhile, we have of course been doing our utmost to promulgate the fact that people can apply to register during this period and will still be able to vote in the referendum, thereby correcting the error that occurred as a result of the crash.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The Minister is being very generous in giving way. The message did get out in Northern Ireland—the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland promoted it, saying that people could still register beyond the deadline—only for a sudden reverse to take place later, so that it now does not apply to Northern Ireland. Why the shambles? What went on in terms of consultation with the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland? Why are citizens in Northern Ireland being deprived of this extra opportunity? I know we do not have the digital system, but having been told that by the chief electoral officer and the Government, people had such an expectation. This is a UK-wide referendum, so why is there a difference?

Mr Letwin: I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for the fact that the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland did indeed issue a statement of the kind he describes. I do not know quite why it was issued, but that body is of course independent of us. As I think he is entirely aware, discussions went on yesterday about whether this should or should not include Northern Ireland. The answer to his question is the answer that he himself indicated: there is not an online system in Northern Ireland, and therefore the thing we are correcting did not go wrong in Northern Ireland. He would need to discuss with my colleagues in the Norther Ireland Office whether it would have been sensible nevertheless to extend this, but their view was that it would not be.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): One of the big bugbears in the issue of electoral registration is the fact that people have to register some distance away from the actual election date. I am very pleased that the Government have now found that it is possible to shorten that period. Is it their intention that there may also be a shorter period for future elections so as to give people more time to register in advance of them?
Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP) rose—

Mr Letwin: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that comfort. Northern Ireland will shortly move to an online registration system, and it is clearly desirable that it should do so.

Let me briefly explain how this statutory instrument achieves the intended effect and avoids a problem that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, when the matter was discussed yesterday. Our aim is to enable those who are applying to register up to midnight tonight to register to vote, if they are eligible, in the referendum on 23 June. That moves that date forward by 48 hours—two working days. The statutory instrument achieves that by taking an entire block of time, which used to elapse between midnight last Tuesday and midnight on 16 June, and moving it lock, stock and barrel, without changing any of the relationships within it, two working days forward. That is why, if Members look at the statutory instrument, they will see that it inserts in a whole series of pieces of legislation a date of 20 June, which would previously, either actually or in effect, have been 16 June. The reason why 16 June to 20 June is seen as two days rather than four is that the whole of our legislation is constructed around working days, and the Saturday and Sunday—18 and 19 June—are therefore excluded. So we have taken a block of time and moved it two working days forward. The net effect of that is twofold, and only twofold. First, it achieves the intended effect of ensuring that people can register to vote in the referendum if they do so by midnight tonight; and, secondly, it means that the registers will be published at the end of the process by midnight on 20 June rather than by midnight on Thursday 16 June. No harm to mankind arises from the delay in the register being published.

The reason the SI solves the problem that was very rightly and acutely raised by my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee is that we retain the full five-day period for objections to applications, and indeed all the other aspects of the process, inside that block of time, because those relativities are not altered. I think that that is what led to the question from the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) about whether we could do exactly the same thing in future now that we have discovered that it does not cause any harm at the end of the process.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I very much welcome the fact that we are allowing people ease of registering to vote: I think we all agree with that as democrats. On the checking of who is eligible to vote, with large numbers seeking to be on the electoral roll, I have had a number of reports in my constituency of EU nationals being sent postal voting papers, and last night somebody called me to say that their 17-year-old daughter had received voting papers. What sort of assistance will be provided to electoral services officers and returning officers to ensure that the vote is secure in that sense?

Mr Letwin: First, nothing that we are doing in any way affects any of that, because the blocks of time are unaffected and therefore all the processes have the same amount of time in which to take place as they would have done previously. Secondly, there has been, in a few cases, a problem with the issue of votes to people who were not eligible to vote. That problem has been inspected and cured. We need to make sure that in future elections it does not happen. Thirdly, I have no knowledge of what might have happened to someone who is 17. I am sure that if my hon. Friend takes that up with his my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), the Minister with responsibility for constitutional affairs, the Minister will be delighted to look into it immediately.

Dr Fox: Nationally?

Mr Letwin: Nationally.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that paper applications will also be considered even though they may have arrived in the post yesterday morning or this morning, in the same way as late applications made online will be considered?

Mr Letwin: The answer to that is yes. The way in which the system in Great Britain operates, unlike that in Northern Ireland, is that all the paper goes into the system at a later stage. The whole thing here has been delayed by two days.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Letwin: I will, and then I am going to finish my remarks.

Jim Shannon: There is a knock-on effect from the registration for postal votes. As we heard in the news this morning, some people have voted already in mainland UK, whereas others in Northern Ireland have not. A large number of Northern Irish supporters are going to the European finals—the indication is that it will be some 20,000 people—and their postal votes could arrive on any date between 9 and 16 June, which means that those people will be away when their postal votes arrive.

1.[Official Report, 15 June 2016, Vol. 611, c. 3MC.]
In the light of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) has said, there seems to be a bit of chaos in the system. What discussions has the Minister had with the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland to clarify those matters, get them sorted out and ensure that people who want to vote can vote?

Mr Letwin: There are two separate issues here. There is the question whether this statutory instrument has any effect on postal voting deadlines, and the answer to that is no, none whatsoever. They remain entirely intact. If there are people in Great Britain who are now able to register but who cannot get postal votes, they can take proxy votes instead. The deadline for proxy votes has not yet evaporated; it will be reached on 15 June, if memory serves. I have not had direct discussions with the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland about the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raises, and I suggest that he take them up with my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office.

I am conscious of the fact that I am using up time that needs to be used by the House for debate, so I will close by saying simply this. We have, of course, taken advice from our own lawyers—I had extensive discussions with the most senior figures in the Government legal service over a number of hours, as the House might imagine, yesterday—and from not only the Electoral Commission but, through it, its lawyers. We are absolutely convinced that we can do this by statutory instrument, and that therefore this is a legally watertight measure. I hope that it will command the support of this House and the House of Lords in time for it to become effective before midnight tonight.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): We welcome this statutory instrument, and I am glad that there has been extensive consultation, particularly with the Electoral Commission. The day before yesterday, more than half a million people successfully completed their application to be on the electoral register. That was a record, and all of us who believe passionately in democracy were truly delighted. But at its peak, the website was dealing with far more applications than at the previous peak, which was just before last year’s general election. There has been understandable concern, on both sides of the House, about the fact that the online registration system was unable to cope with the demand before the close of registration the night before last. At an appropriate time, there will need to be an examination of how that could have happened, especially as there is likely to be increased digitisation of the process for conducting elections in future.

While many of those who applied to register after 10.15 pm were successful, sadly many were not. The result was that many people who wanted to register so that they could exercise their democratic right to vote were unable to do so. That was a negation of democracy and we are right to give those people the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to vote.

I have three specific questions for the Minister. First, does the statutory instrument alter the provisions relating to postal vote applications? He touched on that, but I would like him to say a little bit more. Of course, voters with postal votes are able to cast their votes not just before the referendum day, but on the day itself by delivering them to the polling station. Secondly, what provision are the Government making for proxy vote applications, or will the situation stay as it is?

My third question relates to the extra financial burden that could well fall on certain local authorities. The Minister for the Cabinet Office made reference to extra resources being made available, but I wonder whether the Minister before us can be more specific about how those resources can be applied for, whether there will be a ceiling on those resources and if there is any estimate of what the overall additional cost might be to the Government.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the Labour party agree with me that it is very important that the will of Parliament on whether people from the continent of Europe can vote in the referendum is enforced? It is the clear will of Parliament and most British people that they should not vote. Does the hon. Gentleman have any independent intelligence on how many of them have wrongly been sent polling cards?

Wayne David: I certainly agree that the rules should be adhered to, and I am reassured by the Government’s assurance that that will be the case. However, it would be wrong to exaggerate this issue and make any kind of political point out of it.

As I said, the statutory instrument has our full support because it will enable those people who feared that they had been disfranchised to cast their vote on 23 June. I sincerely hope that those voters do precisely that. I urge the Government to publicise as widely as possible the fact that this facility is available. I urge them to consider new means of advertising it, such as having an advert on Facebook.

I said a moment ago that the statutory instrument has the support of both sides of the House, but I am disappointed that some in the leave campaign have criticised it. It is said by some that the statutory instrument is disproportionate. Others in the Vote Leave campaign have even suggested that the registration site was crashed deliberately to provide an excuse for extending the registration period. That really is absolute nonsense. It is equally nonsensical to suggest that the statutory instrument is somehow unconstitutional. That is clearly not the case.

The Opposition believe that every single person who is entitled to be on the register and who has made a valid application should be able to cast their vote. Of course, how people cast their vote is up to them—that is what democracy is all about.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Is it not the case that students who are registering at this time may have been preoccupied with exams and graduation? Is it not wholly reasonable, therefore, if the system has crashed, for the Government to do something about it and extend the time for registration?

Wayne David: Yes, that is entirely reasonable. We could cite many examples of people the length and breadth of the country, particularly young people, who for reasons like those that my hon. Friend has given
The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) is right that student preoccupations are many and diverse. They do not always involve study or graduation—certainly in my experience. However, perhaps one of the lessons for the future is that leaving registration until the last two hours possible may not be the wisest thing to do. Perhaps those who follow these proceedings will in future decide to register in plenty of time if they want to have their vote.

The sad tale of Government, the public sector and IT continues. This is yet another chapter in it. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that, given the demand on the system, it was unsurprising that it crashed. I am very surprised that it crashed, so I would like to know one or two things. First, how much load testing was done? Why did not we anticipate that, when people realised that the referendum was getting closer, they would want to register? Why was sufficient provision not made in the system to allow for a spike in demand? That happened before the general election—it is not unprecedented. Why did the Electoral Commission not make sufficient arrangements to determine whether its system could cope with the demand? How do we know that it will not happen again? If we have another deadline tonight, how do we know that the system will not crash in exactly the same way?

Mr Letwin: It might help if I answer that point now. A massive amount of load testing was done, and the system was tested with the assumption that we would not face anything like the extent of the difference between what had been experienced previously—for example, at the general election—and now. This spike was three times as intense as the one that occurred before the general election. For today and yesterday the system has been made twice as capacious as it was previously, and we would now have to have about six times as many applications as were made at the general election before the system crashed again. I profoundly hope that that will not happen.

Mr Hollobone: It is obviously good news that the referendum is generating excitement among people of all ages who want to take part in the ballot. However, many students are doubly registered, at their home address and at their place of learning. So that those people do not get into trouble, should it not be made clear that even if they are legitimately registered twice, they cannot vote twice? Should that not be explained, especially to those who are voting for the first time?

Mr Letwin: My right hon. Friend is asking pertinent questions, and it will be useful to have them answered for the rest of the debate. We do not and cannot know how many applications are duplicates, because until they have been verified we do not know whether those people were already on the register. Anecdotally, we think that a large proportion of applications may be
duplicates, but we will know that in aggregate only once we see the published register and compare it with previous registers.

Dr Fox: An important lesson will be to see whether a larger number of people register for the referendum than for the general election. If it is a much larger number, it suggests that the clarity and instruction given by the Electoral Commission had a good deal missing, which would be an interesting lesson for us all. On the competence of the Electoral Commission, let me return to the point that I raised earlier about ballot papers being sent to those who are not entitled to vote in the referendum. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend said that issue was identified and cured, and I wonder whether in due course a list can be published of those local authorities that say they had no problem, and of those that did have a problem, so that we can see exactly where the problem occurred across the country and its extent. I would be interested to know whether for some of those local authorities that said they had no problem, or of those that did have a problem, so that we can see exactly whether there was a problem or not. If the issue is so difficult to identify, it is difficult to believe that people can be so sure that they did not make mistakes in sending out those ballot papers.

I totally accept that this is a legally watertight mechanism, but to legislate for an electoral process during the election itself is not a precedent with which I feel entirely comfortable. I understand the emergency nature of this legislation, and I want as many people to participate as possible. I understand why the crash happened in terms of the technology, but I do not find it easy to agree to in effect changing the rules of any part of an election during the electoral process. We must be careful to state that this is an emergency procedure, and that we are not in any way accepting a precedent for Governments of the future to introduce changes to the rules while the game is in play.

12.14 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The Scottish National party welcomes the extension to registration. Our right to vote is precious, and we all bear responsibility for giving people that right, so I thank the Minister for coming to the House today. I also agree with the comments made by the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who said that we would rather avoid legislating for an election during an election period, but we are where we are.

It is essential that everyone who wishes to register is able to do so, and the SNP will back the Government today on extending the registration window. This is a critical vote, and Members across the House with different views recognise the importance of this referendum. It will affect future generations, and it will have a much more substantial impact on younger voters, who will have to live with the decision that we make in two weeks’ time, than it will on older voters. We are on the final straight; there are two weeks until the referendum. Will the Minister assure us that there will be a post-match analysis, so that we can consider what lessons we can learn from what happened over the past 48 hours?

Mr Hollobone: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest, and I agree that there should be a post-match analysis. Does he share my concern that that analysis will be conducted by the Electoral Commission, which will be writing a report about itself? Should there not be some kind of independent analysis? Otherwise, the report will automatically be skewed.

Stephen Gethins: Of course the Electoral Commission should look into this matter; we should always consider how we can improve our democracy. I hope that the Government will also look into this issue, given that they bear the burden of responsibility for it.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is important that there is a steward’s inquiry at a later date into what happened. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must also consider the effect that moving to individual electoral registration has had on this issue? Every time the register is compiled, there is a surge of new people joining it for the first time; this year, I fear that we may have had the additional burden of a lot of people who were previously on the register checking to see whether they are still on it, or realising that they are not, and that has created a big spike in demand.

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend raises a good point about people double-checking. I double-checked myself, and I encouraged others to do so, so I wonder whether the Government will consider that.

I also ask the Government to consider what lessons can be learned from Scotland. During the independence referendum, voter registration was at 98%, and everybody involved in that process should rightly be proud of themselves. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has also reflected on that. Having had 98% registration, we had an 85% turnout in the referendum, with huge voter participation on both sides, and we should learn from that. I hope that we will reach a turnout of 85%, or even higher, in the referendum, as I am sure that colleagues across the House do, although I am not sure we will quite get there.

Danny Kinahan: I wonder how much of that increase was due to lowering the voting age, and giving younger people who are at school the chance to take an interest.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. If, as has been suggested, younger voters are the ones registering, I encourage that, and perhaps we should consider giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote. Evidence shows that the younger a person engages in the political and democratic process, the more likely they are to be engaged in the long term, so I hope we can reflect on that.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes important points, but we should not forget that an estimated 7 million people are not even on the register in the first place. We should not lose sight of that, or of what we need to do to get those people to register.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point that ties into the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson)
and other SNP Members have wondered whether we should start looking at automatic registration. We want to encourage people to register, and we do not want this problem in future. Automatic registration works in other countries, and it can be a better and cheaper system. Will the Minister commit to considering automatic registration when he conducts that post-match analysis?

In conclusion, the SNP welcomes the extension to the registration period, and we encourage as many people as possible to take part in the important decision in two weeks.

12.19 pm

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I shall keep my comments brief. The statutory instrument is a sensible and proportionate measure that is in no way harmful to decent process, as the Minister sensibly set out. It simply picks up and shifts the period, which is a measured way of dealing with this unfortunate problem. I do not like it that the problem has arisen. I was the Minister who introduced online registration, an innovation of which I am very proud, and I wish the system well; we all want to see it functioning properly.

Let us not forget what the alternative to taking this measure would be. It would be to allow an unlawful situation to have persisted from Tuesday night, whereby people with the right to register to vote were denied the ability to do so—and an arbitrary situation also, given that, because of the nature of queueing on a website, it would not be possible to be even-handed towards citizens. It would be deeply ethically wrong to allow such a situation to persist, so we have no alternative but to take this measure.

There is another reason. None of us should accept poor service from the Government towards their citizens—that citizens ought to be the Government’s master—so I greatly respect the ministerial team for their efforts to ensure that public services, digital as well as paper-based, work better for citizens. That is very important.

Wayne David: Does the hon. Lady think it a fair point that the upsurge and crash occurred after the big debate between the Prime Minister and Nigel Farage? Might not the Government have anticipated a surge of people with the right to register when the system crashed were left with the impression that they were registered, and will not find registering when he conducts that post-match analysis—we hope that gets the message out—is a sensible solution.

I offer one more practical thought. If would-be registrants got as far as leaving their contact details on the site before it failed, it might be possible for them to be contacted directly in the remaining hours. I offer that as a suggestion. I know that it will not cover everyone who tried to register on Tuesday night, but it might be possible in some cases, and it would be a sensible thing to attempt, in order to avoid an unlawful or arbitrary loss of those citizens’ rights.

I end with a point that The Economist made last week, in reference to American politics:

“Any political party that hopes for lower turnout has lost its way…lawmakers must decide whether they still believe in the good sense of those they aspire to govern, or whether they lost that faith somewhere on the way to the statehouse.”

That should be the principle in all our hearts, both in this referendum and, crucially, as we go about politics from hereon in.

12.23 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I am pleased, if not astounded, by the speed at which the Government have moved on this issue. I am grateful for that, and for the Minister’s clear explanation of the reason for the statutory instrument and its purpose. Given that this is the biggest decision for a generation, I believe, like others, that it is essential that as many electors as possible can take part. This is not a general election; it cannot be rerun in five years.

As others mentioned yesterday, there are major implications for the Boundary Commission, so I would like to ask the Minister a very specific question: will there be discussions with the commission as a result of what has happened in the last 24 hours, given that it will clearly have a major impact, as many more constituencies will now have reached the appropriate number of electors?

Chloe Smith: I do not entirely follow the right hon. Gentleman’s logic. If there is only a lift and drop of the same number of days in total, how will that affect the end result for the Boundary Commission?

Tom Brake: The point is that a large number of people not previously registered are registering, which will affect the number of electors in each constituency. This means that the commission is using figures that do not reflect the number of newly registered electors. That is why this is important.

I have a technical question for the Minister. Is it possible that some people who were in the middle of registering when the system crashed were left with the impression that they were registered, and will not find out otherwise until their ballot papers fail to arrive? If so, what is being done about it?

The Minister has rightly said that what happened has allowed us to identify that the final point in the process—the publication of the register—is not a critical point, and that publication could be brought closer to the date of the election. I wonder whether it would be possible to bring it closer still to the election date. If nothing needs to happen after publication, except for local authorities putting copies in the packs for polling stations, why not move it even closer to the date of the election?

Finally, as a result of what happened, there has clearly been some confusion among the electorate generally about whether it is still possible to register up to the end of today. Is there Government funding available that can be used today to ensure that the likes of Facebook and Twitter use the channels by which they can reach a mass audience instantly to make it clear to everybody that they can register until midnight tonight?
Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I correct any misinterpretation? Everyone I know in the leave campaign—in Vote Leave, in particular—welcomes the enormous interest and surge in the number of people registering to take part in the referendum. It was clearly imperative that something be done, if possible, to address the anomaly that arose on Tuesday night. I welcome the fact that young people in particular are registering, and I absolutely take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) that anybody in politics who thinks they will thrive on a lower turnout is not thriving in a democracy that we want to be part of.

There will be a time for an inquest, not just by the Electoral Commission or the Government, but by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. We have already pencilled in what we will do in the aftermath of the referendum, to see what lessons should be learned, and in the aftermath of the general election, individual registration and so on.

Mr Jenkin: I was going to come to that later but will deal with it now. With individual registration, it is imperative that every new registration is cross-checked with national insurance data and, if necessary, Border Agency data. There is no post-registration audit of electoral registers, so anybody who is mis-registered stays on them. This needs to be looked at, because we have no idea how many non-UK EU nationals not from Malta, Cyprus or Ireland are recorded as eligible to vote, so I am surprised that he does not want the registers for the Scottish Parliament elections and the local government elections are different from that for the UK general election. We had elections for the Scottish Parliament about a year after the Westminster general election, but the problem highlighted by the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) did not arise—there was not a great deal of confusion. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is making a mountain out of a molehill.

Mr Jenkin: Not if they were misrecorded—that is the point. We need to make people aware of who is eligible to vote. It would be perfectly reasonable for the Electoral Commission and the Government to make more visible public statements to make it clear that if someone has been offered a ballot paper but is not eligible to vote—and knows it—it is an offence to vote. It is as simple as that. I am not asking polling officers to discriminate and knows it—it is an offence to vote. It is as simple as

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): This is not a new issue.

Mr Jenkin: I am not asking polling officers to discriminate whether someone has lied.

Mr Hollobone: I am listening to my hon. Friend’s remarks with great care. This is an issue for my constituents, who are really concerned about it. If an EU citizen in the borough of Kettering applies to be on the register but ticks the wrong box—either inadvertently or deliberately—and declares that they are a UK citizen, can that be picked up and the application rejected? I have not yet heard that there is a mechanism for doing that, and certainly not if there are to be 100,000 or hundreds of thousands in just a few hours.

Mr Jenkin: My hon. Friend raises a legitimate question, and we should inquire further into it. There should be a fail-safe way of ensuring that someone is who they say they are when they register their vote. At the moment, there is not. If people on the register now who are registered incorrectly are being sent ballot papers, and if it is not due to a software glitch, there is no way of picking it up.

I have urged the Electoral Commission to make more public statements, because the system now has different franchises for different purposes. Why will there not be notices in polling stations? The electoral officer is bound to offer a ballot paper to someone who is on the register, but a “Read this” notice could make it clear that people who are not eligible to vote but who knowingly do so commit a criminal offence.

Mr Kevan Jones: I accept the point about people filling in the application form without declaring that they are an EU citizen, but if they are an EU citizen they will be marked up as such on the register at the polling station. If they were sent a polling card inadvertently, the clerk would know that they were not entitled to vote.

Mr Jenkin: Not if they were misrecorded—that is the point. We need to make people aware of who is eligible to vote. It would be perfectly reasonable for the Electoral Commission and the Government to make more visible public statements to make it clear that if someone has been offered a ballot paper but is not eligible to vote—and knows it—it is an offence to vote. It is as simple as that. I am not asking polling officers to discriminate when the vote takes place; I am simply asking for more clarification and greater public awareness of who is and is not eligible to vote.

The matter before us should not have arisen. It reflects a lack of adaptation, because individual registration has enormously increased the pressure on systems to cope with the problem. The Government were warned by the Electoral Commission and the Public Administration Committee, as it then was, about the consequences of rushing forward with individual registration, however desirable it was. There was a lack of foresight. The Government agreed to spend millions of pounds on promoting registration in the run-up to this poll. Perhaps they should have used publicity to clarify that people did not have to re-register if they were already on the register. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) rightly noted, and as the Minister confirmed, a great number of people registered to vote in this referendum when they were already on the register—perhaps up to 75% of those applying. That is one reason why the system has become clogged up.
People have not clearly understood that if they are already on the register, they do not need to re-register. We need to learn from that.

Let us be clear about the consequences. A requirement to change the law when a poll for postal voters has effectively already opened is highly irregular. If this happened in some fledgling democracy in the former Soviet Union or in Africa, what would the observers say about the conduct of the poll? This is a really unpleasant precedent to set in our system, which should be one of the finest democracies in the world. The fact that Ministers have spent so much talking to lawyers underlines the point I made yesterday that this is on the cusp of legality. We are on the edge of what is acceptable. I do not for a moment believe that there will be a legitimate legitimacy of the polling is complete nonsense. Attempting to muddy the waters on the upsurge in those wanting to vote in the referendum has been a problem, but we should celebrate it. It is good that people want to vote in this very important referendum. Unlike with a general election, there is no possibility of a change in five years’ time; this decision will guide the future of our nation for many decades to come.

It must be the first time I have ever agreed with a Liberal Democrat, but I agreed with the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) that we must subsequently have an inquiry into whether the increase in registration should be reflected by the Boundary Commission.

Let me knock on the head the nonsense we have heard about 17-year-olds voting. I have been an election agent and a candidate in many elections, and I have never known an election yet in which somebody has not been on the register who should not have been. It happens; it is human nature. If someone who is 17 has been given a poll card and turns up at the polling station, they will not be allowed to vote because their date of birth will appear next to their name. Let us try to clear away the fog that Members are trying to create by suggesting that the process is somehow illegitimate. I do not know whether they are preparing their excuses for the result post-23 June, but the fact is that long-standing mechanisms are in place.

May I ask the Minister one simple question about postal applications? He said that the deadline would be extended until midnight. Will there be any provision for a councillor or returning officer to obtain the applications from the post office before midnight? In most cases, the last post will be during the day, and we do not want large numbers of postal applications to sit in sorting offices if they could be delivered to the returning officer. Could the returning officer, or councillor, arrange with the post office to collect them later in the day? Even if they were collected at five o’clock, at least people would then be registered.

What has happened is unfortunate, but I must give credit to the Government for coming up with a solution. That brings me back to the main point, which is that we must ensure not only that as many people as possible are registered to vote, but that the turnout is as high as possible on 23 June.

Mr Kevan Jones: Why?

Mr Hollobone: Because the Labour party would not have agreed to a referendum on our membership of the European Union, and we would therefore not have seen more than 2 million extra people registering. The Conservative victory means that we are a healthier democracy than we could ever have been if Labour had won the election.

Mr Jones: I have heard some tenuous links in my time, but that one takes the biscuit.
Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) is a most assiduous Member of the House, and is also extremely particular about adherence to conventions and scope. I therefore do not encourage him to dilate further upon the point that he has just made. He has made it, but I know that he will now wish to focus on the instrument, and not beyond it.

Mr Hollobone: I am grateful for your wise counsel, Mr Speaker.

The instrument amends the European Union Referendum Act 2015, which specified what we all assumed at the time was the last possible date for registration. One of the worrying aspects of this revision is the fact that we are now being told that it will be possible to register two days after what the Government had told us would be the last possible date. I fear that the Government inadvertently misled the House. Surely, if the aim is to encourage more people to register, it is desirable to specify the last possible date, which is what we have now arrived at by means of the instrument. I urge the Government, when it comes to future elections, to ensure that “the last possible registration date” means precisely that.

I understand that the instrument does not change the postal vote application deadline. There will be instances in which people apply for postal votes without being on the electoral register, and assume that they will be given postal votes because they are registering today. My understanding is that they will not qualify for postal votes, because it is not possible to apply for a postal vote without being registered.

Mr Letwin: I am sorry to intervene, but I think it would be helpful for me to do so at this stage. My hon. Friend has asked a serious question, but what he has said is not accurate. I asked the same question myself, because it is a fine point.

It is not, in fact, necessary to be registered to apply for a postal vote, although it is obviously necessary to be registered in order to receive and exercise that vote. Those who applied for postal votes in time for the postal vote deadline, and are now able to register in time for the new registration deadline, will qualify for postal votes.

Mr Hollobone: I am most grateful for that clarification. We have ended up with the right result, even if it is the wrong way round.

I am concerned about an aspect of student voting, although I hope the Minister will tell me that I have got it wrong. It is great that so many young people are signing up to take part in the referendum, and of course many participants on both sides will be very enthusiastic. First-time voters, in particular, many participants on both sides will be very enthusiastic. First-time voters, in particular, may not appreciate a serious point to be made here. My understanding is that voting twice is a criminal offence, and that it is the police who investigate it. I think it would be a great shame if students ended up being investigated by the police because, in their enthusiasm and naivety, they voted twice.

Mr Kevan Jones: It is, again, trying to confuse the situation to say that that will create a problem. How could someone who was registered in Durham—other than by means of a postal vote: I must say that before the hon. Gentleman comes back at me with it—vote in two places on the same date? That is not possible.

There is another point which the hon. Gentleman and other Members have missed completely. When people walk into a polling station, they see a long list of dos and don’ts, and the don’ts include voting twice.

Mr Hollobone: There is a long list of dos and don’ts, but no one reads it, because the type is so small and the notice is so big. It looks like what it is, a load of legalese about the correct procedures. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of the House and an experienced politician, and he knows about democratic procedures. The serious point that I am making—not from a vote leave standpoint, or indeed from a remain standpoint—is that there will be hundreds of thousands of first-time voters who do not understand registration, and because they realise that they can register at the last minute, they have done so. What I want to avoid is police investigations afterwards because students have made a silly mistake.

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman has no evidence whatsoever that this will be a big problem. He is obviously trying to get a headline into tomorrow’s Daily Mail. As an experienced candidate and an experienced election agent, I can tell him that anyone who is unclear about the rules can always ask the poll clerks, who will explain the process of voting.

Mr Hollobone: I am sure that no students in Durham will be affected by this potential anomaly.

Stephen Gethins: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the quality of the universities that he knows, or about how fast their battle buses must be to take them from one place to another, but will he at least accept that we should be encouraging students and young people to become involved as a point of principle?

Mr Hollobone: I have already said that twice, but I am happy to say it again. I think it is great that we are seeing loads more people signing up to the electoral register, especially young people. If it were up to the hon. Gentleman’s party, or the other party, we would not be seeing that at all.

The instrument makes it clear that there will be a post-match analysis, and that the Electoral Commission will have to produce a report on the conduct of the referendum. This is a serious point: the Electoral Commission will be writing a report about what the Electoral Commission has done in the referendum. Now, that is fine—that is one piece of evidence—but there is no provision in the statute for another investigation to be conducted.

This is a matter for my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin). I think that, whatever the result of the referendum, it will be an urgent priority for his Committee to initiate an investigation of not just this matter, but the way in which the system has worked in general. I understand that there are issues involving the electoral arrangements as a whole—not just registration, but the way in which the referendum is being handled—owing to the scale of the challenge confronting registration officers, and those who conduct
the referendum itself. I urge my hon. Friend and his Committee to begin that work as soon as possible after the referendum. The Minister helpfully said that there were 214,000 applications to register in the hour before the crash. I think I am right in saying that the down time of the crash was one hour and a quarter.

Mr Letwin: It was one hour and three quarters.

Mr Hollobone: Right. None of us knows, but it would be reasonable to assume that about 400,000 possible registrants were not able to register. To make up for this down time—I am not saying that this is wrong; I am just pointing it out—we are effectively extending the registration period for two days. It is very important that Her Majesty’s Government publish the number of registrants in that two-day period. Effectively, they are stopping the registration clock as of midnight two days ago, and they will publish the numbers of applicants for the two preceding days.

Mr Letwin: It may help the House and my hon. Friend if I say that, according to my latest information, there were 242 applications yesterday, which was the first of the two days to which he is referring. That is just over half the number he is talking about across the two days.

Mr Hollobone: I am grateful for that. It is great to have the latest information here in the House.

I close on this point—I keep reiterating it, but, as usual, the Government do not seem to listen—why do we not have the simple system whereby every time a member of the public is in contact with a Government agency of some sort, whether it be a local authority or the benefits department, they are asked the question by a Government official, “Are you on your local electoral register. This is how you apply, and we encourage you to do so.” I do not see why that should be difficult for the Government to organise across Departments, and it would help to minimise the scale of this problem in future.

12.51 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I will try to be brief, Mr Speaker.

Whatever we think of the problems that this country has with its relationship with Europe, we certainly have problems with disfranchisement, disengagement and disbelief in the values of what we do in this place and with politics in general. I welcome the fact that we have seen huge numbers of people registering in this process, and the fact that we have extended that process for two days. As the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, it demonstrates that we could extend the period for voter registration to closer to the date of an election or a referendum. We now have a very good precedent for doing so. For my money, I would also look seriously at 16 and 17 year olds voting, and at compulsory voting. The serious point that I seek to make is that for those of us who favour in principle the idea of online voting, this exercise has demonstrated quite how perilous that transition could be.

Tom Brake: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the issue of voting at the age of 16 and 17. I also agree that it is time for the Government to initiate trials in relation to online voting.

Matt Warman: The right hon. Gentleman read my mind.

Although there are many Members across the House who think that online voting is inevitable, it is crucial that, in a world where we cannot get voting in person right in some parts of the country in the 21st century, we conduct sensible small-scale trials of online voting.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that in 2004 the Labour Government did a trial of all postal voting, e-voting and other things. It was commended by the Electoral Commission. It was his party and others who argued that fraud could be endemic, and that was why the trial was not taken any further.

Matt Warman: I agree that trials have taken place and that they were a good thing, but they did also demonstrate that the system was not perfect. I do not think that anyone who looked at those trials, which were 12 years ago and which did not use the technology that we would now use, would say that they should have been rolled out across the whole country, because they were not as robust as we would have liked them to be. None the less, it remains the case that online voting is inevitable given the direction in which this country is going. We should look carefully at what that means, but, given the experience of the past 24 to 48 hours, let us bear in mind that if we get things wrong, we risk not only further undermining people’s faith in democracy, but putting ourselves in a position where even fewer people than now would vote, and that would be bad for all of us.

Although I welcome many of the things that we have seen over the past 24 to 48 hours, I urge the Government to seize the opportunity to extend the registration deadline closer to the period of an election or a referendum, to demonstrate the real appetite of people to use the web to get involved in democracy, and to begin those trials into online voting so that we can, over however many years it takes, get to a point where people can use the web to cast their vote and increase turnout overall.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That the draft European Union Referendum (Voter Registration) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 8 June, be approved.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask whether you have had any request or indication from a Minister or a Law Officer that it is their intention to come to the House today, or at any time, to make a statement regarding the announcement by the Crown Prosecution Service today that, having considered the case of UK security service personnel and possible involvement in extraordinary rendition of two families to Libya, it has decided not to take proceedings? The press notice issued by the CPS indicates that it has concluded that there is sufficient evidence to support the contention that the suspect had sought political authority for some of his actions. This is the first occasion on which we have had
any indication that the Government of the day had any knowledge of what might or might not have been done. Surely this House should be told about that.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me notice of his intention to raise it. The short answer is that I have received no approach from any Minister indicating a desire or intention to make a statement on this matter. Moreover, although a matter of huge interest to him and a great many other people in the House and beyond, it is of course not a matter for the Chair. However, he has put his point very forcefully on the record, and it has been heard by cerebral occupants of the Treasury Bench, and doubtless the thrust of what he has said will wing its way beyond this Chamber to other important persons. We will leave it there for now. I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what we have just heard.

Mims Davies: I beg to move, That this House has considered carers.

Imagine a day when 6.5 million people did not turn up to work as expected. They had a duvet day. They went to the beach. They subscribed to Netflix. They did some beauty therapy and some shopping therapy. They went drinking and they had fun—they might have taken a trip to the beach, or had a day at a theme park. What if those 6.5 million people made no arrangements for the care of their loved ones? What if those massive numbers of people simply took a holiday and did not arrange any cover? How many vulnerable people would go unbathed and unfed? How many would be unable to get out of bed to go to the loo? There would be no pills, no jabs, no dressings administered and no GP appointments attended. There would be nobody caring for the people who cannot do it for themselves. How frightening, gravely concerning and inhumane would that be? How many people would die? How many people’s conditions would deteriorate? How would our emergency services cope? Who would pick up the slack if those 6 million carers did not turn up for work one day?

In this country, 1.3 million provide more than 50 hours of unpaid care a week. The care they provide is worth £132 billion a year, which is what the NHS costs us. There are 150,000 doctors in the NHS and 87,000 soldiers in our Army. In Eastleigh, there are more than 10,000 carers, and the same number in Chippenham and Sedgefield. There are more than 8,000 in Stirling and more than 12,000 in North Antrim. An army of carers turns up every day—day in, day out.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. She is right to highlight the financial value of carers. Does she agree that the personal value should also be considered? According to Carers UK, three out of four carers feel that their role is not understood in their community. Does she agree that community support is vital in helping to build carer-friendly communities?

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am delighted to have secured this debate today to highlight these issues. I know that she works tirelessly in her community to support carers and the people who need them. I agree that there is a human cost and an economic cost to caring.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for being so supportive in ensuring that this important topic gets time in the Chamber. I hope that this will be a wide-ranging debate. I am also grateful to the Government and to the Minister for Community and Social Care, who has been very supportive of my application to hold the debate this week, which is carers week.

We know the value of carers, but do we really understand what is involved? How do you become a carer? A loved one might get older or become disabled. A child might be born with challenges. Someone might experience an unexpected change in their health. There might be a car accident or an incident at work. An operation could
go wrong. A mental health challenge could arise, resulting in the need for care. All of a sudden, you become someone who needs to be a carer. How do you manage it?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) has suggested, long-term caring can have a financial and emotional effect on families. It can have an impact on relationships. You lose friends. You lose leisure time. You also lose your freedom. Relationships between husbands and wives change. You become a carer rather than a lover or a friend. The impact of the need for mum or dad or a child to come first means a big change for families. You can develop a fear of the phone. You could be at work, out shopping, doing the chores or walking the dog when you get a phone call to say that something has happened on your caring watch.

It is worrying for you as a carer when the phone rings. You are mindful of what damage could be done while you are not there.

Carers week represents an important collaboration by Carers UK, Age UK, the Carers Trust, Independent Age, Macmillan Cancer Support, the Motor Neurone Disease Association and the MS Society. The focus this year is on building carer-friendly communities, and that is why I have tried in my opening remarks to remind people that someone in their lives is taking on the extra responsibility of being a carer. How many hidden carers do Members have in their constituency? Who do we know who is taking on that role? This debate gives us a chance to highlight the need to ensure that all our communities are aware of the work that unpaid carers do. Local GPs should understand the restraints a carer might face—I am aware that GPs themselves face many pressures—and employers should be spearheading flexible working and educating their own organisations to support carers.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this vital debate. Does she agree that some of the hidden carers are young people aged 12, 13 or 14? I have met some of them from Staffordshire and they do the most amazing work. They need our support.

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I shall go on to discuss the importance of young carers in a moment. More than 700,000 of the 6 million carers in this country are young carers who are taking on at a tender age all the burdens that I have described. This has an impact on their education and their opportunities. Our schools should show understanding and foster an environment in which young people can be carers. They should forge an appreciation of caring in our ageing society. Three in every four carers do not feel that their caring role is understood or valued by their community. It is incredible that we have so much more progress to make before we can live in a truly carer-friendly Britain. I believe that we are now at the start.

As I have said, more than 6 million people in England provide unpaid care, with 1.3 million providing more than 50 hours a week. In my constituency, there are more than 10,000 unpaid carers. We have an army of carers quietly working away looking after their loved ones across this country, and they do it for humane reasons. We do not do enough to support and recognise them. Locally, the loss of respite has been a great cause for concern. Respite offers carers freedom and time to regroup, and a lack of it can be a great concern. Alternatively, the wrong type of respite might be offered or it might be poorly managed. I have heard about such experiences in my constituency surgery feedback.

I thank the volunteers in my constituency who support our carers. The One Community brings together many groups to support each other, including the Age Concern centre, Dementia Friends, the Alzheimer’s group and all the people who help carers by driving their loved ones to hospital or to the GP.

I also want to say thank you to everyone in my constituency who runs a lunch club or a social club, all of which provide important opportunities for social contact.

A recent Carers UK report highlighted the fact that many carers are struggling. Most of us will have to care for someone at some point in our lives, and we want to be able to do that. Three in every five people become a carer at some point. Members of this House and of the other place, and our staff, are carers too.

In leading this debate, I should declare an interest. I was a carer, although I did not realise it. I was a hidden carer. We are nothing if we do not bring our own experiences to bear in our work in the House. I was a “sandwich carer”—that is, someone with small children and older, ill parents. We became so friendly with the local ambulance service that we were on first name terms, and I thank them all for the kindness they showed me and my family. My dad was affected by an incident at work and was cared for by my mother for more than 25 years. That had a massive financial impact on me as I grew up and on our family. And when dad was gone, guess what, mum needed looking after too, because when you are looking after someone you often forget to look after yourself. People can go downhill quite quickly in those circumstances.

I found myself muddling along looking after small children, going to GP surgeries and getting mum up to London, where we struggled on the escalators and on the tube to get to vital hospital appointments. I did not realise that that was an ongoing role for me. I gave up my job and threw myself into it. I remember the phone calls. One came when I was about to go on air at a radio station just before 6 o’clock in the morning. Dad was unresponsive. There had been a problem with his insulin.

Luckily, mum was awake because she was going to care for my children, covering for me while I was at work. She was caring for me, I was caring for her, and we were all caring for dad. When the phone rang, I had to drop everything and get there. For me, that was a snapshot of what people are doing day in, day out, and year in, year out. There is no break. If someone is lucky to get one, that is great, but it is still your watch even when they are not with you—are they in the right place?

A particular story that comes to mind was when my dad developed glaucoma as a result of the diabetes that was brought on by the head injury. He was given respite, but at that point he had not told people that he was losing his sight. He was in a respite centre and got lost going to the loo in the middle of the night. He got in the wrong lift and was wandering around a strange place. He was over 70, frightened and concerned though he was meant to be in a safe place. That story meant that no further respite was taken, meaning no further breaks.
I want to move on from my experiences, but please remember that all of us will be doing this. There are people in the House who do it already. I hope that we can recognise and understand the issue.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend allow me to add that each of our offices has caseworkers to whom we should pay tribute for their dedication in trying to help carers and others? That is only one part of carers week, but it is one that should always be remembered. We are grateful to them.

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. My caseworkers have been into the community, meeting constituents who are unable to come to surgeries or drop-ins. They have been to refuges to see women with difficult disability issues. They are prepared for anything and we would be nowhere without them.

Today’s debate will allow us to realise that caring will only increase in importance. With an ageing population and advances in medical science, we are seeing a steady increase in those who need care and those who are willing and able to provide it. Since 2001, the carer population has grown by a staggering 16.5%. There is a strong economic case for doing more for our carers. The economic value of the contribution made by 6 million carers is £132 billion a year, which is nearly equal to the UK’s total health spend.

As the number of young carers grows to over 700,000, perhaps we need a national day to recognise them and to highlight and support what they do. They look after family members who are physically ill, mentally ill, disabled or perhaps even misusing substances. These young children miss out on many normal childhood experiences that they should be taking part in. Young carers can sometimes be isolated and bullied owing to the pressures they face at home.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that many such carers are hidden and scared of coming forward to seek help? They are worried that they might end up in care themselves because their parents, or their parent, are unable to look after them.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. I absolutely agree. Pointing out that there are difficulties at home can be a frightening experience, and young carers may wonder what it will mean for them. It may feel better to say nothing, but that is a frightening place in which to be.

Young carers often miss school days. When they become young adults, they are more likely to drop out of college or be unable to head to university. That is not good enough after all they have put into their families and given the impact on their lives. They need support when helping their loved ones. They display real human decency at such a young age and suffer as a result. We should be nurturing, supporting and applauding our young carers.

The vast majority of carers are of working age. Many of them want to work, and 3 million people juggle full or part-time work with their caring duties. At the House of Commons carers event this week, I spoke to carers who are juggling their desire to do it all and who are not dropping the ball even though their health is often suffering. They are sometimes aware that they are able to care for their loved ones only for a limited time: they need to stay in the workplace for financial reasons. It is often not a choice; it is forced.

It is bad for companies if they lose our carers because the carers feel they have no choice but to walk out the door, which is what I did. If I was not in this place, I would now be without any caring responsibilities—apart from the two small children who do not seem to have been adopted yet, so I have to remember to look after them! I would be looking for a job and would have been out of the workplace for some time.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate today. Does she agree that carers contribute a great wealth of experience and other skill sets to employers that non-carers perhaps cannot?

Mims Davies: Absolutely. Carers have a can-do attitude that they bring to the workplace. If I was rewriting my CV, I would hope to put that on there.

It is bad for carers to fall out of the workplace. When asked about their experiences, the results were astonishing. Over a third of carers felt that their employer simply did not understand their caring role, and a third said that their employer did not have policies in place to support them. Flexible working is a key support mechanism to help carers to do their valuable work. Some progress has been made in supporting flexible or agile working. A limited right to request flexible working was introduced in 2002, and I am pleased that the Children and Families Act 2014 extended that to all employees after 26 weeks. However, given the pressures that carers face, that is not long term enough. The Government need to look to do more. The new legal right also paves the way for a possible culture shift in flexible working, and I want employers to take up the mantle.

It is deeply worrying that there seems to be a strong gender bias, with caring falling mainly on women in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Let us make it acceptable for all to take the time to care. One in four women aged 50 to 64 has caring responsibilities for older or disabled loved ones compared with one in six men, but I have met men in my constituency who have given up their jobs to care. I would like to see that as a real possibility. If someone wants to be there and can be there, it does not matter who they are.

This debate is an excellent opportunity to pay tribute here in the House to the crucial work of carers. Some 20% of carers currently receive no support with their caring work, because they simply have not put their head above the parapet. They do not realise that they are carers, and I know how that feels. Half of carers expect their quality of life to get worse in the next year, which people made clear at the carers event in the House earlier this week. People are concerned that they are not looking after themselves and simply do not know how to facilitate that. The national carers strategy is currently being written, and I am delighted that the Minister has written to me as part of the process and that I am involved. He is allowing time to focus on the matter to ensure that we get it right. I hope that the debate will give him. Members the chance to set out clearly to the Government and to the country that we are not doing enough for our carers and that they are struggling.
1.19 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing the debate. I am sure that this is an issue that touches many hon. Members. In my family, my father needs caring for, and the circumstances will be the same for many of us. As our population ages, the situation will only get worse.

I want to focus particularly on carers’ finances, as the struggle that many carers face in making ends meet has been raised with me repeatedly by my constituents, including Graeme McGrory, who cares for his partner Ann, and who has explained to me that the carer’s allowance—the main benefit for carers—is the lowest benefit of its kind. It works out at £1.77 an hour. If we compare that with £7.20 for the national living wage, we can see that there is a huge gap. In a 35-hour week, that gives a difference of £170 a week. I cannot imagine that there are many carers out there who work only 35 hours a week; I imagine most work much longer.

It is not just that the carer’s allowance is so low. The Government also need to make sure that when any changes are made—for example, to the minimum wage—or when any welfare reform is implemented, the impact on carers is properly assessed, so that they are not affected negatively. For example, at the moment the carer’s allowance threshold is £110 a week. Before April, if a carer worked for 16 hours a week on the minimum wage, they would earn £107.20 a week, but the rise in the minimum wage that came in in April means that the same person is now earning £115.20. That is not a lot more, but it is enough to take them above the earnings limit. That puts carers in a difficult position. What are they supposed to do?

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): This has happened to a constituent of mine, and I can tell my hon. Friend what she had to do: she had to drop her working hours from 16 to 15 a week, because working 16 hours a week put her £5.20 over the income threshold and took away every penny of her carer’s allowance. I implore the Minister to look into this, as it would only mean a £5.20 increase in the income threshold for carer’s allowance. I would really appreciate it if he could come back to this issue in his remarks.

**Sue Hayman**: I thank my hon. Friend for that incredibly important point. If someone has to choose between cutting back on work or losing their entitlement, they are between a rock and a hard place. I do not want to believe that the Government would want to punish carers in such a way. I agree with my hon. Friend that this needs to be reviewed urgently. I hope that the Minister will consider reviewing the threshold, and that in future any changes will be considered from the perspective of the impact on people in receipt of carer’s allowance, to ensure that they do not suffer unnecessarily.

There was the same problem of the Government not looking at the impact of new policies on carers when the bedroom tax was introduced. The Government introduced the change without considering the impact on carers, and without properly understanding why a spare bedroom can be so vital for families with a disabled, chronically ill or terminally ill member.

These are the reasons carers are struggling so much to cover basic living costs. That is particularly hard when family members have had to cut back on working hours to care for somebody; often, they will have given up well-paid careers. If the person being cared for has also had to give up their job—for example, because of an accident at work—that means that the family has to cope with a really steep drop in income. On top of that, if the family have children or are caring for elderly relatives, they are under a lot of stress and pressure. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh said, carers do society a huge service, saving all of us taxpayers a lot of money—an estimated £132 billion a year. If carers were to go on strike—perhaps they should if they want to get attention—imagine the impact on the NHS and local authorities. The people they care for could not just be abandoned.

The Government need to commit to helping, and to improving dramatically the situation for many carers. They also need to recognise that this dramatic loss of income often leaves carers with an increase in other costs. Carers UK’s recent inquiry found that carers can face higher utility bills, transport costs and shopping bills. On top of that, they might also need to bear the cost of adaptions in the home. The recent report by the New Policy Institute found that there are now 1.2 million carers living in poverty. That is simply not good enough.

If we consider ourselves to be decent, compassionate people; if we believe in society and community; and if we recognise that any one of us here might become a full-time carer, or might need care, we must pledge to do more. We must come together to support carers, who do such an important job in our society and who are often exhausted, both physically and emotionally. We have to say: enough is enough. It is time that the Government stopped the shameful situation in which carers and their families are pushed into poverty. It is time that we all said, “Enough.”

1.26 pm

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Many people think of carers as a small but dedicated group, yet as we have heard today, as many as three in five people will be carers at some point in their life. There are an estimated 50,000 carers in Wiltshire alone—roughly 10% of our county’s population—and 3,000 of those are under the age of 24. Mr Deputy Speaker, you or I could be a carer one day, but chances are that we would not realise our role. We would just think that we were caring for our loved ones. Some 70% of carers in Wiltshire continue to remain hidden, and it is believed that many of those people do not understand or recognise their caring status.

That is why this week and this debate are so important, and I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing the debate. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. We need to work together to raise the profile of these silent heroes, these astonishing individuals who give and give, time and again. Carers enable hundreds of my constituents to continue to live in their own home. Let us face it: without carers, our NHS would not cope, our care homes would be flooded, and the independence of thousands would be compromised. The care provided,
I hope that we will look at supporting more training directly challenge the problems that carers face. Specifically, legal rights, and I hope that the national strategy will locally, and within the voluntary sector.

Supporting carers needs to be targeted nationally and their business. It is important to stress that the issue of carers offer and not see them only as a strain on the country. Employers need to understand the benefits with it on this, and although the strategy is in its early stages, it is still a huge challenge to balance the two. It is often about having the ability to cope, but also a level of understanding from the employer.

Also based in my constituency is Carer Support Wiltshire, with whom I have volunteered. I saw at first hand its extremely high level of work and dedication, and its enormous impact on the lives of so many local people. Its role as a charity locally cannot be overstated. Its role as a charity locally cannot be overstated, and its enormous impact on the lives of so many local people. Its role as a charity locally cannot be overstated.

Carer Support Wiltshire has devised a scheme intended that I completely and utterly support the campaign to employment or training. They are therefore more entitled to the carer’s allowance but does not realise it, I would have sent out a lot more leaflets by now. We need to address this head-on. We need to go even further, and I am confident that the national strategy will encompass strenuous efforts to address the awareness and entitlement issues.

Many of the constituents who come to me are pensioners, and they do not realise that if their state pension falls below the amount of the carer’s allowance, they are in effect entitled to a top-up. Alternatively, if they are not in that bracket, they have what is defined as an “underlying entitlement to carer’s allowance”, which means that when they are means-tested, that is reviewed. I mention these entitlements today because I am convinced that it is important to stress them, and to get the message out to any elderly carers who are watching.

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend hit the nail on the head when she talked about the importance of better communication—and communicating to carers who feel isolated and vulnerable about the support that is available and the opportunities to make things better. As a result of today’s debate and through the Minister, we could look at communicating better with that group of people.

Michelle Donelan: I thank my hon. Friend. I could not agree more with her comments today. Another thing that concerns me deeply is that it is very easy to stereotype a carer, yet the reality is very different from the stereotype. The 2011 census identified 166,363 young carers under the age of 18 caring for a family member or friend; more than 110,073 were under 16. The real figure, allowing for hidden carers, is very much greater. Yes, the Children and Families Act 2014 extended the right to an assessment of support needs to all young carers under the age of 18; and since 2010 the Government have created specific training guides for teachers and teaching staff, to enable them to identify and support young carers.

However, there is still a big problem, which we need to face up to. Around one in 20 young carers regularly miss school because of their caring role. Young carers often get lower grades; a recent survey showed their most common grade at GCSE to be D. Young carers are twice as likely as their peers not to be in education, employment or training. They are therefore more entitled than other groups to the support that we can offer. That is why it would be completely wrong for me not to stress that I completely and utterly support the campaign to
allow the pupil premium to show its understanding of the stresses, strains and pressures on young people who are carers. Does not a young carer, like any other young person, deserve the best at life, the best chances, the best opportunities? It is extremely hard to be a carer at any age. Imagine combining that with struggling to cope with schoolwork, GCSEs or A-levels, while growing up. Imagine the impact of that—the emotional pressure it would create. In this country we have a pupil premium, which is designed to develop a level playing field. Surely it is time that young carers were allowed on the pitch too.

National Carers Week is all about highlighting the silent heroes, of all ages, in our community, whose dedicated love keeps people safe, secure and often living in their own home. Without them, the economy and the community that we all love in our constituencies would collapse. Today, I hope that we help raise awareness and understanding, show our support, and highlight the different ways that we can improve and develop our national strategy.

I would like to finish by thanking each and every carer in my constituency and in the country for all their hard work.

1.36 pm

Corri Wilson (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): According to the family resources survey, there are at least 5.3 million informal carers in the UK, although the number might be higher. There are thought to be more than half a million carers in Scotland, 10,000 of whom are in my constituency. The good news for carers is that, under the Scotland Act, benefits for carers, disabled people and those who are ill are being devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The UK Government are renowned for their disregard for the disabled. Disabled people have already taken a cut to their benefits, which will affect their ability to live independently, and consequently the support they require from carers. Those cuts not only affect the livelihood of disabled people but their carers, who will be impacted too by the overall cut in support for the person they care for.

The Scottish Government’s approach to social security recognises the need to ensure that disabled people and their carers are fully supported with dignity and respect. It is estimated that unpaid carers in Scotland save the Scottish economy almost £11 billion a year, so it is little surprise that the Scottish Government see social security as an investment in the people of Scotland. Unpaid carers are the backbone of community care, and play an indispensable role in supporting the needs of their loved ones, often at an enormous cost to their own health and wellbeing.

I often think “carer” seems a tiny, inconsequential word that is in total contrast to the reality of being a carer. What does being a carer mean? A carer is a risk assessor, carrying out health and safety checks to ensure that the person they are caring for is in a safe environment—for example, away from kettles and cookers—and cannot wander out the front door. A carer is a driver, to the numerous health and hospital visits. An outing, however small, is not like an outing that you or I would have. It is essential to be ready for all eventualities—medication, if it should be taken at a certain time; emergency changes of clothing.

A carer is a negotiator, collaborating with the many services that are now part of their life. A carer is a cook and a waitress or waiter, ensuring that the person they care for has tasty, appetising meals even when their appetite is diminished. A carer is a friend who is there to listen and offer support, particularly when things are difficult. A carer is on constant night shift, sleeping with one eye and one ear open to make sure that nobody has got up during the night. A carer is an entertainer, looking for ways to brighten the day, and a Philadelphia lawyer to cope with and understand the mountain of paperwork that comes with the role and the services involved. A carer has to be strong, both emotionally and physically. That list is not exhaustive but, as hon. Members can see, the small word “carer” does not quite cut it.

Having cared for my lovely father, who has dementia and Alzheimer’s, I have first-hand experience of the juggling act that carers have to perform every single day. It is exhausting, mentally and physically, and often it is impossible to predict what will happen from one day to the next, which is why the support services are so important for carers. The fantastic East Ayrshire Carers Centre in my constituency provides invaluable respite breaks to carers, allowing them to recharge their batteries and continue caring. It also offers training for young carers.

As we have heard, young carers may struggle to balance caring with being at school and often feel isolated, and they do not have the same recreational opportunities as their peers. This can impact on the opportunities open to them when they leave school. The Dalmellington carers centre offers work placements to young people to give them skills, experience and the confidence to find work, but those skills and experience are of no use if employers are not able to offer flexible working patterns.

It is not just young carers who are affected. The majority of carers are of working age. Carers UK estimates that the economic value of the contribution made by these carers is £132 billion a year. However, according to the New Policy Institute, more than 2 million of them are living in poverty. Almost 1.5 million people of working age spend at least 20 hours a week caring for someone, and more than a third of them are living in poverty. As demand for care continues to increase—and as the state pension age rises—the pressures of managing care and work are becoming a reality for more and more people.

Working-age adults with substantial care commitments are sacrificing their income from employment to undertake unpaid care. Many are forced to give up work entirely. Women take on a disproportionate responsibility for care in the UK, which is further widening the gender pay gap and increasing inequality between men and women. Caring falls particularly on women in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Research in 2012 found that women were four times more likely than men to give up work because of multiple caring responsibilities. Women pay a high
price for time taken out of work, and this disadvantage persists well beyond the years they spend caring. Breaks in employment and part-time work have a long-term impact on women’s incomes across their lifetime, on their ability to progress in the workplace, and on their ability to save for their retirement.

A lack of carer-friendly workplace policies means that an increasing number of employees, more often than not women, are forced to either give up work at the peak of their careers or move to part-time working. Just last year the Prime Minister pledged to end the pay gap within a generation. If this Government are serious about tackling the pay gap, employment law needs to respond to the increases in unpaid caring. The extent to which the labour market is able to accommodate people with caring responsibilities is important. We have a responsibility to break down the barriers to carers’ access to employment opportunities. Increasing the availability of quality part-time, flexible work, as well as raising the awareness of the right to request flexible working, would be important steps towards supporting carers to enter employment that suits their needs.

There has been a tendency in the UK to see part-time working as the only solution to balancing employment with caring responsibilities, but part-time work means limited promotion and progression opportunities, and is much more likely to be available only in low-skill, low-pay sectors. Whereas women dominate part-time work, uptake is more evenly balanced between men and women where flexible working is available. I acknowledge that the Government have extended the right to request flexible working, but there are no policies in place to address the lack of jobs being advertised with that as an option.

In conclusion, this Government appear to accept the benefits of flexible working, but are doing little to expand its use as a mainstream employment model. If the Government are truly committed to supporting the ability of carers to work, they need to do more to address the issue of access to flexible work, supported by carer’s allowance and other benefits.

1.44 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in today’s proceedings and I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing today’s debate. I thank her, the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) for sharing their personal experiences. I am not a carer myself, but I have close family members who require care and I recognise the stresses that have been described.

The motion asks us to consider carers and their contribution to society. This debate has been organised to coincide with carers week, when we celebrate carers and thank them for the vital role they play in society. Carers not only perform an important role for the person whom they look after, but their selfless acts help ease the demand on our public services. Across the UK, this unpaid care is worth an estimated £100 billion each year. I often wonder what would happen to our public services if our unpaid carers decided not to continue to provide the care that they do. How would we respond to that?

Carers week is very worthwhile, but we as parliamentarians fail carers and those they look after if we debate, celebrate and take note of carers’ issues only in this week. This is just a normal week for our carers. I do not doubt that carers value our thanks and appreciation, but after speaking to a number of carers in my constituency, I know that some of them tend to avoid carer week. They are desperate for more than the usual “unsung heroes” soundbites or the “pat on the back” platitudes. This should be a week of celebration and thanks, but more importantly this should be a week when we talk with, not to, carers in order better to understand the experiences that come from being a carer.

As I said, I am not a carer and I do not pretend to know all the issues facing carers. Nevertheless, I have pledged to fight the corner for carers as I sincerely and honestly have the utmost respect for them. When I was first elected, I quickly set up 13 surgeries a month, one of which is a specific monthly carers surgery at Renfrewshire Carers Centre, which allows me to hear at first hand some of the issues and challenges that carers face. There are more than 9,000 known carers in my constituency and these surgeries can be heart wrenching, but they also motivate me to do more to help ease the burdens that our carers face daily.

My constituency office is only too well aware of the challenges and struggles that carers face, as one of my staff members, Lynn Williams, recently had to resign from her post in order to care for her husband full-time. This was a real blow for the office, because Lynn was, as we say in Scotland, a well kent figure in the caring and voluntary sectors. After three years working for the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and lobbying to improve the lives of carers, she went on to be asked to join the Scottish Government’s welfare expert working group, all the while combining full-time work with caring for her husband.

We often talk about the £100 billion a year that carers save the UK economy, but very rarely do we talk about the economic loss that occurs when our talented people such as Lynn are forced to leave the economy because of caring commitments. Carers UK and Age UK estimated that in 2012 £5.3 billion was wiped from the UK economy as a result of the lost earnings of carers giving up work to care. At a time when austerity is gripping our economy, it makes no sense whatever that we allow such a significant amount to be lost to our economy.

There is a clear and urgent need to reform the current care and support system to ensure that hard-working individuals are not forced to leave the workplace. We also need to create a working environment that raises awareness of the challenges that carers can encounter. I want to see an environment where employers are aware of the struggles and demands that carers face, and thus create a flexible working environment that can deal with those caring responsibilities. I support the Carer Positive scheme, which seeks to recognise employers who support carers. Around one in seven people in the workforce will have a caring responsibility, and with the number of carers expected to increase, we need to encourage more organisations to operate flexible working environments.
for carers. This will be good for business, good for the economy, and good for carers and the people they care for.

In Scotland, the SNP Government have a strong track record of working with carers to help develop policies that make carers’ lives a bit easier. We have invested around £114 million in programmes to support carers—more than ever before. A £13 million short break fund has provided around 15,000 carers and cared-for people with the opportunity to relax without feeling stress or guilt. The Carers Parliament has been established to provide carers, young carers and carer representatives from across Scotland with the opportunity to discuss and debate matters important to them.

My first ever speech to an SNP conference—to 3,000 people in Glasgow, incidentally—was about carers. In it I called for carer’s allowance to rise at the very least to match jobseeker’s allowance. As a bare minimum, our carers deserve parity with other income replacement benefits. I was therefore delighted when, just a few weeks later, the Scottish Government announced that, with new powers over social security, they would do precisely that—a commitment that will benefit carers by nearly £600 a year. I am aware, however, that many carers do not believe that this increase in carer’s allowance is enough, and they have a strong case. I hope that this is only a start and that the debate is now open about how we value and reward caring in Scotland.

Furthermore, only today the Scottish Government announced, through their newly appointed Social Security Minister, Jeane Freeman, that they intend to consult on a young carer’s allowance, stating: “It is unfair that some young people who have the responsibility and pressure of caring for a loved one may experience financial difficulties. That is why we will now consider whether a Young Carer’s Allowance could bridge that gap in support.”

I call on the UK Government to match the increase in carer’s allowance in Scotland and to consider a young carer’s allowance, to ensure that carers both young and old right across these islands can benefit.

I am under no illusion that there is much more that we can and should do to help improve the lives of our carers. I am sure that I am not the only Member who has been keeping an eye on #RealCarersWeek, which has been trending on Twitter. This hashtag has provided a glimpse into the lives and struggles of our carers. Tweets have been posted raising awareness of the endless bureaucracy and form-filling, which other Members have alluded to. They refer to the sleepless nights and endless visits to GPs and hospitals, and to the lack of appreciation that certain Governments have for the role that carers provide for our society. Unfortunately, there have been many disgusting responses from some ignorant and small-minded people, many of whom, ironically, will require care at some point in their lives. When politicians rightly tweet their support for carers week using #CarersWeek, I strongly encourage them to read some of the tweets under #RealCarersWeek as well.

I want to challenge the UK Government directly on the pain that their polices are causing in the lives of carers and those they care for. The Government may want to hide behind soundbites such as “hard choices”, “fairness” and “empowering the claimant.” However, they are only soundbites that attempt to justify the pain and stress that is being caused. Carers are exhausted with the endless form-filling that they are expected to undertake, or the lack of appreciation that they receive. However, the biggest stress that they experience is seeing their loved one have to deal with their own personal Government. They are angry with the effects that welfare reform is having on the quality of life of the people they care for.

I am sure that I am not the only one who was upset and angry after reading The Guardian article that suggested that 500 adapted cars, powered wheelchairs and scooters are being taken away from disabled people each week. The article, by Dr Frances Ryan, states that PIP is a disaster for disabled people and asks whether welfare reform is becoming dangerous for them. I will let others make their own conclusions, but forcing 500 disabled people each week to become housebound is not productive for the person directly affected, for their carer, or indeed for the economy.

While it is right that we take time properly to thank and credit carers for the role they perform in society, let us give carers what they really want: a commitment from parliamentarians of all persuasions that we will listen to them, work with them and deliver for them.

1.53 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) not only for securing the debate, but for bringing to the Chamber her powerful experiences and sharing them with us. I also want to thank the Minister for all that he does to ensure that carers are given the support they need and deserve.

I want to sign up to the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) that we should extend the pupil premium to all young carers. There are 160,000 young carers whose life chances are disadvantaged by the amazing duty that they perform. Extending the pupil premium to all those young people seems to me to be a very fair exchange for all that they do.

Looking at the other end of the age spectrum, 28% of my constituents in Bexhill and Battle are over 65. By comparison, the national average is 17%. Accordingly, I have a very high number of older carers in my constituency. That is what I want to focus my contribution on today. The 2011 census revealed that there are over 1.8 million carers aged 60 and over in England—almost 16% of the population in that age range. The number of carers aged 85 and over grew by 128% in the past decade, according to a report published last year by Carers UK and Age UK, and it is expected to double over the next 20 years, according to a Government report from 2014.

East Sussex has the highest proportion of over-85s in the UK. Again, that group will be highly pertinent to my constituency. Supporting this army of carers is good for the economy, and good for those people each week to become housebound is not productive for the person directly affected, for their carer, or indeed for the economy.
is provided. It also placed a duty on NHS bodies to co-operate with local authorities in delivering Care Act functions, which, if the clinical commissioning groups in East Sussex can work as a whole, will lead to a “Better Together” integrated health system in East Sussex.

I am conscious that the delivery of those rights is contingent on local authorities having the necessary financial resources in place. I welcome the devolution of business rates to my county, but the yield in East Sussex is low and the demands from a population with above-average ageing is high. Our county will need more time to deliver and more investment in infrastructure to attract new businesses to the coast if this is going to provide for carers and other groups who need local authority finance and support.

I welcome the new 2% levy that local authorities can apply to council tax, provided that it is spent on adult social care. While I champion the rights of carers within the home, many carers are caring for loved ones who reside in care homes due to complex or advanced needs. It is absolutely essential that those carers have the comfort of knowing that their loved ones will be well cared for when they are not in the home to deliver it. I have championed the care home industry, which features heavily in my constituency. Funding them properly via the new 2% levy will, I hope, result in better Care Quality Commission ratings than those that have been awarded following recent investigations.

Across East Sussex, 60% of our care homes were found to be inadequate or needing improvement. It concerns me greatly, that, because of these poor ratings, many of our carers may choose to soldier on at home when a care home would be the better choice for their loved ones. All the care homes that I have visited in my constituency have been fantastic. It is important that those that need to improve do so with the extra funding that the Government have procured.

In a rural constituency such as mine, social isolation can be a particular concern. This is exacerbated for older carers looking after loved ones. According to a report published in 2011, more than two thirds of older carers reported not getting breaks away from caring at all, with a further third getting a break only once every two or three months, or less. Let me therefore take this opportunity to thank all those constituents who do so much to give carers a break. While I am at it, let me name-check my mother and my two sisters, who regularly host teas at home attended by carers who do not get the chance to get out of the house and get looked after by someone else for a change. While it is right to look to the Government to be the ultimate support, very often it is the community and their acts of kindness, via visits, conversations, moral support and basic errands, who improve the welfare and wellbeing of our elderly carers. I salute all those who do it.

I am keen for the Government to look at the following suggestions that were made to me by the fantastic Care for the Carers team in East Sussex. First, we should help national partners reach more carers. Would it be possible to make it a duty for the NHS to identify carers, in the same way that the Care Act does for local authorities? Secondly, we should ensure that carers have good support. Would it be possible to ensure that local authorities do not charge carers for the support that they are entitled to? East Sussex is currently not charging carers, which I recognise and celebrate.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point about the NHS having a duty to identify carers. I have tried three times to introduce that in a private Member’s Bill, so I am really pleased to find support for it among Conservative Members.

Huw Merriman: I am pleased, as a novice in the House, that there is agreement across the House on that cause.

Thirdly, there should be help for carers in complex situations—those caring for people with dementia or mental health problems. It seems to me to be an obvious ask to promote good practice recommendations to commissioners and health professionals and to promote it in national policy making.

Finally, I thank and express huge admiration for all those who care for others in my constituency and beyond. I know that they seek little praise, but it is right that we should praise them this afternoon.

2 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I am very pleased to speak on this subject, which covers so many areas. I am especially pleased to support the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) in this debate, which I thank her for bringing forward. I also support her call for a young carers day, which is essential, and I congratulate her on that idea.

I was never involved in this field in my time as a councillor and in the Northern Ireland Assembly, so all I have learned about it has been through the casework in my constituency offices. I thank all my staff, who have dealt with everything and pulled this together. They are just a small group of all those who work every day in our offices to help everyone concerned.

In learning on the job, I have also learned about the policy changes. In Northern Ireland, two policy changes have suddenly thrown up different things. One was the closure of residential homes. It seemed right to move people to be looked after at home, but at the same time it actually took away some people’s chances of respite when their loved ones stayed in a residential home. At times, we need to rethink what we are doing. The other involved the mental health hospital that kept trying to send home one person who was having great difficulties. His family could not cope, however, and he eventually drowned himself after putting on his waders and walking into the local reservoir.

We all need to be aware—this week has been quite fantastic in making people aware—of how hard everyone is working in the caring industry. I have been hugely impressed by those, whether the families, the neighbours, the community or all the organisations in our constituencies, who are pulling together to provide help. I have been horrified just as much, however, by the stories I have read this week and heard about at other times through my offices. There are stories about those who have very little support, and about the sacrifices they have had to make in using their savings, selling their house, losing
their job and all the awful things that go just because they are doing what is absolutely right in looking after their loved ones.

In Northern Ireland, there are some 220,000 carers—that figure has gone up nearly 20% in the past 10 years—which is one in eight of the population. Some 30,000 people care for more than one person, and some 26% of carers provide more than 50 hours of care a week. I am sure the figures are different in all the other constituencies, but this debate today, and this week, is for getting across our points about the importance of carers. In 2016, it is estimated that carers in Northern Ireland save the state £4.6 billion. A massive amount is going on—I will not steal all the statistics from my colleague, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who I know has many more to cite—but I want to congratulate and salute all those involved.

From what I have learned this week, I believe that if we are to adopt the national strategy for carers, it needs to be pulled together into a longer-term strategy in the same way as happened with pensions. Caring covers many other fields, so a strategy needs to be worked out with those fields so that everything is joined up and they all work together. My age-old point is that it is phenomenally important to get all the countries in the United Kingdom working together.

One thing was really brought home to me during the particularly cold spell in Northern Ireland some five years ago when I was working with Home-Start to help families in Antrim. I think it was 18° below, and it came down to a heat or eat choice for some families so, by pulling together with local businesses, we helped to get food for people. The next day, those who delivered it said that two of the families broke down in tears when the food was brought to their doors because they had been pushed right to the limit. That is the sort of story we should take away from today.

There are so many points to mention, including about helping carers to be recognised by everyone and getting employers to be more flexible in looking after them, for example, a tapering pay limit. So many things are now coming out, and this week has been fantastic in teaching all of us, so I congratulate everyone involved. I thank hon. Members for listening to me.

2.5 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate, and to thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for bringing it forward for us all to participate in. This is the second such debate that she has led on this subject, and we look forward to many more on similar subjects in times to come. I also thank all those who have spoken—I understand that I will be the last to speak from the Back Benches before the shadow Minister and the Minister. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) has just nipped out, but I look forward to her speech, and I very much look forward to the Minister’s. I have honestly found the shadow Minister and the Minister to be compassionate—we have a compassionate shadow Minister and a compassionate Minister—and I am convinced that their responses will both focus on the issues we have raised and those that it is important for us to be involved with.

Carers UK estimates that there are some 6.5 million carers in the UK. Over 1 million people in the UK say that they are supporting or caring for family members who have an illness that is terminal, which is also an issue. To put those figures into perspective, there are 48 carers for every person who died last year in the United Kingdom. Statistically, that is a massive figure. It is estimated that the NHS saves some £11.6 billion each year because of these unsung heroes. We have used that expression often today, but just because we use it often does not mean that it is any less appropriate. Their contribution as volunteer carers is immeasurably valuable.

Carers may end up providing more than 100 hours of care per week. From my knowledge of those who come to see me and those with whom I have worked in my constituency, I know that 100 hours per week is a low estimate. For some of them, caring is a 24/7 exercise, such as the medical and health difficulties of those for whom they care. All too often the outside world is completely oblivious of their efforts. Even those who know carers may be oblivious, because they do not always know what is happening once the door is closed and the carer is left alone to look after the cared for. We do not know what happens behind those closed doors.

I believe that employers are forcing some workers to forgo promotions. That is clearly stated in the background information that has been provided, on which I congratulate those in the Library. Its staff are not often thanked for what they do, but the background information they have provided—the stats and the paperwork—is very detailed and informative, and they deserve to be congratulated on how well they have prepared us for this debate.

Carers have said that they have had to forgo promotions, reduce working hours or leave work altogether. More than a third of them do not feel comfortable at work talking about caring, just over a third say their employer does not understand their caring role and exactly a third say their employer does not have policies in place to support carers. Some 60% of carers have given up work or reduced their hours to provide care, 25% have been unable to pursue or have had to turn down a promotion, 37% say their work has suffered and 42% say they have struggled financially. These are not just figures; these are people’s lives.

The figures illustrate very clearly what the issues are. Some 55% of carers have struggled financially, as it says in the background information. My colleague, the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), mentioned that. I suppose all MPs have personal knowledge of this, but we are certainly aware of how carers are struggling in Northern Ireland. Some 72% of carers have given up work or reduced their hours. Again, these figures tell us where the problems are.

As the hon. Member for Eastleigh said, Carers Week is being supported by all the health organisations, including Age UK, the Carers Trust, Independent Age, Macmillan Cancer Support, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. I work with these organisations almost every day of the week. They are household names, unfortunately, because of the level of problems that we have across the whole of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

A subject close to my heart, as is the case for many of those here, is dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. A few months ago, we had a debate on that in Westminster Hall. I have not experienced it personally in my family, but I have certainly experienced it through meeting...
some of my constituents and their families. It is hard to explain to anyone who has not experienced it. These are very delicate issues to address; they are not just physical but emotional and mental. I have seen people with dementia who can often, unknowingly, become agitated or even violent. Night-time wandering can have a serious impact on carers’ sleep patterns, let alone the sufferer’s. Many people out there require someone close to them to give up much of their lives to provide the care that they need. Sleep patterns are just the tip of the iceberg.

I commend the groups in my area, particularly some of the church groups. For example, a Church of Ireland church, St Mark’s in Newtownards, has a group for the whole of Ards and North Down where people with dementia and Alzheimer’s come together to do painting and crafts. Music is a wonderful thing for helping those with dementia and Alzheimer’s. It helps to relax them, and for some people it takes them back to where they were many years ago—to their youth and their childhood.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is speaking movingly about the challenges that dementia sufferers and their carers face. This week the Carers Trust raised with me concerns about patchy levels of support in dementia care across the country. Does he agree that local authorities need to go out and learn from best practice around the country, such as the church groups in his constituency and the successful dementia gateways in Dudley, to make sure that more carers and more dementia sufferers can receive the support they so desperately need?

**Jim Shannon**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I wholeheartedly agree; I think we all do. Those of us who are aware of this issue will understand the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touches on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh referred to young carers, as have other hon. Members. Crossroads Young Carers in Newtownards has been around for many years. We have a massive number of young carers in my constituency alone. I was rather shocked to find that they were so numerically strong. That illustrated to me the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touched on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh referred to young carers, as have other hon. Members. Crossroads Young Carers in Newtownards has been around for many years. We have a massive number of young carers in my constituency alone. I was rather shocked to find that they were so numerically strong. That illustrated to me the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touched on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh referred to young carers, as have other hon. Members. Crossroads Young Carers in Newtownards has been around for many years. We have a massive number of young carers in my constituency alone. I was rather shocked to find that they were so numerically strong. That illustrated to me the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touched on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

We need an awareness campaign about carers so that they are no longer the unsung heroes but become the recognised heroes that they should be, not just in this House but across the UK. I have a letter here from the Minister of State for the Department for Work and Pensions welcoming the debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

**Jim Shannon**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I wholeheartedly agree; I think we all do. Those of us who are aware of this issue will understand the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touches on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh referred to young carers, as have other hon. Members. Crossroads Young Carers in Newtownards has been around for many years. We have a massive number of young carers in my constituency alone. I was rather shocked to find that they were so numerically strong. That illustrated to me the importance of all these groups. The issue that he touches on was frequently mentioned in the debate in Westminster Hall. Some 38 Members were involved in that debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

We need an awareness campaign about carers so that they are no longer the unsung heroes but become the recognised heroes that they should be, not just in this House but across the UK. I have a letter here from the Minister of State for the Department for Work and Pensions welcoming the debate, and it got a massive response. I thank him for his very important words.

The main social security benefit available to carers is carer’s allowance. This is for someone who provides more than 35 hours of care a week, and it entitles them to only £62.10. Furthermore, carers may incur sanctions on how much they can earn on top of the allowance. Dementia carers save the NHS more than £11 billion per year, to put a financial cost on it, yet they get only £62.10 per week for giving up their lives for someone less fortunate. I know that the Minister’s Department is not responsible for that, but, with respect, it is not a good reflection on Government, given the hours that carers spend on caring. I recognise that times are tough financially. You cannot produce a high-quality suit if you have low-quality cloth, and the same thing applies to finances. We therefore have to be realistic about what we can do, but it must be highly insulting to carers to see some of the things happening in the news when they are getting only £62.10 per week. Although the Minister is not responsible for benefits, could he give some pointer for carers with regard to benefits advice? I give them benefits advice when they come to my office. To be fair, the benefits system is very responsive. We just have to point people in the right direction and show them the right opportunity. Perhaps there is a role for Government in that. I understand that our colleagues in Scotland have considered upping the carer’s allowance. That was discussed in our debate on dementia and Alzheimer’s.

Carers UK calculates that the value of unpaid care is some £132 billion each year—the equivalent of NHS spending. Although it is hard to calculate how much of this relates to people who care for someone who has a terminal illness, research has found that carers who look after someone with one of the four most prevalent cancers—lung, breast, colorectal or prostate—provide care worth £219 million per year: a third of the total of end-of-life care costs. Providing end-of-life care—that difficult time for people emotionally and physically—saves the NHS a massive amount of money as well. Other people have referred to personal things in families. My mother looked after my dad before he passed away, and that was not always easy. My mum is a fresh 85-year-old, or she will be on 14 July. If it were not for the closeness and the commitment of family, we would face a lot of other serious issues.

According to research by Carers UK’s Northern Ireland subsidiary, Carers NI, 16% of carers cannot afford to pay their utility bills, while nearly 40% cannot afford their bills without struggling financially. I can vouch for that in my constituency, given the numbers of people who come to me who are finding it very difficult to make ends meet financially. The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) raised the question of heating or eating during the cold spell. That is a reality today as well, perhaps even more so than in the past. A third of
carers are using savings to pay everyday living costs, and a third have used up any savings they had and now have nothing to fall back on. Thirty-two per cent. of carers have ended up in debt as a result of caring, and over four in 10 carers—almost half—are cutting back on food or heating. Furthermore, carers experience higher levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the UK. We have the highest levels of fuel poverty in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Information given to us by the Library indicates that 51% of carers 

"have let a health problem go untreated...Half of carers (50%) have seen their mental health get worse...Two thirds of carers (66%) have given up work or reduced their hours to care...Almost half of carers (47%) have struggled financially...Almost one third of carers (31%) only get help when it is an emergency."

That is the reality for carers. Full-time carers are twice as likely as non-carers to be in bad health. Eighty per cent. of carers say that caring has had a negative impact on their health, and half of carers state that they experienced depression after taking on a caring role.

Sixty-three per cent. of carers say that they are at breaking point, and one in six carers receive no practical support at all. Despite an ongoing rise in the number of carers in the UK and sharp rises in the number of people caring full time, the number of people who receive carers’ assessments and carers’ services is falling. When we hear all those stats, we need to remember that there are people behind them who have to deal with reality.

It is often said, and we need to say it again, that food banks have been extremely helpful. That is the case in my constituency and, I am sure, in others. Food banks operate out of compassion and heart. They bring together Government bodies, churches and individuals who want to do their bit for the community. The food bank in my area, run by the Trussell Trust, has done exceptional work with carers, those who are under financial pressure and those who are experiencing delays in benefit or not getting all the benefits that they should be getting.

The food bank is very much a part of life in my constituency. By the way, I think it is good to have food banks in our constituencies. They bring a lot of good things to my area. I do not see them as a negative; I see them as a positive, because people reach out and want to help each other. That is good, because if we help each other, we do what we are supposed to be doing in this world, which is to make lives better as best we can.

Carers UK estimates that the number of carers will grow to 9 million by 2037. Will any of us in this Chamber be here in 2037? I am not sure. I probably will not be—if I am, I will be the oldest man in the world, but that is by the way. We have to look at the stats, because they take us to where we will be in a few years time. I hope that the Government take cognisance of the stats, because it is important to form a strategy.

It is clear already that the support provided to carers does not suffice. Independent analysis demonstrates that the gap in funding for social care is expected to reach between £2.8 billion and £3.5 billion by the end of this Parliament, and that does not even begin to cover what will happen if the Government do not take into account the fact that the number of carers is growing. This should serve as a wake-up call to everyone—the Government, the regional Assemblies in the devolved Administrations and all stakeholders—about the reality ahead. There will be significantly more carers than there are already, and appropriate planning is needed to ensure that support is there.

I conclude with these comments. I welcome the fact that the Government are developing a new carers strategy, and I look forward to the Minister’s response on that. It is important that we, as elected representatives, put forward this debate in a positive fashion to get a strategy and responses to our questions, which we can feed back to our constituents. On the issues that I and others have raised, I impress on the policy makers the need to remember that there are real people behind all the statistics. It is people such as carers whom we are elected to serve. I can only hope that the debate will raise awareness of the need for urgent and large-scale reform of the way in which the Government treat carers.

A number of carer support groups come together in the churches and the community centres of Strangford. They are wonderful people who do great work, and they deserve to be supported and helped by us, as MPs, through our Government and through the regional Assemblies, in whatever way we can. Those groups bring together all the people of the Ards and North Down Council area who want to participate. They give carers much needed opportunities for rest and socialisation. The opportunity to socialise and interact with others, or to get a moment or two to themselves, can make a world of difference to carers.

2.24 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing this debate in carers week. Frankly, one week in the year is not enough; carers care for more than just one week in the year. I will talk predominantly about informal carers—the people who are looking after family—but we should also remember the people who work in the care industry, because they support the carers and the people who need caring for. We have problems getting high-quality care because we do not value those people. We pay them very poorly. They work for companies that often treat them badly. Pay for travel time may not be included, and they may be doing 15-minute visits. These jobs are therefore short-term and temporary, and people get out of them as soon as they have the opportunity. Unless we turn this into a profession that is valued and respected and includes development—as we have done with nursing, over the years—our relatives and loved ones will not be cared for by people who actually want to do the job. I would just like to open with that.

We have heard a lot of detailed statistics about informal carers. Across the UK, 10% of people—6.5 million—are involved in caring. In Scotland, the proportion is higher, at 17%. People often do not identify themselves. Those carers are not always the same people, because there is a turnover—a change—every year of one third, or 2.1 million people. Some of them, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, will be people caring for loved ones at the end of their life. When we lose that loved one, although we may face other challenges, we leave the informal care group, but other people take up that role. The same number of people—more than 2 million—enter and leave the role of informal carer each year.
We have heard about the cost that informal carers save the state. If we were to replace them with professional staff, the cost would be almost greater than that of the NHS, but how do we treat the people who deliver that care? A third of them live in poverty. That is because we have tangled things up so much around carer’s allowance, and we never seem to have a “health in all policies” view, so on different days of the week we make decisions that absolutely contradict each other.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson)—I hope I got that right—mentioned some of the changes that have been made, including to the personal independence payment and the employment and support allowance work-related activity group. Perhaps the Government think that those changes send people back to work, but the reality is that many of the people affected, particularly where mental health or waxing and waning illnesses are involved, will not get back to work. That household will simply become more impoverished. We need to realise that that has an impact. If someone cannot afford to do things, their quality of life goes down. People who are caring—1.3 million of them for more than 50 hours a week—already have a pretty tough life without having to deal with poverty on top of everything else.

We have heard that carer’s allowance is some £62 a week; it is pretty insulting that that is less than jobseeker’s allowance. People tend to spend six or nine months on jobseeker’s allowance, but they may depend on carer’s allowance, along with other benefits, for much longer than that. To pay someone, in essence, £62 a week for the hours that they put in is derisory. In Scotland, if I may correct the hon. Member for Strangford, we are not just considering raising carer’s allowance to £72 a week; that is a commitment. It will become the same as jobseeker’s allowance. Even that is very much a baseline. It does not recognise what those people need.

Of course, there are people in caring situations for whom money is not an issue, because they have a pension or large amounts of savings, but they are not the generality of cases, if a third of carers are in poverty. Half of them have used up all their savings and have had to borrow. A quarter of them have had to re-mortgage their home. That all adds stress to people who contribute massively to society.

We have well over a million older carers, as the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) mentioned. What has not been mentioned in this debate is that people on retirement pension do not qualify for carer’s allowance. That seems bizarre, because one of the biggest groups of carers is people who are retired. In the past, people would have been caring for a partner as they became more frail, but as people are living longer, we are retiring people who are caring for a parent, or for a parent and a partner. The hon. Member for Eastleigh spoke of caring for little ones and older ones, but we actually have people who are caring for older ones and much older ones. That is massively challenging.

At the other end, we have heard mention of young carers, who are defined as those under the age of 16. They are completely excluded from carer’s allowance as it starts only at the age of 16, yet those children again play a major role and suffer major detriment. They will often be in a poor household, because the parent—as it usually is—for whom they are caring will have suffered from the various cuts to support. Their parent may have a physical or mental illness, may suffer from addiction, or may in other ways not be the parent in the family. If 12 and 13-year-olds are carrying that burden, and cannot afford to go on a school trip, and do not have time to do the little Saturday job or paper round that allowed the rest of us to invest in the height of fashion, we are allowing their quality of life to be lowered still further.

Young adult carers are defined as being 16 to 25. If they are students, they are automatically excluded from carer’s allowance, regardless of the fact that a quarter of them work more than 20 hours a week. If they work less than 35 hours a week, they do not qualify for anything. If they are official students, they qualify for nothing.

We have all these pockets of people who are working really hard, yet we as a state are offering no support to them. That is the minimum that we should be doing. They will still be doing a hard job and putting in long hours that save the country masses of money. We should all feel ashamed that they can have to choose between eating and heating, and that there are young people who have no opportunities and know that their job opportunities will be limited by going through that. Obviously, given my health background, I have looked at the health of these people, and they are twice as likely to be ill. Indeed, 8% of them are on disability living allowance as was, so we have someone who has frailty caring for someone else who has frailty.

One fifth of the people who are putting in more than 50 hours a week are not getting any services because, as has been mentioned, they do not identify themselves as carers, no one else identifies them as carers, and they have no idea where they should go to get help. I back the call that this should be part of the health service’s duty. If a doctor diagnoses someone with advanced cancer or dementia, or a child with disability, they should ask, “Who are the carers here?” That is part of the primary care role in Scotland, but I am not sure what the roles are in England. Certainly, as part of the quality framework in Scotland, there must be that discussion. There is still room for improvement in our communities on that. People simply see themselves as looking after their family, but actually, they are looking after all of us.

We know that the ageing population will increase. We already have 800,000 people with dementia, who are being looked after by 670,000 carers. At the moment, 60% of us will be carers at some point. As the numbers increase, all of us must expect to spend a portion of our lives as a carer. If that always causes massive detriment to our work, our ability to do anything and our quality of life, we will have allowed the quality of life of everyone to deteriorate.

For women, there is a disproportionate hit, because 60% of carers are women, and one in four of those women will end up giving up work. As was mentioned, they end up in part-time, low-quality, low-paid jobs, and they do not get promotion. Right at the end, they get a rubbish pension, which, as we have heard in many debates in this Chamber, may be plucked out from underneath them. That is the last slap in the face. With modern technology, we should be able to have more home working and flexible working to allow people with talent and skill to remain active and have a career, even if they face a few years of having to commit to
caring for someone. As we go into the future, whether we are carers or not, as politicians we need to make sure that we provide the basic funding and services to support carers as they support those who need help.

As individuals, we need to do more in our communities. We have heard mention of carer-friendly communities. I was honoured last Saturday to be part of the launch of one of my local towns, Prestwick, as a dementia-friendly community. It was a fantastic event, and the turnout of the community at the market cross for music, food, cakes and singing by the wonderful Musical Minds choir, which is made up of people with dementia, was fantastic. The community is already coming forward, and local businesses have undergone training.

Within that, we have a group called Crossroads, which supports carers and allows them little informal breaks, so that they can try to keep some of themselves. Women are used to being recognised as somebody or other's wife and somebody or other's mother once they have got past being so-and-so's daughter. The problem for somebody facing this intensity of care is that they can feel like they disappear altogether—that they as a person have no outside view at all. Their hobbies are gone and, as was mentioned earlier, their friends are gone.

It is important, not just as politicians and people in families, but as members of our communities, that we value and recognise carers if they are out and about, and accept the person they are caring for, no matter if they are a bit loud, if their wheelchair gets in the way, or if they need time to get on the bus. If we accept the person they are caring for, the carer will also feel more accepted in our communities. Basically, I call on everybody, because we all have a role to play.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Just as we must not lose our recognition of people, or identify them just by their disability, the fact that they need care or the fact that they are carers, it is important that we recruit carers to contribute to thinking on public policy—and not just when it relates to care issues; often, carers are disfranchised and disconnected from society because of their caring commitments. All of us at all political levels need to do more to engage carers, so that they contribute to a range of public policies.

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I refer him back to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) about the Carers Parliament in Scotland, which looks at young carers, young adult carers and older carers. When they consult, the Scottish Government make great efforts to pluck people out of the voluntary world to come and tell them how it really is, because unless we hear how it really is, we are not going to fix it.

We all have a duty, including the Government, to look more at health in all policies. We cannot fix everything, but we should not be adding poverty on top of all who need help.

There have been some interesting and thoughtful contributions from hon. Members. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), the hon. Members for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). We also heard briefly from the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and my hon. Friend the Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and for Foyle (Mark Durkan).

There are more than 6.5 million carers in the UK. We have all used different figures in the debate, but I tend to use that one. In my constituency, there are nearly 11,000 carers. I have known ever since I became a Member of Parliament that many of them have a heavy workload due to the ill health in my constituency.

In many areas of the country, people are living longer. As the population ages, we are living with increasingly complex care needs. Three in five of us will become carers—the hon. Member for Eastleigh touched on that. There are also more older carers. In England and Wales, almost 1.3 million people aged over 65 give unpaid care to a family member or friend. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) spoke about the fact that, between 2001 and 2011, the number of carers who are over 85 increased from 38,000 to more than 87,000. More than half of carers aged over 85 give 50 hours or more of care every week. That is certainly something to think about.

We are failing to address key issues for carers. Inadequate support for carers and the people they care for damages carers’ quality of life. I will argue that Ministers must do more to recognise the importance of carers and to put in place policies to address their needs.

First, many carers continue to suffer financial hardship because of their caring responsibilities. As we have heard, a recent report by the New Policy Institute found that 1.2 million carers are in poverty. It is shocking to think that so many carers are struggling to make ends meet. In the Carers UK report, “State of Caring 2016”, half the carers surveyed reported cutting back on essentials such as food and heating. Others are having to borrow money, and more than a third use their own savings. The hon. Member for Strangford raised those issues. I feel very strongly that no carer should be pushed into poverty because of their caring responsibilities. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Workington for talking about financial hardship among carers. It is an increasing problem.

Secondly, too many carers are left to cope on their own with little or no support. As we have heard, one in five of the carers who give 50 hours or more of care each week receive no practical support with their caring role. More needs to be done to protect carers’ health and wellbeing. We must ensure that carers are identified at the earliest possible stage so that they can find the help and support they need. As I said earlier, in the past
I have introduced private Members’ Bills to place a duty on GPs and NHS bodies to identify carers and ensure that they are referred for support. The last time I introduced such a Bill, the coalition Government did not support it. However, that duty on the NHS to identify carers was included as a pledge in Labour’s manifesto in 2015.

The Government have promised a new carers strategy to give carers “the support they need to live well while caring for a family member or friend.”

However, to achieve that aim, any new strategy must include a duty on GPs and NHS bodies to identify carers. After all, the NHS is nearly always the first point of contact for carers as they begin caring, and so is best placed to identify them. I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle for a vital change that we can make for carers.

Thirdly, I want to talk about the chronic underfunding of social care and the impact on carers. I have raised that many times with the care Minister and most recently with the Chancellor. In the previous Parliament, there were five years of funding reductions for adult social care, totalling £4.6 billion. Local authority spending on social care for older people fell in real terms by 17%, even as the number of people aged 85 and over rose by 9%. Three hundred thousand fewer older people receive publicly funded adult social care now compared with 2009. In the Carers UK survey, 60% of carers who had seen a change in the amount of support they received said that that support had been reduced due to cost or availability.

I hope that the care Minister will not repeat the Chancellor’s mantra about the 2% social care precept and the increases in the better care fund arriving by 2019-20. The 2% social care precept is inadequate to meet even the Government’s minimum wage policy. In my local area of Salford, the cost of paying increases in the national minimum wage in the care sector will be £2.7 million, but the 2% social care precept will raise only £1.6 million. In effect, the council tax payers of my local area are paying for that Government policy of increasing the national minimum wage. The Minister knows that there is no increase in the better care fund this year and only £105 million extra next year. It is hard to understand why Ministers have refused the reasonable request from the Local Government Association to bring forward £700 million of better care funding to address the financial pressures that it faces this year and next year.

We know that there are real concerns about the financial viability of many of our social care providers. In evidence this week to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry on discharging older people from acute hospitals, the president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Care, Harold Bodmer, said that the sustainability of the residential care and domiciliary care sectors was the main concern for social services directors. He also pointed to significant regional differences. He said:

“I wouldn’t underestimate the impact of the differential effect on the social care market in different parts of the country, because there isn’t a domiciliary care problem in the north-east, but there is in parts of Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and Norfolk. It is really difficult to get domiciliary care in north Norfolk.”

I thank the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire for talking about home care not being valued. It may be that people in parts of the country where they cannot get domiciliary care are voting with their feet. People do not want to work in a sector that does not value or pay them properly. Home care should be a much more valued role.

I have real concerns that this fragility in care provision could leave more people without adequate care and put more pressure on unpaid family carers. This is worrying because more people are already providing care for more hours than ever before: 1.4 million people now give more than 50 hours of unpaid care a week, and that number is rising faster than the increase in the general population of carers. There has been an increase of 25% in people caring more than 50 hours a week in the past 10 years compared with an increase of just 11% in the total number of carers.

The Care Act 2014 entitles all carers to a timely assessment of their needs. However, one in three carers who have had an assessment in the past year had to wait six months or longer for it. Worryingly, nearly 40% of carers caring for someone at the end of life also had to wait six months or more for an assessment. That is unacceptable. Carers for people at the end of life should be prioritised. We have talked about that in different meetings here.

Timely assessments are surely one of the starting points in providing support to carers, but even when carer assessments take place it seems that they do not properly address carers’ needs. Almost 70% of carers in the Carers UK survey felt that their need to have regular breaks from caring was not considered in their assessment. Members have rightly repeatedly referred to the importance of breaks for carers. Seventy-four per cent. of working age carers did not feel that the support they needed to juggle care with work was sufficiently considered. We need those important assessments to be more than box-ticking exercises, but that can happen only if the Government invest in support for carers and give local authorities the resources that they need to provide care and support. I hope that hon. Members have been able to meet and listen to a number of carers this week—indeed, I understand from the debate that that is already happening.

At the carers week parliamentary event I met Katy Styles, who cares for her husband Mark, and she told me about a number of issues that she has encountered as a carer for a person with motor neurone disease. What I felt most in talking to Katy was that she wanted to be recognised and listened to as a carer, but she also raised issues of financial hardship. Katy and Mark Styles told their story to the all-party group on motor neurone disease, and Katy said:

“We told them about how we were once two professionals and how our lives had been devastated by Mark’s condition. I explained that as a teacher I had earned £150 a day and now I receive £62.10 a week in carer’s allowance for providing never-ending care and support for my husband. Mark explained how he was forced to retire at 46, that our income had fallen off a cliff, but our bills continued to increase. He told the group about how we travel miles and miles to receive care, and how we had to make adaptions to our home which were paid for with savings that we will never be able to replace.”

The MND Association found in its survey that more than half of carers for people with MND care for more than 100 hours per week, yet only a third have had a
carers' assessment, and four out of 10 people were unaware of their right to one. Caring for more hours each week can mean carers having to give up work and facing financial hardship, and we have touched on that in this debate. Some 2.3 million adults in the UK have given up work to care, and almost 3 million have reduced their working hours.

I do not want to leave the issue of financial hardship without mentioning women born in the 1950s who are carers, but who are now not getting their state pension until later in their 60s. I have spoken about carers such as Marian, who has given up work at the age of 62 to look after her mother and her brother, both of whom have dementia. Her only source of income is a small private pension of £2,500, and her husband will have to support her until she gets her state pension at 65. The Minister has probably not been involved in many of the debates on the state pension age, but many women born in the 1950s are in such a situation and now face financial hardship.

We have mentioned those who give up work to care or who struggle to manage their working hours, and about combining care with work, and the feeling in the debate was that more needs to be done to ensure that employers provide carers with enough support. Some companies are leaders in providing support for their staff who are carers. For example, Centrica offers flexible working, access to counsellors, and an employee-led carers network that is supported by the company's senior leadership. Its carer's leave policy offers up to one month matched paid leave per year to help with caring responsibilities, and it also takes into account that caring responsibilities may fall to people who are not immediate family members.

I have concerns that members of this House are not able to provide those levels of support. IPSA contracts for Members' staff offer only five days' leave for caring reasons, and even that is stated as being for emergencies and dependants only. That minimal policy does not reflect good practice—the Minister will know what that is—and we could do better for our staff. I invite the Minister, the hon. Member for Eastleigh and others who have raised that issue, to join me in talking to IPSA to request a change in that policy. It is not good enough not to have better practice when supporting our staff who are carers.

As has been said, carers week is an important annual event because it provides us with an opportunity to recognise the contribution that carers make to society, and to highlight the challenges they face. I thank all organisations that support carers and provide hon. Members with so much information about caring issues: Carers UK, Age UK, Carers Trust, Independent Age, Macmillan Cancer Support, the MND Association, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. My constituency contains the excellent Salford Carers Centre, and an amazing group of young carers are supported by the young carers project. I look forward to meeting them tomorrow. I also thank Marie Curie, which launched a report on end-of-life care for LGBT people in the House yesterday, as well as Together for Short Lives and the Rainbow Trust Charity for their support for children with life-limiting conditions and their families. Finally, I thank the UK's 6.5 million carers, and especially the 11,000 carers in my constituency, for the essential role that they play in supporting our health and care system. Carers need and deserve so much more respect and support than they are currently given.

2.53 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing this debate and on the way she opened it, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this important debate during carers week. I will start where the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) ended, and thank all those who are involved in caring in our society. As we have heard from every speaker, carers make an invaluable contribution to the UK that we could not do without, and perhaps I can illustrate that by citing some of the remarks made by colleagues during the debate.

I will touch on some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh in the remarks I have prepared for this debate, and I will also comment on her other points. She started with a graphic description of what might happen if carers were not around and if they decided not to do what they do every day, which brought the point home to us. She spoke about how people become a carer, and said that it could happen to any of us at any time. At last year's national care awards I remember watching a video in which the point was made vividly that any of us in that hotel room could become a carer within 24 hours, and we can all understand that. As others pointed out, carers are no longer a minority group but people we all know—many of us are closely connected to carers, if not carers ourselves—and we are all only going to become more closely involved in the future. She, like others, made that point very well.

My hon. Friend also spoke, as did others, about the need to identify people not solely as carers but as husbands, wives, partners, employees—everything else they still are—and about the great danger of someone being pigeonholed because they have become a carer. It is important to remember that someone does not lose their identity when they become a carer. Hon. Members also highlighted the importance of carers week. I am proud to be the president of Carers in Bedfordshire—I have been for some years—and I thank it for its work. All hon. Members have thanked their local groups.

My hon. Friend was not the only colleague to speak of her personal experiences of caring. As I have mentioned from the Dispatch Box before, the range of Members' experiences goes far beyond what the media are keen to portray and touches on virtually all aspects of life outside. When I hear the cares and experiences that colleagues bring to this place, I always hope that people outside read our debates and understand a bit more about us, why we want to be representatives in Parliament and the personal experiences we bring.

The hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and others spoke about finances, on which subject I could spend the whole 15 or 20 minutes. I know that this subject is particularly important to the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, the spokesperson for the Opposition. On carers allowance, which the hon. Member for Workington focused on, the Government keep the earnings limit under review and keep under consideration whether an increase is warranted and affordable. The
increase of 8% in 2015 far outstripped the increase in wages. The earnings limit is currently £110 a week, but that is a net figure, and if allowable expenses, such as childcare and pension contributions, are deducted, a claimant might earn significantly more. The limit enables a carer to maintain some contact with the employment market and achieve greater financial independence, but I recognise and would not minimise the constant financial pressures and difficulties facing families. The limit is kept under review. Also, as I said, there is a wider review of the carers strategy, which has allowed a lot of people to make contributions on finance, not just the amount but the important interlinking of benefits. That point will not be missed, and I thank her for raising the matter.

Barbara Keeley: Carers charities often raise with us the link with things such as the national minimum wage. The Minister talked about the figure last year, but the national minimum wage changed in April, and many of the carers trying to keep a part-time job going will be at that level, so it seems sensible to link the threshold with the national minimum wage so that when the national minimum wage increases, so does the threshold.

Alistair Burt: I cannot make that specific commitment, but I understand fully the hon. Lady’s point. As I said before, the earnings limit and all the factors affecting it are kept constantly under review, but I am sure that Treasury colleagues will not have missed the remarks made today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) also made the point about carers not being a small minority. She commended Carers in Wiltshire, and I commend her for being a volunteer—another example of the experience we all bring to this debate—and she raised the important issue of entitlement to benefits and signposting. In our call for evidence as part of the review of the carers strategy, respondents raised the importance of people being directed towards the things they need as soon as possible. The moment someone becomes a carer, their world changes, and they need as much information as possible at that time. She was right to mention the importance of signposting in particular. She spoke with great passion on the subject.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson), who also spoke from personal experience, made a point about access to work. I shall talk about employment later, but she made her point strongly, and again she was not the only person to recognise that, although we all wish for a world in which burdens are shared equally, in truth they are not. Women carry the biggest burden when it comes to caring, and will probably continue to do so for some time. Recognising the extra pressures on women is particularly important. The hon. Lady made that point very well.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) was particularly helpful in saying that although it is carers week for us, it is just another week for carers. I also liked it when he said that it was a week to talk “with”, not “to” carers. That was a particularly well made point. He spoke forcefully about the reality of life—the sleepless nights and other issues that carers experience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) brought up the issue of care homes. I am not going to linger on that subject, but, as some colleagues know, I am particularly exercised about safety in care homes. It is my belief that someone in the care of the state, whether it be the NHS, local authorities or anyone else, needs to be as safe as a care home, a mental health institution or in learning disability facilities as they would be in an intensive care unit. As I expressed in yesterday’s debate about Southern Health, that is simply not the case.

I am very conscious of issues surrounding care homes. I have a round-table meeting on Monday with those responsible for the monitoring and regulation of care homes, and I pay tribute to the Care Quality Commission and others who are trying to do a good job of regulation, but this also involves some of the groups that are critical of regulation, want to see more done and want to ensure that there is safety in care homes. Some of the stories of abuse that we read about in the papers need to become fewer and fewer until they are extinct.

I want to praise the National Care Association because there are many good care homes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said. It is important to keep the right balance in recognising the quality of good homes without minimising the pressures on them. When things that should not be happening are going on, it is quite difficult to maintain that balance. I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend mentioned this important issue. I commend, too, the ideas coming forward from the carers team in East Sussex, and I urge members to ensure that the ideas put to my hon. Friend will be put into our national call for evidence. They have until the end of this month to do so. I do not envisage a statutory instrument to extend that still further, should there be a rush of evidence at the end of the month, but we never know in the present circumstances. Getting that information in would be very helpful.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) was not the only one to refer to the pressures on our own caseworkers, who do so much work to look after people in the House. I appreciated his mention of that point. He hoped that the carers strategy would be a long-term strategy. I hope it will, too. The strategy should be reviewed from time to time—this is the first review for two or three years—and that is certainly the aim. That is why I would like the strategy to look slightly beyond the immediate and consider how to build for the future rather than simply having a snapshot now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—I call him my hon. Friend—is exceptionally generous and courteous to all Front-Bench Members when he speaks. I would like to tell him how much that is appreciated—it really is—when he is so genuine in expressing his views. He spoke of his personal experiences, pressures in Northern Ireland and the Crossroads young carers in Newtownards who particularly stressed the difficulties faced by young carers and the things that they often miss out on. My hon. Friend spoke about a singing group. A few weeks ago, I went to Biggleswade at the request of the Alzheimer’s Society to join a singing group, and I sang some songs with the people there. It was certainly an uplifting experience that morning. I commend those groups and the carers who work with them.
The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) made a considered and thoughtful contribution, as usual. She spoke about all the financial pressures. Particularly telling was her comment that although there are a relatively fixed number of carers and although it is steadily growing to 6.5 million, it is a replaceable 6.5 million and about a third leave for all sorts of reasons.

On bereaved carers, I was contacted through Twitter by someone in that position who asked whether the strategy and review would cover them, and I answered “Yes, it will and it should”. The moment that caring for someone stops because of bereavement, the carer’s life has changed—perhaps in an anticipated way, but it is has still changed. Caring for people in those circumstances is really important. We must not forget this group, so I greatly appreciated what the hon. Lady said. She also spoke of the need to ensure that social care is seen as a profession as much as nursing and domiciliary care are throughout the NHS and elsewhere, and I thoroughly agree with her.

The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), whose background in caring requires her to be listened to seriously every time she speaks about this issue, made a number of comments. I shall deal with the subject of finance a little later. Let me say first that I will ensure that the review that we are conducting will cover early identification in the NHS. We are trying to ensure that it takes place earlier and earlier. The issue of GP identification is very important, and I am pleased that the hon. Lady raised it again.

Barbara Keeley: I should be happy to send the Minister a copy of my Bill and the explanatory notes if that would help to elucidate the points that we have made.

Alistair Burt: I have no doubt that those are already deep within the recesses of the Department of Health, but if it would speed things up and provide encouragement, I should be grateful if the hon. Lady did indeed do that.

The hon. Lady also made an important point about our staff in the House. She said that we should look after them. I appreciate the point that she made about the staff of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, and I will look into how we can best ensure that we recognise properly—in line with best employment practice elsewhere—that those who work for us bear considerable burdens of caring from time to time.

I am grateful for the opportunity to come to the House and share the important work that is under way across the UK and the EU to develop a new cross-Government strategy for carers. I continue to be humbled by the many powerful, honest and informed contributions that we have heard throughout the afternoon from Members who have described the carers whom they know and represent, as well as their personal experiences. Those views, and the many others that we have received so far, will be fully taken into account as the Department works with Government colleagues, stakeholders and, crucially, carers themselves to develop the new strategy.

Today we have been reminded that behind the statistics stand spouses, partners, parents—in fact, all manner of relatives, friends and neighbours—who are providing care right now in our communities. Their commitment can scarcely be quantified or questioned, and we must ensure that our own commitment to support people is demonstrated clearly as well.

I pay tribute to the national care awards, which are sponsored by LloydsPharmacy, Carers UK and The Sun. I was at the awards ceremony a couple of weeks ago, and we met the winners at lunchtime. The Prime Minister was kind enough to offer No. 10 Downing Street for a lunchtime reception, and we took people round. We are always struck when people like that say that it is a privilege to be there. We say to them, “No, it is our privilege that you are here with us. It is the other way round.” Those people were a great group—great winners. We went to a dinner at that night. Radio 2 was very good: there is always a table of wonderful people to support the awards. When we hear the personal stories—which have been reflected in some of what we have heard in the House today—we are all immensely impressed. Let me again pay tribute to those awards; they do one of the jobs that we have all been speaking about this afternoon—valuing and recognising carers for what they do in so many different circumstances.

Before we go any further, may I offer a small philosophical comment? I picked this up from a piece in The Guardian by a writer called Madeleine Bunting. I do not read The Guardian all the time, contrary to the belief of many of my colleagues, but every now and again I am struck by something that is really good, and what Madeleine Bunting wrote is important. She was writing about what care is. We talk about it—we talk about the facts and figures and the finance here in the House—but what is it precisely, and where is it going? Madeleine Bunting wrote:

“We recognise instantly when we experience it: an interaction that acknowledges a moment of human connection. It may be brief, but it expresses and confirms a common humanity, a recognition of the individual—and always involves a particular quality of attention.

But the characteristics needed to provide this kind of care are losing cultural traction. Attentiveness requires two crucial ingredients: patience and the willingness to put one’s own preoccupations aside and to be available to another. Yet in a myriad of ways we are all being groomed by consumerism and digital media—to be the opposite: impatient and self-preoccupied. That impatience makes us easily distractable, addicted to the next stimulus.”

I think that Madeleine Bunting was making a really important point. The people about whom we have been talking have avoided that: they have patience, and a commitment to others that is beyond many of us. However, there is concern about society—concern about where it is going and the pressures that it is under. Demographics suggest that we will need more care, and yet certain pressures are making it more difficult for that to be realised. What will carers be like in the future if they have become too distracted and too self-occupied? That is not the case with carers now, but it is a valid point to raise with regard to the future.

We owe a duty of care to this vast army of people, who show their patience and their compassion for others. I am talking about not just providing them with the support, tools and information that they need to care well, but ensuring that their own health, wellbeing and life goals are not compromised. Our respect is unreserved, but respect is not enough. We must never lose sight of that fact if a new carer strategy is to succeed.

I should say at this point that I do not wish to paint a negative picture of caring. Although personal sacrifices are made each and every day, many carers have told us that it remains a privilege to care, and that they have a strong desire to repay the kindness of others. Indeed,
[Alistair Burt]

carers derive immense satisfaction and peace of mind from being the primary source of comfort and reassurance for friends and loved ones. However, that satisfaction must not be at the expense of carers’ own mental and physical health.

We have also heard this afternoon about the great diversity in types of caring. There is no such thing as a typical carer—carers are people of all ages and from all walks of life, and those for whom they care have different needs. In particular, we neglect at our peril the needs of children and young people with caring obligations. They are most at risk of having not just their health and wellbeing compromised, but their education and career ambitions too.

There is no “one size fits all”. We must be alert to that as we attempt to craft new and improved support for all those providing care in our communities. It is no surprise that one in six of us is currently caring. As life expectancies extend and our population grows, caring for others has already become part of the fabric of our lives. All those who have spoken today have made it clear that they are not affected by the lazy mindset that tells us that carers are other people; carers are all of us. As a constituency MP, I have had the privilege of visiting carers and carers’ groups in Bedfordshire. As a Minister, I have spoken to carers’ groups in relation to pulling together the new carers strategy. I strongly commend those who work in my own county.

Almost 20 years after the Carers Act 1995 first gave official acknowledgement to those providing “regular and substantial” care, the Care Act 2014 now gives carers new rights, including parity of assessment, advice and support with those for whom they care. Those new rights are a historic step forward. We have provided local authorities with £433 million in 2016-17 for new burdens arising from the Act.

We know that the Care Act is taking time to bed in. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South referred to the matters that affect assessment, and I understand them very well. Care varies from place to place. A group from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services working with the Department is looking at those variations in care, so that in places where assessments are much slower than in others, we are looking at what can be done and how things can be improved. That is very much on our mind.

Barbara Keeley: Having been present during discussions about certain groups of carers, perhaps the Minister will tell us whether he believes that carers of people who are at end of life should be prioritised for assessment. It is pointless to have people waiting six months when the person for whom they care may have only a few weeks or a few months to live.

Alistair Burt: I will ensure that that is considered as an important point of the assessment. I will write to the hon. Lady in relation to that.

Let me turn to finance now. There is always concern about the amount of finance that is available. It is almost impossible to get the right amount. By spending around £2.5 billion a year on benefits in Great Britain, benefiting more than three-quarters of a million carers, we are trying to respond to the needs that are there. That money provides a measure of financial support and recognition for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide care. As I said earlier, those allowances remain constantly under review. As this debate has made clear, it is not just about finance, but about all the other things, including supporting young carers and making sure that they are not forgotten and remembering that employers play an important part. I commend NHS England for the important work that it has done in relation to carers and for its commitment to carers.

I also want to mention the results that our call for evidence has produced, just to give people some assurance that these things are on our minds. We have received 3,800 responses so far, 85% of which are from carers themselves. A great number of the responses have been candid and honest, and it will frighten my officials if I read them out. They describe financial hardship; a lack of recognition and involvement; the impact on carers’ health and wellbeing; the difficulty of maintaining life outside caring; and frustration with access to assessments and services. All these issues are on our minds.

The need to ensure that carers get the recognition they deserve has been well illustrated in the compassionate speeches that we have heard today. Carers are vital, and not just in carers week. There is also a young carers awareness day—it was on 27 January this year—sponsored by the Carers Trust. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) for holding a round-table about carers recently. This matter is on the minds of everyone in the House and I appreciate the courtesy of hon. Members in giving their time to deal with this important issue this afternoon.

3.15 pm

Mims Davies: Thank you for allowing me a few more moments to speak at the end of this important debate. Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to thank all Members for their thoughtful and helpful contributions today. I also want to thank the Minister for his characteristically compassionate and understanding comments on the carers strategy and for taking on board the comments that have been made across the Chamber. I am grateful for the wide-ranging comments from those on the Opposition Benches, who have also been most helpful.

Carer signposting is vital. Recognition by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is also vital—a point that came up yesterday with the staff in my own office. I have also had women who were born in the 1950s coming to see me in my constituency about their roles as carers resulting in financial hardship. I also spoke about my own personal experiences of caring, which resulted in some challenging financial times and a drop in the quality of life. I therefore never underestimate the financial challenges that face carers and their tenacity in making ends meet. That is always astonishing.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) for talking about the brilliant work being done in her constituency and for championing the “Walk a mile in my shoes” event. That is absolutely the right way to manage these things. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) said that “carer” was just too small a word to describe such a big role. She also mentioned the variations in the different work that people do. The hon. Member
for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) talked about carers week being more than just a congratulatory event, and said that it was about identifying needs and opportunities for change. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) highlighted the need to look after carers and to allow them to have breaks. His own family provided a fine example of that. The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) spoke powerfully about the wonderful success of carers week in Northern Ireland and about the measures that should be adopted. I have scrawled something here about joined-up thinking. It is easy to say those three words. If only we could achieve it sometimes!

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) characteristically picked up on many of the points made by other Members around the Chamber, particularly those relating to hidden carers. I have been contacted by people on Twitter and Facebook who have been listening to or watching the debate today—some people have also been messaging me—to say that they now realise that they are hidden carers. Perhaps they are looking after someone with vascular dementia, for example, and this is having an impact on their lives, day in, day out. Others have spoken about the effect of looking after children and other family members.

I welcome this opportunity for Members to talk about end-of-life care, which is a really important time for carers. It can involve financial pressures, costs, poverty, stress, borrowing, and perhaps re-mortgaging or losing a cherished home as the impact of the situation bites. We have also talked about the issues affecting student carers and young carers, and I am reminded particularly of the issues that come in weekly to our caseworkers, who deal with them so well.

In my summing up, I was also feeling slightly philosophical, like the Minister. Theodore Roosevelt said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. I thought of one of the last conversations I had with my dad before he died. I was in the hospital, helping him to bathe and go to the toilet, and he said to me, “Did you ever think that you would be looking after your old dad like this?” and I said to him, “I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Caring may be the most challenging, boring, difficult, monotonous or heart-breaking role, particularly at that end-of-life stage, but carers will never regret being there and doing it. Caring is a challenge, but carers look back and relish the fact that they made those last few moments and times better. Carers, we recognise and salute you today. You are special and a true carers army.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,
That this House has considered carers.

ADJOURNMENT
Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(Julian Smith.)

3.20 pm
House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Border Force Personnel

1. Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): What estimate she has made of changes in the number of Border Force personnel over the course of this Parliament. [905348]

2. Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Following on from the question put by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), I welcome the greater flexibility in Border Force’s approach, but businesses and residents in the Humber region are extremely concerned, following the report recently issued by the National Crime Agency. I recently met the Immigration Minister, who provided some reassurance, but can the Home Secretary give an absolute assurance that additional resources will be put into Humber ports, if required?

3. John Spellar: I wish to ask the Home Secretary a question about Border Force vessels. Is there not a significant difference over recent years in how Border Force manages its workforce? When we came into power, the workforce schedules did not match the peak requirements of people arriving at the airports. We have significantly increased the number of e-gates, which means that people do not have to go through the individually manned desks because they can go through the e-gates instead.

4. Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What estimate she has made of changes in the number of Border Force personnel over the course of this Parliament. [905351]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I recognise that there is an urgent question on the tragic circumstances of Orlando later, but I am sure that the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with the victims of this appalling terrorist attack and their families.

Over the course of the financial year, the number of full-time equivalent staff in Border Force is expected to remain flat. Budgets have not been finalised beyond the current financial year, so I am unable to provide an estimate of staffing levels for subsequent years.

Mr Spellar: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply and I endorse her sentiments about the appalling events in Orlando.

What impression of the UK does the right hon. Lady feel people get at our airports when faced with huge immigration queues, yet vast numbers of immigration officers’ desks are unoccupied? Does the Home Office not know what is going on, or does it not care? What is she going to do about it?

Mrs May: I am pleased to say that we have made a significant difference over recent years in how Border Force manages its workforce. When we came into power, we discovered that under the last Labour Government, the workforce schedules did not match the peak requirements of people arriving at the airports. We have changed that, and we have significantly increased the number of e-gates, which means that people do not have to go through the individually manned desks because they can go through the e-gates instead.

Diana Johnson: Ports such as Hull are being targeted by traffickers and illegal immigrants, as was shown in February when 18 illegal immigrants were found on the dockside in Hull. Many staff have contacted me to say that, as a result of the cuts, they are worried because they are unable to provide the level of service that they want to at the border. What extra resources will places such as Hull and other ports around the country get to help them to do the job they want to do?

Mrs May: We are very clear that Border Force has sufficient resources in place to carry out its mandated duties at ports across Humberside and to mount effective operations to identify and intercept smuggled contraband goods and clandestine migrants. What Border Force has done is to ensure that there is a greater flexibility in the workforce, so it can be managed rather better according to risk and need.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): One thing that makes Border Force more effective in protecting the border in Kent is the ability to operate in Calais rather than in Dover as it used to do. Does my right hon. Friend agree that anything that gave the French the temptation to move our border back to Dover would serve to weaken our borders?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. As not only a former Immigration Minister but a Kent MP, I am very clear that those juxtaposed controls are a significant benefit. They help us to secure our border and we wish them to stay in place.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I have given consideration to the suitability of vessels and resources will be put into Humber ports, if required?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I hope I can reassure him. We have announced that Border Force will be provided with £31 million over the next four years to deploy more staff to undertake counter-smuggling work at ports across the country. This will lead to the deployment of more Border Force staff at maritime ports, including those on Humberside.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate the Home Secretary on passing another milestone and becoming the third longest-serving Home Secretary in history. The number three is very important, because it is the number of Border Force vessels available to patrol 7,223 miles of coastline, whereas the Italians have 600. Will she look further at the need to provide more resources? I know she has talked about the £31 million, but at this moment criminal gangs are targeting the English channel and going into small ports with their cargo. May we have action much sooner than in the few years that she mentioned?

Mrs May: I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman may very well be the longest-serving Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. I apologise for not having looked in the record books yet, but perhaps that fact can enter them now.

In comparing the number of Italian vessels with the number of Border Force vessels, the right hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. In Border Force, we have given consideration to the suitability of vessels and
what vessels are required, which is why there will be some changes. In the strategic defence and security review that was published last November it was announced that we would seek to ensure that all maritime assets could be deployed most effectively in dealing with risks and threats of this kind.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Will the Home Secretary publish the internal review by the National Crime Agency which highlighted the weaknesses in patrols at our small ports and marinas? My constituency contains the closest channel port to London. Will the Home Secretary now, as a matter of urgency, tell the House what she will do to reconfigure the way in which Border Force patrols beaches and inlets, particularly those in the south-east of England, which are now very vulnerable to people traffickers coming here directly from the continent?

Mrs May: It is important to bear in mind that dealing with the potential threat of people trying to enter the United Kingdom clandestinely through smaller ports is not just about physical policing of the coastline, but about understanding intelligence, and, in particular, about the work that is being done to counter organised criminal gangs. The National Crime Agency has set up an organised immigration crime taskforce, which is working not just here in the United Kingdom but with its French counterparts and elsewhere on the continent to ensure that we can stop those movements before they reach our shores.

Calais and Dunkirk Camps

2. Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What discussions she has had with charities and non-governmental organisations on conditions in the camps at Calais and Dunkirk.

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): While the management of the camps is a matter for the French Government, there is close engagement between the United Kingdom and France on all matters relating to the migration situation in Calais. Through the August 2015 joint declaration, the Home Secretary and the French Interior Minister set up a project that is being delivered by the French non-governmental organisation France terre d’asile to identify vulnerable migrants and direct them towards existing protection, support and advice.

Peter Grant: May I associate myself and my colleagues with the Home Secretary’s earlier comments about the dreadful killings in Orlando?

The Red Cross has issued the following recommendation:

“The UK Government should be proactive in identifying unaccompanied minors with a UK connection and help guide them through the process of finding protection in the UK”.

What exactly are the Government doing to comply with that, and what have the results been so far?

James Brokenshire: As I have said, France terre d’asile, to which the United Kingdom Government is giving financial support, is doing precisely that. It is going into the camps to identify young people and to ensure that we have a good understanding of the work that is being done there. Separately, our own advisers are going into the camps to provide appropriate advice. What is of key importance, however, is getting those young people into the French asylum system.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): On behalf of Labour Members, may I echo the Home Secretary’s comments about Orlando?

Research published this week by UNICEF shows that children in refugee camps in Calais and Dunkirk are experiencing violence, sexual exploitation and abuse on a daily basis. Clearly, for those who are entitled to be reunified with their families, speed is of the essence, but UNICEF estimates that, at the current rate, it could take up to a year to process the children who are already in Calais and Dunkirk and who have a legal right to be reunited with their relations in the United Kingdom. What steps are the Government taking to address that, and can the Minister tell me how many Home Office staff are currently based in France and working to speed up the process?

James Brokenshire: I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman about the need to ensure that those cases are processed as quickly as possible. The most effective way to do that is to provide teams that link up with the best expertise on both sides of the channel, and that is exactly what we have done with the French authorities. The process will not take as long as he suggested. We are seeing cases being processed in a matter of weeks, which is precisely what we want.

Migrants: Illegal Working

3. Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that illegal migrants cannot profit from working in the UK.

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): The Government are committed to tackling illegal working. The Immigration Act 2016 makes illegal working a criminal offence in its own right, which ensures that wages paid to illegal migrants can be seized as the proceeds of crime, and assets may be confiscated on conviction. The Government are prioritising the implementation of that provision, which will take place on 12 July.

Jack Lopresti: Does my right hon. Friend consider that tackling illegal working has been made easier or harder by the 2014 judgment of the European Court, which forbids the United Kingdom from requiring migrants to have documentation issued by the British Government, although a High Court judge has said that documents issued by other EU member states are systematically forged?

James Brokenshire: I can reassure my hon. Friend on the steps that Border Force takes to check documentation and the fact that under this Government we have 100% checks of all scheduled passengers arriving here precisely to identify where fraudulent documents are used. The most important thing is the join-up across government in identifying where these activities are taking place, which is precisely what is happening.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On 11 May I wrote to the Home Secretary regarding an illegal worker in the care sector in the UK. I have not received a reply to that letter, but over a month later can
the Minister or Home Secretary explain why that illegal worker is still working in the United Kingdom and why anyone seeking to report illegal workers is referred by the Home Office to Crimestoppers rather than the Department dealing with it itself?

**James Brokenshire:** I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman of the steps that immigration enforcement is taking in a number of sectors where abuse has been highlighted, including construction and the care sector. I will certainly follow up on the point he raised about the letter he has sent to ensure that it is being appropriately followed up.

**Mr Speaker:** Mark Garnier. Not here. [Interruption.] I have no idea about the whereabouts of the chappie, but we must move on.

### Unaccompanied Children (Family Reunification)

6. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to accelerate the family reunification process for unaccompanied children in Europe with family in the UK. [905353]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees (Richard Harrington):** Ministers and senior officials have formally opened consultations with Greece, Italy and France to identify and transfer to the UK unaccompanied refugee children where it is in their best interests. We are also consulting local authorities, non-governmental organisations and UNHCR. In addition, we have worked with France to improve the operation of the Dublin family reunification process.

**Angela Crawley:** May I associate myself with the comments of the Home Secretary and other hon. Members on the homophobic, hate-based atrocity that has taken place in Orlando this week?

International Red Cross has stated its concern for children in Dunkirk. It has highlighted the length of the asylum process, the lack of official information and the domination of smugglers as factors that prevent the Dublin system from even getting off the ground. What progress is being made in overcoming these challenges to ensure that children are swiftly reunited with family in the UK?

**Richard Harrington:** I can assure the hon. Lady that we are doing all we can to get children in the asylum system and, once they are in the system, to make sure the procedure happens as quickly as possible. We are having regular meetings with the relevant NGOs, including quite a big one on Thursday, to find out how we can speed this up. The records show that the system is operating much faster and with many more numbers than in 2015, and we are doing our absolute best to speed it up as much as we can.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What progress have we made in dispatching the 75 experts to Greece, into the hotspots around Europe and also into Calais to ensure that there is robustness and confidence in the process of vulnerable children going into the system and then having their family reunion application processed, rather than going into the hands of the smugglers and traffickers?

**Richard Harrington:** On the officials due to go out to the hotspots, that is well under way. Many have already gone and a lot more will be going in the next few weeks. My hon. Friend has taken a keen interest in this and I am very pleased that, along with my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister, we have worked together on many things. We take this very seriously. We are putting a lot of resource into it, and I hope in future to be able to report to the House the positive results that I know my hon. Friend wants.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): How many unaccompanied children from France have been admitted since the Minister took on this role?

**Richard Harrington:** The most recent figures published are that, I believe, more than 30 children from France have come over here—that is in the period up to April 2016—and I can assure the right hon. Lady that we are expecting this to increase very significantly. But we cannot take these duties lightly. For example, we have carefully read the survey, or census as it calls it, by terre d’asile on most of the Calais camp. It identified about 180 children of which 50 claim family reunion connections with the UK. We are doing everything we can to quantify exactly who are the ones with family reunion links with this country, and doing our best to speed up reunions. However, I am sure the right hon. Lady will agree that we have to take this seriously and make sure that they have proper connections with the UK, and if it is proved that they do, which is a very quick process, that they are brought over here very quickly.

20. [905367] **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Further to the question from the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), does the Minister think that 30 is an adequate number? How quickly does he think he can get the children who have been identified reunited with their families?

**Richard Harrington:** As I explained to the right hon. Lady, I think the number will be increasing significantly in the future. The most significant thing is the speed this takes once a child claims asylum; it takes a short period—in many cases, it is two weeks—and I am hoping to improve on that.

### Newhaven Port

8. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure the security of the UK border at Newhaven port. [905355]

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** Border Force officers in Newhaven maintain 100% checks of arriving passengers and undertake intelligence-led activity to tackle both people-based and commodity-based threats. They collaborate effectively with the police, the National Crime Agency and their French counterparts in Dieppe to identify and disrupt attempts to smuggle migrants and commodities into the UK illegally through that port.

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the Minister for his reply. I recently met Newhaven Port Authority to discuss the future of the Newhaven ferry, and I was told that last year was its most successful ever, with a 50% increase in
passengers and freight. That is welcome, but it is putting extreme pressure on the existing Border Force officials. Will the Minister reassure me that this Government are doing everything they can to ensure that this vital travel and trade link is kept secure?

James Brokenshire: I congratulate the port operators on the work they have done to see the success that my hon. Friend has highlighted, and I am sure her work has given them support, too. I assure her that Border Force’s model operates not only to ensure that we have the necessary core team to tackle business-as-usual activity, but to surge additional resource, in line with intelligence, where we have identified particular threats.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): rose—

Mr Speaker: Newhaven is a considerable distance from the constituency of the hon. Gentleman, but I am sure his ingenuity will avail him.

Albert Owen: Principal ports—major ferry ports—such as Newhaven and Holyhead in my area are under extreme pressure because Border Force vessels are used in smaller ports in close proximity. May I help the Minister by suggesting that offshore vessels that are not used in the North sea on wind farms could be adapted by Border Force to close these gaps?

James Brokenshire: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity in asking the question. The Home Secretary has already responded on the strategic review that is being undertaken, and we are looking at all available Government assets to ensure that we pull them together. The National Maritime Information Centre is designed to assist with that, and we will continue with that work.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP) rose—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is going to tell us about Stranraer I dare say.

Richard Arkless: The previous coalition Government removed the Border Force staff from my home port of Stranraer, in my constituency, a number of years ago. Given the increased threats that we face from contraband and puppy smuggling from the rest of the European Union, will the Secretary of State commit to re-examine that decision, so that we can have appropriate defences at our port in Stranraer?

James Brokenshire: The Home Secretary has already indicated that £63 million of additional resource is being made available precisely to focus on smuggling. I am happy to discuss further with the hon. Gentleman any particular issues he may have, but I can assure him about the intelligence-led approach that Border Force takes and how we will deploy resources dynamically to meet any challenges.

Police Reforms

9. Marcus Fysh (Yeoovil) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that police forces implement reforms to increase their effectiveness. [905356]

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): We have established and continue to strengthen the system whereby police and crime commissioners provide real local accountability on how chief constables’ forces perform. Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary inspects efficiency and the effectiveness of force activity, and the College of Policing creates an evidence base as to best practice and sets out professional standards.

Marcus Fysh: Will my right hon. Friend please comment on the reform of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, whose processes have caused some issues for officers in my constituency and whose effectiveness is vital for public confidence in the police?

Mike Penning: With the Policing and Crime Bill that is going through the House at the moment, we intend to instil that confidence in the IPCC not just by changing its name, but by strengthening its role. It is absolutely imperative that the public have confidence in the police, as the vast majority of them do a fantastic job.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Will these reforms help solve unsolved crimes? Nobody who grew up in Dudley will forget the shocking murder of 13-year-old paperboy Carl Bridgewater, and no one who watched last night’s documentary on the case will believe that the new evidence it revealed should not be looked at. Will the Minister and the Home Secretary ask the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to review the new evidence to see whether this case can finally be solved and whoever was responsible be brought to justice?

Mike Penning: No one will forget that terrible case, no matter how long ago it was, and our thoughts are still with the parents. It is not the role of the IPCC to instruct the police how to investigate, but we will look at the case and at the ongoing evidence. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I could meet to discuss it further.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Having pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of Justin Skrebowski claiming diminished responsibility, Trevor Joyce was sentenced last week to life imprisonment. Justin’s brave widow, Gulsen Alkan, has already met Ministers in her campaign against knife crime, but this case also raises questions about how well mental health services work with the police. What steps are the Government taking to improve that, and will the Minister please meet us once more to prove that lessons can be learned from this case, and that such a horrific case can never happen again?

Mike Penning: I am pleased that the family has the courage to want to campaign on knife crime. It is very important that victims feel that they have the confidence to come forward. I am sure that either the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), or I will be more than happy to meet to discuss this matter. The issue around mental health is at the core of the Bill that is going through the House at the moment. The police must be used as a last resort when it comes to safety. We must make sure that we have a better understanding of mental health issues. Street triage and other such work that is going on at the moment has really helped us with the type of policing that we want to see in the 21st century.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): One thing that makes the police extremely effective is the co-operation that we receive from our European partners. What will the Minister say on 25 June if we are no longer eligible to be in Europol?
Mike Penning: We will work with our European partners and other partners around the world to ensure that our criminal justice system works.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): To be effective, the police need to be trusted by the community that they serve. Truth is built by being honest about the past. Will the Home Secretary finally do the right thing and grant the request of the Orgreave Truth and Justice campaign and nearly 100 cross-party MPs for a full inquiry into what exactly happened on 18 June 32 years ago in the battle of Orgreave?

Mike Penning: The hon. Lady raises a very, very important point, and, as Hillsborough has proved, the Home Secretary has a track record of looking at that sort of thing with a very open mind and in a way that perhaps no Home Secretary has ever done. We will look at Orgreave—indeed we are looking at it at the moment. Confidence in our police can be there only if we have a transparent system for dealing with complaints, and that is exactly what the Bill that is going through the House is all about.

Cybercrime

10. Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle cybercrime.

Karen Bradley: This Government take the threat of cybercrime very seriously, which is why, through the national cyber-security programme, we invested more than £90 million during the previous Parliament to build specialist capabilities and improve the law enforcement response at local, regional and national levels, and we will continue to invest. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced last November, this Government have committed to spending £1.9 billion on cyber-security, which includes tackling cybercrime, over the next five years.

Alberto Costa: Leicestershire police, whose hard-working officers I shadowed on patrol last Friday, provide a range of cybercrime information on their website. Does my hon. Friend agree that effective partnership between the police and other agencies is key to maintaining adequate defences against the growing and real threats that cybercrime poses to our society?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. It is vital that we work with the police and others. Leicestershire police are a shining example of proactive working to ensure that people understand the threats, understand the risks and understand how to stay safe online.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): What steps are there to simplify offences, so that the legislation that is effective online crimes. There is clearly a need to consolidate and simplify offenses, so that the legislation that is effective is more likely to be used to ensure justice. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this further? Important amendments tabled for debate this afternoon would provide part of the solution. We need far more co-ordination, and I am sure that the Minister would benefit from further discussions with other stakeholders on this issue.

Karen Bradley: I do agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is absolutely right. I visited Spain when that operation was tackling the boiler room fraud that was going on in Spain, and only because of that co-operation and bilateral work, using European Union mechanisms, were we able to have such success in that operation.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): There are currently 30 pieces of legislation being used against online crimes. There is clearly a need to consolidate and simplify offences, so that the legislation that is effective is more likely to be used to ensure justice. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this further? Important amendments tabled for debate this afternoon would provide part of the solution. We need far more co-ordination, and I am sure that the Minister would benefit from further discussions with other stakeholders on this issue.

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend and I had a conversation about this earlier with reference to the debate that will happen later, and I am more than happy to meet her, with my noble Friend Baroness Shields, who has responsibility for digital security on the internet.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): According to Childnet, 82% of children between the ages of 13 and 17 have seen hateful things on the internet. In addition, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is saying that children as young as 11 have been victims of revenge porn, so what more can the Minister do, and what assurances can she give to the House that children will always be protected from the worst aspects of the internet?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important issue. The internet provides a fantastic opportunity for us all, and it is amazing that my children can play games with friends hundreds of miles away and across the world. That is an amazing opportunity, but there are risks and threats to being on the internet. That is why we are legislating to insist on age verification for pornographic websites, so that children do not have access to them, and that is why we are working with colleagues across the Government—with the Departments for Education and for Culture, Media and Sport, in particular—to ensure that we do everything we can, working with industry, to keep children safe online.

Extremism and Radicalisation

11. Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What progress the Government are making in tackling extremism and radicalisation.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): We have improved our understanding of extremism and radicalisation. We have built partnerships with over 350 community groups and introduced the Prevent duty, and trained over 450,000 people since 2011. I have excluded over 100 hate preachers and Europe's most serious criminals, European collaboration, including with the European arrest warrant, is absolutely key.
worked with social media providers to remove over 180,000 pieces of terrorism-related content online since 2010.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that response. Ofsted admitted to me in a letter that it failed properly to inspect the Zakaria Muslim Girls High School in Batley in October 2015, run by a conservative Muslim sect, because the inspector felt unable to speak to pupils or staff—apparently, the inspector was told that it was Eid, when it was not actually Eid—despite the fact that the report commented on the school’s policies on radicalisation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to ensure that all Government agencies use every means at their disposal to drive out extremism from every corner of society?

Mrs May: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Friend, and the point of putting the Prevent duty on a statutory basis is to ensure that people in the public sector recognise their responsibility in dealing with extremism, in identifying extremism and ensuring that action is taken. We have seen from the Trojan horse example in education how important it is that all those responsible for ensuring that what is happening in schools is right and proper and that British values are being taught take that responsibility seriously and can fulfil it.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government have placed female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour-based violence in the UK counter-extremism strategy?

Mrs May: Yes. It is because we have looked at ways in which people can operate within communities to try to create an attitude, particularly towards women in those communities, that effectively treats women as second-class citizens, which is counter to the British values that we have in our society as a whole. We take issues associated with forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence and female genital mutilation extremely seriously, and we have taken action against these issues. We want to see more action being taken in order to bring more prosecutions in these areas, but it is important that we recognise that there are some attitudes that help to create divisions in society. We do not want those divisions; we want to ensure that there is proper respect, regardless of gender, faith, background, class or ethnicity.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): One of the best ways to stop extremism and radicalisation is to keep radicals and extremists out of the country in the first place. Often these people have a criminal record, although they may not necessarily show up on lists of terrorists. Can the Home Secretary confirm that when an EU citizen arrives at one of our borders, their passport is checked against the criminal record check bureau of their own country? Is that happening?

Mrs May: I have made it plain to my hon. Friend on a number of occasions that the information that we have at our borders through our membership of Schengen Information System II in the European Union is an important strand of information which enables our border officials and others to make decisions about individuals who are coming across the border. I am sure that, as my hon. Friend says, he does not want people who are preaching extremism to come into the United Kingdom, so I hope that he will congratulate the Government on the fact that as Home Secretary I have excluded more hate preachers from this country than any previous Home Secretary.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): First, may I join others in condemning the despicable acts in Orlando? We should be clear that these are homophobic and criminal acts.

There is ongoing concern that rather than defeating Daesh, the military action in Syria has merely displaced criminals and terrorists to other parts of the region and in many ways encouraged people to engage in acts closer to home. What action has been taken to address these developments? Can we be reassured that action to tackle such behaviour will not wholly eclipse the good efforts of many to prevent extremism at source in this country?

Mrs May: The hon. Lady is right to say that there are many good efforts being made in communities to prevent extremism within communities. The Government want to support that and to give voice to those mainstream voices working to promote the values that we share across our society. In relation to the threat from Daesh and the threat from Islamist terrorism, we of course watch carefully how matters are developing. It is the case that the threat arises from specific groups, from people who are inspired by groups, not just Daesh but al-Qaeda as well, and people who may be inspired online on the internet. That is why it is so important that we deal not just with physical presence, but with the bigoted ideology that underlies the terrorist threat, because it is only by dealing with that ideology that we will be able to deal with the terrorist threat.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): In the light of last week’s conviction of the man who launched an unprovoked knife attack at Leytonstone tube station, and some unverified reports that the Orlando shooter suffered from bipolar disorder, we should be mindful of the Royal United Services Institute’s estimate that in 35% of cases of lone wolf terrorism, there was an indication of a mental health disorder. What action has the Home Secretary taken, and what information and guidance have been issued to GPs and other health professionals on assessing the risks of radicalisation of their patients?

Mrs May: I referred earlier to the Prevent duty, which covers the whole of the public sector. That is why we have been conducting significant training within the public sector, including in the health service, about issues associated with radicalisation. Alongside that, I am sure that, given her question, the hon. Lady will welcome the parity of esteem that the Government are now giving to mental health and physical health inside the NHS.

Violent Acid Attacks

12. Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reduce the number of violent acid attacks.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): I am very aware of the life-changing impact and distress to victims caused
by acid attacks, and I am currently working with retailers to identify the best means of restricting sales of products with a high acidic content.

**Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con):** Attacks involving acid are, by their very nature, particularly nasty offences. Will the Minister please assure the House that she will work with the Ministry of Justice to ensure not only that adequate resources are made available to tackle the problem, but that deterrent sentences are imposed that properly reflect the life-changing nature of these offences?

**Karen Bradley:** I assure my hon. Friend that I do work closely with the Ministry of Justice. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Policing Minister, who is also a Justice Minister, is on the Front Bench, and I can assure my hon. Friend that we work very closely on this issue. He is right to say that not only do we want the perpetrators caught and stopped but we want appropriate sentences for this behaviour.

**Juxtaposed Border Controls**

13. **Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** What steps the Government have taken to improve checks at juxtaposed border controls in preparation for the summer. [905360]

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** We have invested tens of millions of pounds to reinforce border security at the juxtaposed ports, including through the installation of security fencing, floodlighting, anti-intrusion detection technology, and additional freight-searching contractors, dogs and security personnel. This has been complemented by increased French police numbers.

**Henry Smith:** I welcome the UK border enhancements over the coming summer period. Will there be an exchange of information about those leaving the UK as well as those entering it?

**James Brokenshire:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the sharing of information and intelligence between the UK and France, and it is an essential point to stress in the context of organised immigration crime that may be taking place across the channel. We have significantly stepped up our activities with the French authorities, and that will have a continuing impact in the fight against those who are simply seeking to traffic people into this country.

**Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab):** The school summer holidays are also known to some as the “cutting season”, when young girls can be flown from the UK to have female genital mutilation forced on them in other countries. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that Border Force is equipped to stop young girls being flown out of the UK to be mutilated?

**James Brokenshire:** The hon. Lady makes a compelling and important point—indeed, I understand that it may well be debated in this afternoon’s consideration of the Policing and Crime Bill. I will certainly continue to discuss the issue with colleagues across the Home Office, but I can assure her that steps are being taken to ensure that Border Force officers are trained and that we recognise this really appalling crime to a much greater extent.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** Given England’s inevitable progression towards the Euro 2016 final, will the Minister reassure me that the juxtaposed border controls will have the resources they need to deal with the number of fans who want to go to France, and to work with the French authorities to deal with the morons who have shamed our country over the last week?

**James Brokenshire:** I am sure that all of us would absolutely condemn the actions of anyone who has gone not to watch football but to become involved in violence. We also want to see all the home nations do well in the days and weeks ahead. However, my hon. Friend makes a point about security, and security is being maintained. We have stepped up security screening externally as well as internally, and the French authorities have maintained security at the juxtaposed ports at this increasingly challenging time for the French Government.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** Please will the Minister join me, as a Member from Wales, in commending Wales as the first home nation to win its first game at the European championships? Does he believe that the exchange of information with our allies will be improved or worsened by Britain voting to leave the European Union on 23 June?

**James Brokenshire:** I think I commended all the home nations in my initial contribution. The point the hon. Gentleman makes is important: we benefit from being able to use European systems to screen people at the border and from being able to have Europol working with joint investigation teams and with police and law enforcement agencies across Europe. I absolutely believe that our position in terms of safety and security is strengthened by being part of those mechanisms and being part of the EU.

**Immigration Rules (Constituent Parts of the UK)**

14. **Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP):** If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of applying different immigration rules to Scotland and other constituent parts of the UK. [905361]

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** Our immigration system is designed to work for the whole of the United Kingdom. Applying different rules would lead to migrants applying in one part of the UK and then moving to another, as happened—as the Scottish Government’s own research shows—with the “fresh talent” scheme.

**Callum McCaig:** That is the scheme that the Government abolished. I thank the Minister, but that was an inadequate answer, quite frankly. I draw his attention to the fact that Australia and Canada have introduced substantive immigration rules to ensure that migrants are encouraged to live where they are most needed. Will the Government look seriously at how this can be implemented in the UK, as the Justice Secretary has suggested today in Scotland?
James Brokenshire: Experience of the “fresh talent” scheme indicated that only 44% of applicants had remained in Scotland at the end of their two years’ leave on the scheme. We asked the Migration Advisory Committee to look at whether differentials would work in terms of the overall salary thresholds, but it advised that that would not be appropriate and, indeed, that it would lead to the setting of higher salary thresholds in Scotland as contrasted with the rest of the UK, therefore not achieving the objective for which I think the hon. Gentleman is trying to argue.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Scotland needs different immigration rules because it faces very different demographic challenges from those in London and the south-east, yet the needs of London and the south-east determine British immigration policy. Why will not the Government exclude Scotland from the net migration target and work with the Scottish Government to pursue policies that are tailored for Scotland’s needs?

James Brokenshire: I do not agree with the hon. and learned Lady’s analysis. The shortage occupation list recognises the different skills shortages that may need to be addressed in Scotland. Under the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Government have new powers to make Scotland a more attractive place to come to, live in and work in, in order to boost the tax take and grow the population. I encourage the Scottish Government to use those powers.

Joanna Cherry: As the Minister very well knows, immigration is still a reserved matter. I am interested to hear that he accepts the principle that different rules can apply to different parts of the UK by highlighting differences in the shortage occupation list. Having accepted that principle, why will he not work with the Scottish Government to pursue other policies that are designed to meet the specific demographic challenges that Scotland faces?

James Brokenshire: I did not say what the hon. and learned Lady suggested. We always welcome the opportunity to continue discussions with the Scottish Government on these issues, recognising that immigration remains a reserved matter. We will look carefully at the Scottish Affairs Committee’s report and respond to it shortly. We are very clear that there needs to be a policy for immigration across the UK, and that is what this Government will continue to adopt.

Topical Questions

T1. [905339] Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The violence in Marseilles surrounding England’s match against Russia was deeply disturbing. Seven English fans are still in hospital, two with very severe injuries, and our thoughts are with them. The French authorities had to deal with trouble involving England supporters on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Seven English fans are still in hospital, two with very severe injuries, and our thoughts are with them. The French authorities had to deal with trouble involving England supporters on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There will be lessons to be learned surrounding the wider policing operation. I am in no doubt that co-ordinated groups of Russian supporters bear a heavy responsibility for instigating violence.

We must also ensure, however, that we have our own house in order. Some among the England contingent in Marseilles behaved inexcusably. Anyone who has travelled to France to cause trouble has let down their nation and does a disservice to all genuine England fans. In co-operation with the French Government, we are going to do all we can to ensure that such scenes are not repeated. I have spoken to the Interior Minister, Bernard Cazeneuve. Plans are in place to ensure that there are more British police spotters in Lens for the match between England and Wales. We have prevented nearly 1,400 people with a history of football-related violence from travelling, and an extension of the ban on alcohol sales around key matches announced yesterday is a positive step. Above all, I appeal to the English and Welsh fans travelling to Lens this Thursday. UEFA has made it clear that the penalties for bad behaviour for individuals and for the teams they support will be severe. I have every confidence that the fans will respond in the right spirit and we can all get back to enjoying the tournament.

Lucy Frazer: As a former barrister who specialised in insolvency law, I understand the civil remedies available to make recoveries from those involved in fraud. The economic crime prevention group has recovered £1.1 million and led to 10 disqualifications of directors since the insolvency pilot began in 2013. Does the Home Secretary plan to continue the pilot?

Mrs May: My hon. and learned Friend is right to point to the work that has been done so far by the ECPG, which is a joint public and private sector group across various agencies; indeed, the National Crime Agency is one of its sponsors. A report on the insolvency scheme to which she referred is due shortly, and the future of the project is being considered. The outcome of that report will be part of those considerations.

Mr Speaker: I gently remind Front Benchers that we must accommodate Back Benchers. I am not having the time eaten up by Front Benchers.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): The Home Secretary is right: the terrible scenes of violence in Marseille this weekend have soured what should have been a great celebration of football. As ever, the vast majority have been let down by a hard-core minority, and their actions are all the more inexcusable given the serious terror threat hanging over the tournament. Although, as the Home Secretary has said, the England fans are not blameless, it is also the case that they were the subject of extreme provocation and that there were severe failings inside the stadium and concerns about policing. Given that this is a complex matter and that we need to establish all the facts ahead of the England-Wales game on Thursday, will the Home Secretary commit to making a fuller statement at her earliest opportunity, to ensure people’s safety and that there is no repeat?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman is right: we obviously want to ensure that there are no repeats of the scenes we saw in Marseilles. That is precisely why
work is ongoing between the UK Government and the French Government to look at the steps that need to be taken, particularly in Lens, where the England-Wales match will take place, and Lille, where Russia will play very close to that time, and that work will continue.

Andy Burnham: Let me turn to Hillsborough and mention that I wrote to all parties in the House, asking for their support in making it a moment of real change. One of the reasons that the Hillsborough injustice stood for so long was the inadequacy of the original inquest, which imposed the 3.15 pm cut-off and at which families had to scrabble around to raise funds for their own legal representation. The truth is that similar injustices are still happening today. Bereaved families are all too frequently thrown into courtrooms, raw with grief, to face adversarial questioning from highly paid QCs hired by the police and other public bodies. Later today I will put a proposal to this House to create parity of legal funding for families on the simple principle that public money should fund the truth, not the protection of vested interests. Will the Home Secretary say why she is opposing that move and whether she is prepared to work with us to establish that important principle?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman has rightly raised an issue that has been a matter of significant concern to the families who were victims of the terrible tragedy in Hillsborough. He is right to say that the original inquest system did not serve those families well. I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Jeremy Wright), the former Attorney General, was able to reopen the inquest, with the results and verdicts that we have seen. I have asked Bishop James Jones, who chaired the independent panel that looked into the Hillsborough incident and who has also been chairing the family forums and has been my adviser on this matter, to work with the families, to hear directly from them their experiences. I expect experiences about the inquest process to be part of that, which is why I wish to look at this issue once we have the full picture from the families as a result of the review by Bishop James Jones. The right hon. Gentleman has raised a very important and valid point, but I think that we need to look at the issue in a wider sense and get all the experience from the Hillsborough families before we look at the inquest process.

T2. [905340] Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The four agricultural students from Cirencester who were accused of rape prove that one does not have to be a celebrity to suffer the trauma of a case going on in the full glare of publicity. What protection can the Home Secretary give defendants, as is the case with the accuser, so that there is some sort of equality?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises a very important point that he has raised with me personally on a number of occasions, and the case to which he refers has brought it into sharp focus. The usual practice is that the police do not identify people before charge. However, we had a long debate on this issue about five years ago and there are cases where the identification of somebody can bring forward other victims and enhance the case against them, so this is not an easy area in which to operate.

T3. [905341] Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): There have been grave reports by asylum seekers detained in immigration removal centres of sexual assault. What risk management measures have been put in place for vulnerable detainees, who may already have histories of trauma but who are detained alongside foreign national offenders who have histories of violence?

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): We take our duties in relation to the operation of immigration removal centres extremely seriously. That is why, under the Home Secretary, we engaged in the Shaw review and report on how we can better identify those who are vulnerable. We will implement further changes in the months ahead to ensure that those issues are very much brought to the fore.

T4. [905342] Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The internet has brought with it great opportunities but also, sadly, a much darker side and threats. What work is being done to ensure that paedophiles who operate anonymously online are brought to justice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. We need to make sure that there is no safe place for paedophiles to operate. I am sure she knows that all 43 forces have signed up to the child abuse image database that this Government introduced and that the Prime Minister instigated. It is really starting to get results in identifying and safeguarding child victims, finding perpetrators and making sure that they can be brought to justice.

T8. [905346] Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Yesterday saw even more newspaper revelations about serious problems with COMPASS asylum accommodation contracts in Glasgow, yet emails from senior G4S staff and minutes of Home Office meetings suggest that these contracts are to be extended come hell or high water. Will not the Home Office at least have enough respect to wait for the Select Committee on Home Affairs to complete its inquiry before making any such decisions?

James Brokenshire: We are carefully considering the extension of the existing contracts in accordance with their terms. The introduction of the COMPASS contracts has improved the standards of accommodation, but where there are failings we will take action.

T5. [905343] Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Last Monday, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) asked how many EU citizens had been deported during the last four years. Now, as I understand it, the question has been answered and we are told that only 102 EU citizens have been deported. Does the Minister acknowledge that the deportation of such a small number is rather poor?

James Brokenshire: I remind my hon. Friend that the Government have removed more than 30,000 foreign national offenders since 2010. The number of offenders from EU countries who have been removed has more than tripled from 1,000 in 2010-11 to more than 3,400 in 2015-16.
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Home Secretary will have seen the recent reports that Eliza Manningham-Buller, when she was head of MI5, wrote to the then Prime Minister protesting about MI6 involvement in rendition. This becomes particularly concerning in view of the reasons given by the Crown Prosecution Service last week for declining to prosecute a senior officer of MI6. Will the Home Secretary confirm that that letter was written by Eliza Manningham-Buller, and will she commit to having it put into the public domain?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman will know that we do not comment on documents that have apparently been leaked from Government. That is the position, as it always has been.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I have been contacted by a number of my constituents who have expressed concerns about the balance between privacy and security in the Investigatory Powers Bill. Will the Home Secretary explain how the implementation of the Bill will provide that balance but will also provide essential protections against terrorism?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to mention this very important Bill. The measures in the Bill are essential to enable both law enforcement and our security and intelligence agencies to protect us from not only terrorism but serious and organised crime, paedophiles and others. I assure her that we are putting in place world-leading safeguards and oversight arrangements, which will ensure that the balance between privacy and the need to exercise these powers is properly kept.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: If she can ask her question in one short sentence, I shall call Carol Monaghan.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State work with organisations such as the Red Cross to explore alternative ways of submitting family reunion applications, to avoid dangerous journeys to third-party countries?

Mr Speaker: The Minister has less than 15 seconds to respond.

James Brokenshire: I think I can safely say yes.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister. This shows what we can do when we try.

In respectful memory of the victims of the homophobic terrorist slaughter in Orlando, I should like to request of colleagues that at 3.30 we observe one minute’s silence. Thank you.

3.30 pm

The House observed a minute’s silence.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues and all of those observing our proceedings—thank you for that display of respect.
Orlando Attack: UK Security Measures

3.31 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) (Urgent Question): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on the terrorism threat and on wider security measures in the UK in the light of the horrific attacks on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Orlando, USA.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The attacks in Orlando on Saturday night were utterly evil and the Government condemn them completely. At least 49 people were murdered and a further 53 people were injured, many of them seriously. Those people were enjoying a night out when the attacks took place, and our hearts go out to them, their families and their friends. This is the deadliest mass shooting in US history. It was an outrage committed to spread fear and born out of hatred. As President Obama has said, the US authorities are treating it as a terrorist attack and Daesh has claimed responsibility. It is clear that such an attack has its roots in a twisted ideology which counts homophobia as a cornerstone of its warped world view.

This was not just an act of terror, but an act of homophobic hatred and I want to make it clear to all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Britain and around the world that we will not tolerate such bigotry and violence. We will work closely with the United States and we will continue to offer them our assistance and support. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies and friends in the global fight against terrorism, fear and hatred. As the investigation into the attack continues, more information will emerge. However, we are not aware of any British nationals being caught up in the events on Saturday night. As should be expected in the light of this attack, UK police forces will be further reviewing plans for large-scale and other public events over the coming days and weeks. The police have not advised any organisers to cancel or postpone any LGBT-related events.

Hon. Members will be aware that since the start of 2015 we have seen 16 terrorist attacks in Europe including those in Brussels and Paris, as well as the atrocity in Tunisia, in which British people have been killed or injured. There have also been many attacks further afield, including in Bangladesh over the weekend. In the last 18 months, the police and security services have disrupted seven terrorist plots to attack the UK. All were either linked to or inspired by Daesh and its propaganda. The threat from international terrorism, set independently of Ministers by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, remains at severe, meaning that an attack is highly likely. In March, the murder of prison officer Adrian Ismay reminded us that the threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism also remains.

Each time I come before the House following a terrorist attack, I do so in the knowledge that people have died and others are suffering. I know that this House, and people around the world of all faiths and none, will want to join me in condemning this attack. This Government are determined to defeat the insidious ideologies that drive extremists. Let us be clear. There can be no justification for the mindless slaughter of innocent people. There can be no hiding place for those who perpetrate these acts. And there is no doubt that we will fight and that we will prevail against the doctrines of hate and fear that lie behind such attacks.

Stephen Doughty: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question today. I thank the Home Secretary for her statement.

We think we are making progress, and then we are faced with horrors such as this—an unspeakable act of both homophobia and terror, of murder and of hate, and an attack on the LGBT community, who are now mourning their loved ones in Orlando, and on equal love and equality worldwide. Orlando, we stand with you in this House. I stand with you as a gay man, and I know that millions across this country, of all faiths and none, will do the same.

For all our progress, far too many around this world suffer death and attack every day in the LGBT community. There have been other attacks in the United States, such as the attempted firebombing in Seattle in 2014 or the horrific death of Matthew Shepard. Many have been thrown off buildings in Syria, whipped and chemically castrated in Saudi Arabia, tortured in Iran or Cameroon, and attacked in Uganda or Ethiopia and by right-wing death squads in Brazil and Mexico, and across many countries in the middle east and Africa—let alone those denied basic rights in so many other countries, and even still in parts of our own.

While our gut instinct is often, quite frankly, to stand up boldly to the homophobes, the transphobes, the haters and the terrorists—to go out in Pride, to go to our clubs and to stand with our partners—many will, understandably, be worried about our own safety. From the horrific Admiral Duncan attacks to the many reported and unreported hate crimes against LGBT+ people in this country, we all know that it could have been us.

I therefore want ask the Home Secretary three specific questions. She has quite rightly acknowledged that homophobia, transphobia and hate appear to have played a key part in this horrific attack, alongside terrorist motives, so will she look carefully at the threats to our own communities from all sources, not least the increase in hate crimes in this country? In 2014-15, there were 5,597 hate crimes against people because of their sexual orientation and 605 against people because of their transgender status. Will she ask all police forces to work closely with their communities, and especially with Prides, to support community safety—not just at specific events, but in the daily fight against hate crime? Will she outline what steps she will take on a pan-European basis to tackle any current or emerging threats, not least to stop the trafficking of assault weapons or any other weapon we have rightly banned in this country but which, tragically, are available in the United States.

Every bit of hate we chip away and replace with love is helping to change our world for the better, so we must never forget that love wins in the end, even in dark, horrific times. We should go out proud and march in Pride, hold hands with our loved ones, kiss them, stand up against the haters, the killers and the bigots, and never forget the slain of Orlando or so many who have stood up bravely in the cause of equality and love throughout our history.

Mrs May: May I commend the hon. Gentleman for the remarks he has just made? He has spoken movingly on this issue, and I am sure the thoughts he has expressed
[Mrs May]

are shared across the whole of this House. He is right: it is not just a question of standing in this Chamber and making statements; it is a question of how we approach these issues more widely, and of what we do in our day-to-day interactions with fellow citizens and other individuals.

The hon. Gentleman asked me three specific questions. Certainly, we of course look at all sorts of threats that could pose a risk to the lives of, or could endanger, our fellow citizens. In relation to hate crime, he is right that the figures have gone up. Certainly, a lot of that will be from increased reporting, and it is important that people have the confidence to feel able to report these crimes. On the other side of it, he mentioned police forces’ reaction and interaction with groups, and that is important. It is of course important that the police understand the issues and are able to deal with them appropriately when those crimes are reported to them, and I think progress is being made in that area.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked me about firearms. We have been working across the European Union on this issue. An enhanced weapons directive was discussed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on Friday. We have been encouraging and working with Europol in relation to its work on the trafficking of firearms. The National Crime Agency had a very successful case last year involving the interdiction of firearms, and there have been significant sentences off the back of that case. But, of course, we have to do more. It is important that we work co-operatively with others in looking at where firearms might be originating from, and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are taking appropriate action.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The freedom to be oneself has been hard won in this country over 60 years. As such, freedoms for LGBT people are symbolic of liberty in this country, as indeed is this place, and the armed forces, police services and security services who defend those liberties. Will the Home Secretary ensure that all those symbols of our freedom receive the necessary protection, because undoubtedly they are under threat, as symbols of everything that we have achieved as a country?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All those right hon. Members and hon. Members across the House who have stood up and proclaimed themselves as gay are an important symbol of freedom. That has been a very important statement for people outside this House, as well. I believe that we have more openly gay MPs in this House than there are in any other legislative Chamber in the world. That is something to be proud of.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): The words of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) were powerful and intensely moving, this sickening attack. The grief of the friends and families of those who died will be unbearable, and we send them our deepest sympathy and solidarity at this time.

This was an act of terrorism that targeted the gay community. As such, it brings back memories of the horrific bombing 17 years ago of the Admiral Duncan pub in Soho, in the heart of London’s gay village. That too targeted innocent people, and today we think of everyone affected by it.

If yesterday’s attack is eventually linked to Daesh, that will raise concerns among the LGBT community here and across the world about their safety. With that in mind, will the Home Secretary assure the House that the police and security services keep the safety of all communities, but the LGBT community in particular, under review? Will she tell us whether she has received any intelligence that something similar might happen here?

Over the weeks ahead, many Pride celebrations are planned across the UK, including large-scale events in London, Brighton and Manchester. People will rightly be concerned about the security of those events. They are planned and staffed by volunteers, and most Pride organisations pay for security themselves from the funds that they raise. Will the Home Secretary ensure that organisers receive updated advice, support and, where necessary, additional security, to provide reassurance that Pride events will be as safe as possible for all those attending this year?

It seems to be a facet of our times that rising hate, discrimination and inflammatory language are re-entering political discourse. Will the Home Secretary say whether she has seen a poster circulated this afternoon by Leave.EU, which sought to use events in Orlando for its own purposes? Will she join me in condemning that highly offensive piece of propaganda?

Terrorists want to divide our communities, and turn one set of people against another. Let everyone in this House say to them today that we will never, ever let them succeed in inciting hatred against the Muslim community or the LGBT community. We celebrate diversity and community in this country. We will not allow the haters and terrorists to foment division. Whatever it takes, we stand resolutely alongside the LGBT community and continue to fight hate and homophobia in all their forms.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman rightly asked me about the police response. As I indicated in my response to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), the police’s position at the moment is that they have no plans to cancel or postpone any LGBT events due to take place over the coming days and weeks. They will constantly assess that position, and if they need to give additional advice or take additional action, they will of course do so. Local police forces work very closely with Pride organisers to ensure that there is appropriate and proper security for Pride events.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the Leave.EU poster. I was shown a picture of it just before I came into the Chamber. I think it is utterly irresponsible. What took place is a terrible and horrific homophobic terrorist attack; attempts to link it into the issue of membership or otherwise of the European Union should rightly be condemned on all sides of this House.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): My stomach turned when I saw the scenes emerging from Orlando, and the brutal slaughter of so many innocent people,
and I think I speak for the whole House when I say that today we are all LGBT, irrespective of our sexuality. I am reassured by what the Home Secretary said about future festivities and Gay Pride, whether in London or other parts of the United Kingdom. Gay people need to feel safe when they go out in the evening or on festivities, and like many other MPs, I will be going to Soho later this evening to stand vigil in memory of those who were slaughtered.

The Home Secretary rightly spoke about sending a message throughout the world. A couple of years ago I asked for the Gay Pride flag to be flown above embassies and high commissions during Gay Pride Week, but that did not happen. Will she talk to Cabinet colleagues and the Foreign Secretary to see that that does now happen, so that we can send out a message of support for LGBT people throughout the world?

**Mrs May:** I am happy to raise that matter with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and to ask it to look specifically at that proposal.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman will be reassured to know that the rainbow flag will fly about Portcullis House throughout the appropriate weekend. That was decided some time ago; it is not something that I needed to announce, but it is pertinent to the point he has raised.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the dead and to the injured in Orlando, and I condemn this terrible outrage unreservedly. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this urgent question and on his moving words, and I thank the Home Secretary for acknowledging that these attacks were motivated by homophobia. Does she agree that it is important for everyone to acknowledge that these attacks were motivated by homophobia, both out of respect for the dead and injured, and in recognition of the very real threat of similar attacks on the LGBTI community?

I am proud to be a member of the LGBTI community. In years gone by, and when I came out 30 years ago, we used to be afraid of going into clubs and bars for fear of insults and violence from onlookers. We had hoped that those days were long gone, but this attack shows that they are not. What we are trying to say is that the authorities will take particular precautions to protect the LGBTI community from homophobic attacks, especially during the Pride season that is about to start across the United Kingdom. Will she reassure us that those precautions will be taken?

**Mrs May:** I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Lady, and it is important to recognise the homophobic nature of the attack that took place in Orlando. As I indicated earlier, it is right that the police consider security arrangements for the various Pride events that take place, and they will also assess at local level any other events that take place, or particular venues that are frequented by large numbers of people from the LGBTI community. If additional action is necessary, they will of course take it.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The attacks on Saturday were deplorable. Will my right hon. Friend reassure us that although we must remain alert to such attacks, we must not allow them to alarm us and we must continue with our daily lives? The greatest thing that terrorists are looking for is to unnerve us and to spoil what we take to be our normal routines of life.

**Mrs May:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we ceased to go about our business in the normal way, and if people from any community felt that they could not carry on living their lives as they wished to do so, the terrorists will have won. That is why it is so important to be clear in our condemnation of these attacks, and—as has been shown across the House—clear in our intention to fight against the terrible ideology that is fuelling these attacks and to prevail against it.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): The whole House will want to associate itself with the comments of the Home Secretary and shadow Home Secretary. It is early days but claims have been made that the suspect in this terrible attack had been interviewed three times by the FBI. Does the Home Secretary agree that monitoring suspects is the highest possible priority for our security services but that they cannot do it on their own—they need the support of communities—and therefore any information about people behaving in a way that is not in the norm should be reported to the authorities and carefully monitored? The public might not know whether it is important, but the security services certainly will.

**Mrs May:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct to say that we need to ensure that information from communities is made available to the authorities, where there are concerns about the behaviour of individuals. As we have seen from attacks in various parts of the world, this is not just about groups of people planning attacks; it can just be about an individual who might show signs, through their behaviour, of a changed attitude and approach. I encourage communities, where they have concerns, to make those views known to the authorities, so that, even if there is nothing of concern, at least it can be looked at and that that can be ensured.

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): As the first openly gay Conservative MP, may I welcome the absolute and total unanimity of the House in sending a message of support and sympathy to the victims and the people of Orlando? May we hope that America is listening and fully understands the genuine nature of what we are trying to say?

**Mrs May:** I absolutely commend my right hon. Friend for his remarks. He took an important step many years ago—I remember because I was party chairman at the time. It was a significant step for him, for the Conservative party and for politics in general in the UK. As he says, our thoughts are with the people of Orlando at this time.

**Mr Speaker:** If memory serves me, it was in July 2002, so the 14th anniversary thereof will soon be upon us.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The intended targets of this vicious and homophobic attack might have been the LGBTI community of Orlando, but we should regard it as an attack on us all. In a free
society, when a group is attacked because they are different and a minority, it is an attack on us all, and that is how we should see it. This is a time for mourning, but that time will pass eventually, and when it does, should the opportunity present itself to the Home Secretary, I hope that she will say, as a candid friend to our friends in America, that they really need to look again at the availability of guns in their country.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman is right that this was an attack on the values we all share and an attempt to create division and hatred in society and between communities. We must all resist and fight against that and ensure that communities can come together with one voice and condemn such attacks. I think he will find that many people will be raising the issue of gun control in the United States.

Ian Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): One of the most poignant comments I have read on the atrocity in Orlando came from the mother of a young man who is currently unaccounted for. She said: “We have relatively few years on this planet. Why do we spend so much time hating each other?” This atrocity has a terrorist link, but so many attacks on us do not. Will the Home Secretary reassure me that she will work with colleagues in Government to do everything possible across government to stamp out homophobia and transphobia through things such as school anti-bullying programmes? It is so important.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: this issue has a wider resonance, and we must do everything we can. Much has already been done but I suggest that we will never be able to say that we have done all the work we need to. Throughout the education system and in our attitudes and approaches as a Government and as politicians, we must show that we are all one community and that we must resist those who attempt to divide us and sow hatred, of whatever sort, in our communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I want to express the sympathies of the Democratic Unionist party; our thoughts and prayers are very much with those affected by this dreadful atrocity. I commend the work of those in Government to do everything possible across government to stamp out homophobia and transphobia through things such as school anti-bullying programmes? It is so important.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: this issue has a wider resonance, and we must do everything we can. Much has already been done but I suggest that we will never be able to say that we have done all the work we need to. Throughout the education system and in our attitudes and approaches as a Government and as politicians, we must show that we are all one community and that we must resist those who attempt to divide us and sow hatred, of whatever sort, in our communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I want to express the sympathies of the Democratic Unionist party; our thoughts and prayers are very much with those affected by this dreadful atrocity. I commend the work of those in Government to do everything possible across government to stamp out homophobia and transphobia through things such as school anti-bullying programmes? It is so important.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: this issue has a wider resonance, and we must do everything we can. Much has already been done but I suggest that we will never be able to say that we have done all the work we need to. Throughout the education system and in our attitudes and approaches as a Government and as politicians, we must show that we are all one community and that we must resist those who attempt to divide us and sow hatred, of whatever sort, in our communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I want to express the sympathies of the Democratic Unionist party; our thoughts and prayers are very much with those affected by this dreadful atrocity. I commend the work of those in Government to do everything possible across government to stamp out homophobia and transphobia through things such as school anti-bullying programmes? It is so important.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have some of the toughest, if not the toughest, gun controls in the world. Those, of course, were born out of tragedy here in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman is also right that although the size of the attack in Orlando was significant—the biggest loss of life in a mass shooting in the US—atrocities are also being undertaken elsewhere in the world in the name of this terrible warped Islamist ideology. That is why it is so important for us to defeat that ideology.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Homophobia can, sadly, be part of the daily reality for LGBT people at home and abroad. What makes this attack particularly upsetting is that it took place in a gay club—a place where LGBT people can feel safe to love the person they love quite publicly. As we approach Pride season, what reassurance can the right hon. Lady give my constituents that it is safe to take part in the celebrations of our diverse community? What conversations is she having with the Secretary of State for Education to tackle homophobia in schools and to have comprehensive sex and relationships education that says love is stronger than hate?

Mrs May: I can give the reassurance again that the police will, of course, be making very careful assessments of security issues relating to events in particular, but also venues, for people from the LGBT community. Obviously, if any specific action is necessary, they will take that action.
The Secretary of State for Education was present earlier, and will have heard some of the questions that have been asked. She is also the Minister for Women and Equalities and I know that she takes her responsibility for equalities very seriously. I used to have that responsibility myself, and I can assure the hon. Lady that in considering issues relating to those who wish to divide our communities and sow hatred, we work very closely with the Department for Education.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): May I associate myself with the Home Secretary's comments and those of other Members? As an out and proud gay woman, I know that the atrocities in Orlando were directed at members of the LGBT community—my community, our communities. This act of clear homophobic hate crime in Orlando must be challenged. It is a stark reminder of the prejudice and discrimination that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people continue to face. It serves to remind us how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. Does the Home Secretary agree that we must make every effort to challenge all forms of homophobic hate crime, and must agree that #lovesislove?

Mrs May: I entirely agree with the comments that the hon. Lady has put on the record. I think it important for all of us to take that message out and about, and for the whole House to make it clear that, as she has said, we absolutely condemn this sort of hatred.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): In my constituency, Muslims do not murder gay people; they elect them.

I know that I speak on behalf of all the diverse faith communities in my constituency in expressing my solidarity with the LGBT community in Orlando. The truth is, however, that this attacker was not a lone wolf when it comes to hatred of LGBT people. It may be an uncomfortable truth for some people in this country and around the world, but the fact that he carried bullets does not mean that the prejudice that they carry makes them any better.

May I ask the Home Secretary to work with the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that the excellent work that is taking place in schools to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying continues, and is built on further to ensure that all children, irrespective of their backgrounds and the types of school that they attend, are taught that in this country, in standing up for human rights, we do not tolerate or in any way accept discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We must ensure—and this is part of the work that the Government are trying to do in the Home Office, in the Department for Education and elsewhere—that we send clear message about the values that underpin our society here in the United Kingdom and make it such a great place to live, one of which is absolute respect for everyone, regardless of their sexuality, background, ethnicity, faith or none. It is important for us to ensure that those are the values that are being taught.

Fiona MacTaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Home Secretary has, I think, expressed the views of us all. The unanimity of the House has been impressive, and I think we should communicate that to all the people who have lost loved ones in this atrocity.

It is true that the motivation for the outrage was hatred and terror, but what enabled it to happen was the availability of guns. More American citizens have been murdered in mass shootings than all the Americans who were killed in wars between the end of the civil war and the war in Iraq. Will the Home Secretary personally commit herself to conveying to the American Government our fear that if they continue not to act, they will lose more of their citizens to this hatred and terror?

Mrs May: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. Gun availability is an important part of the overall issue. As I said earlier, we hear many voices in the United States—sadly—on both sides of the argument, because there are those who strongly claim that the right to carry arms should enable guns of this sort to be more freely available and ever present. I should be happy to raise the issue with the American Administration, because I think it important that we can see the dangers. We have suffered a tragedy here that led to the tightening of our gun laws, and I think we are all grateful for the fact that we now have the toughest, or some of the toughest, gun laws in the world.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am a gay man, and let us all say unambiguously what happened in Orlando yesterday: it was a premeditated slaughter of gay people because they were gay by a man who we are told had been outraged because he recently saw two men kissing. It was the worst mass killing of gay people in our lifetime. Does the Home Secretary agree that homophobia is not intrinsic to the human condition? It is too often taught in homes, in school classrooms and playgrounds and in places of worship. Anyone who has ever winced when they saw two men kissing, muttered loathing when they saw two women holding hands or who has invoked God in justification for a human prejudice is complicit in creating a climate of poisonous intolerance. Will the Home Secretary therefore agree that love and tolerance should serve as the epigraph for those who have died so monstrously?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I think we should take that message of love and tolerance, and we should be very clear that we condemn these sorts of prejudices that, as he says, can be taught and encouraged and sadly in some places are being taught and encouraged. They are not part of the society that we wish to live in, the values we share and the tolerance and respect for others that we want to see across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I want to place on record my condemnation of the terrible attacks in Orlando. It seems that ISIS is being pushed back in certain parts of the middle east and we are seeing fighters fleeing from its strongholds, a number of whom are coming across to Europe, and some may come back to the UK. Given that, is the Secretary of State satisfied that extra measures are in place to deal with this possible influx of additional ISIS fighters coming back to Europe and that co-operation is of a sufficient level with other European countries?

Mrs May: Yes, of course we look at people who are returning on a case-by-case basis to see what action is necessary. We increased the powers of the police in the
Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, not least with the temporary exclusion orders that enable the police to work with other countries, in Europe particularly, and with places in the UK where someone might be returning to from Syria. They help to manage the return of any such individuals, and we do co-operate very closely with EU colleagues on these matters.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): In the light of this horrific homophobic attack in Orlando, will the Home Secretary urgently support the call from across the House for compulsory sex and relationships education in all our schools, to educate everyone that love is love and it is okay to be yourself? No one should fear coming out or being themselves, especially after this horrific event, so does she agree that we need to take every opportunity to educate our children so that extremist prejudice does not take hold?

Mrs May: It is very important in education to make sure that we do everything we can to see that extremist prejudice does not take hold. This is something that I know the Secretary of State for Education is looking at very closely.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Defence Secretary has written to me to say that 850 UK-linked individuals of national security concern have travelled to take part in the Syrian conflict and just under half have returned. In light of the Home Secretary’s answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), could she say how many of those over 400 citizens are on that managed return scheme she talked about, making sure we know who they are talking to and what they are doing?

Mrs May: I fear that there may be a misunderstanding of what the managed return scheme is about: that is about the managed return of an individual where it is felt necessary to manage their return across the border. The issue of what action is taken for an individual once they have returned to the UK, which is determined on a case-by-case basis, is a separate matter.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I would like to associate myself with the collegiate views of this House. Given the atrocity in Orlando, home-grown terrorism has been recognised as a significant risk. Reports indicate that radicalisation may be occurring in UK prisons, with young men who have histories of violence. What policies are being introduced to address this very important issue?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice has initiated a review of the issue of extremism in prisons, and the Home Office will be working with the Ministry of Justice when it is possible to work on the recommendations from that review. We are all very clear that, in an environment where it is possible for terrorist offenders to come into contact with serious and organised criminals, it is important to ensure not only that that is managed very carefully, but that we deal with the potential for radicalisation and extremism.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): A number of countries have sent messages of solidarity with the United States and the people of Orlando, but some of those countries, including Egypt and Saudia Arabia, themselves have the death penalty for homosexuality and have arrested hundreds of people in the past two years. Is it not time that all those countries came into the 21st century and recognised that they have to match their words with deeds and legislation?

Mrs May: I am very clear in my views—and I am sure other Members of this House are clear in theirs—on issues associated with the death penalty, including the death penalty for the sort of issue the hon. Gentleman has raised. This is of course a matter for those countries themselves, but these subjects are regularly raised by British Ministers when they are in discussion with those countries.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): May I begin by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for the extraordinary leadership you have shown, not only on the back of these events, but more widely, with the way in which you have absolutely established yourself as a friend of the LGBT community? The ostentatious flair of my community may be slightly restrained for the next few days as we think of those who were needlessly taken from us, but despite that the rainbow flag still flies high and proud over Pride season. It flies high because too long has passed between now and the days gone by when we spent time living anonymously and in fear. Solidarity is stronger than fear, so will the Home Secretary join me in encouraging all our friends and allies around the country to go to a Pride march this summer, to give money to an LGBT charity, to stand up for the kid in your school who is being picked on? Those kinds of acts, I promise, you will not regret.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which goes to the heart of the initial comments made by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who said that it is not just about standing up and saying things—it is actually about doing as well. There are many ways in which people can show their solidarity with members of the LGBT community, and I would encourage them to do so.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), the Home Secretary, the shadow Home Secretary, the spokesperson for the Scottish National party and all colleagues for what they have said over the past 40 minutes or so and for the obviously sincere, eloquent and compelling way in which they have said it. I hope that in the light of the sentiments expressed by colleagues, they will approve when I say that, on their behalf and in all of our names, I intend to write to the Mayor of Orlando. In doing so, I write both to convey our profound shock and absolute sympathy, and to underline the fact of our complete solidarity with the LGBTI community in Orlando, with the LGBTI community across the United States, and indeed with all the people of the United States at this exceptionally difficult and trying time.
Point of Order

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am delighted to see the Minister for Immigration in his place, because I wish to refer to his response to an urgent question on 26 May. When he responded to me, he indicated in good faith that the Brain family had come to the United Kingdom after the post-study work visa had been removed. I wish to ask him to clarify his remarks, because the family were granted a visa to come to the United Kingdom on 20 December 2010—before the post-study work visa had expired. That is a crucial point, because I have always argued that the family should be given the right to work here while they fulfill the demands of the tier 2 work visa, and that point is instrumental to the case they are bringing. I ask your forbearance, Mr Speaker, as I seek to bring this matter to the attention of the House and have the Minister correct the record, if he is prepared to do so.

Mr Speaker: I have sought to display my usual generosity of spirit to an exceptionally dedicated and assiduous constituency Member, which the hon. Gentleman undoubtedly is. However, I hope that he will take it in the right spirit if I say that that was not a point of order. Moreover, it was patently not addressed in any meaningful sense to, and could not be intended for, the Chair. It was really a request to the Minister on the Treasury Bench. Accordingly, it is best communicated directly to the Minister in writing or through a meeting, rather than across the Floor of the House. On this one occasion, and this one occasion only—I realise the seriousness of the matter—I will say that if the Minister wants very briefly to respond, even if only to indicate a willingness to engage, so be it, but he is under no obligation to do so. In future, the hon. Gentleman should give me notice of an intention to raise such a point of order, in which case I will wisely counsel him against doing so.

James Brokenshire: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am content to write to the hon. Gentleman in respect of the point that he has raised so that I am able to consider it properly.

Mr Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) is satisfied for now.

Policing and Crime Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]
Further consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee.

New Clause 48

INSPECTION OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES
“(1) The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 is amended as follows.
(2) In section 28 (inspectors), before subsection (1) insert—
‘(A1) Her Majesty may appoint such number of inspectors of fire and rescue authorities in England (the ‘English inspectors’) as the Secretary of State may determine.
(A2) Of the persons appointed under subsection (A1) one is to be appointed as the chief fire and rescue inspector for England.
(A3) The English inspectors must inspect, and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of, fire and rescue authorities in England.
(A4) The English inspectors must carry out such other duties for the purpose of furthering the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England as the Secretary of State may from time to time direct.
(A5) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England may appoint assistant inspectors and other officers for the purpose of assisting the English inspectors.
(A6) When carrying out an inspection under subsection (A3) of a fire and rescue authority created by an order under section 4A, an English inspector must not review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the fire and rescue authority in connection with the discharge of an excluded function.
(A7) For the purposes of subsection (A6), the following are excluded functions in relation to a fire and rescue authority—
(a) the function of preparing a fire and rescue plan and a fire and rescue statement (within the meaning of Schedule A2);
(b) the functions that the authority has in its capacity as a major precepting authority for the purposes of Part 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
(c) the function of appointing a chief finance officer under section 4D(4);
(d) where functions of the authority have been delegated to a chief constable under an order under section 4H, the functions conferred on the authority by section 4H(4) and (5);
(e) functions specified, or of a description specified, in relation to that authority in an order made by the Secretary of State.
(A8) The power under subsection (A7)(e) may be exercised in relation to—
(a) all fire and rescue authorities created by an order under section 4A,
(b) a particular fire and rescue authority created by an order under section 4A, or
(c) a particular description of fire and rescue authorities created by an order under section 4A.
(A9) Schedule A3 makes further provision in relation to the English inspectors.’

(3) In section 28, in subsection (1)(a), after “fire and rescue authorities” insert “in Wales”.

(4) After section 28 insert—
“28A Inspection programme and inspection framework etc: England

(1) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must from time to time prepare—
(a) a document setting out what inspections of fire and rescue authorities in England the English inspectors propose to carry out under section 28(A3) (an ‘inspection programme’); and
(b) a document setting out the manner in which the English inspectors propose to carry out the function conferred on them by section 28(A3) (an ‘inspection framework’).

(2) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must obtain the approval of the Secretary of State in an inspection programme or inspection framework before the English inspectors act in accordance with it.

(3) The Secretary of State may at any time require the chief fire and rescue inspector for England to carry out, or arrange for another English inspector to carry out, an inspection under section 28(A3) of—
(a) a fire and rescue authority in England;
(b) all fire and rescue authorities in England;
(c) all fire and rescue authorities in England of a particular type.

(4) A requirement imposed under subsection (3) may limit the inspection to a particular matter.

(5) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England or, at the request of that inspector, any other English inspector may carry out an inspection under section 28(A3) of a fire and rescue authority in England that has not been set out in an inspection programme (and has not been required under subsection (3)).

(6) Before deciding to carry out, or to request another English inspector to carry out, an inspection of a fire and rescue authority in England that has not been set out in an inspection programme, the chief fire and rescue inspector for England must consult the Secretary of State.

(7) Nothing in an inspection programme or inspection framework is to be read as preventing an English inspector from making a visit without notice.

(8) In this section ‘English inspector’ means an inspector appointed under section 28(A1).”

(5) After section 28A (as inserted by subsection (4)) insert—

“28B Publication of inspection reports etc: England

(1) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must arrange for a report prepared under section 28(A3) to be published in such manner as appears to him or her to be appropriate.

(2) But the chief fire and rescue inspector for England must exclude from publication under subsection (1) anything that he or she considers—
(a) would be against the interests of national security, or
(b) might jeopardise the safety of any person.

(3) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must—
(a) send a copy of the published report to the Secretary of State; and
(b) disclose to the Secretary of State anything excluded from publication by virtue of subsection (2).

(4) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England must in each year submit to the Secretary of State a report on the carrying out of inspections under section 28(A3) (during the period since the last report).

(5) A report under subsection (4) must include the chief fire and rescue inspector for England’s assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England for the period in respect of which the report is prepared.


(7) In this section ‘English inspector’ means an inspector appointed under section 28(A1).”

(6) In Schedule A2 (application of legislation relating to police and crime commissioners) (as inserted by Schedule 1 to this Act), in paragraph 8(2) (powers of police and crime panels: modifications of section 28 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011), after paragraph (c) insert—

“(ca) the references in subsection (6) to the commissioner’s functions were to the functions of the relevant fire and rescue authority that are excluded functions for the purposes of section 28(A6) of this Act (see section 28(A7)).”

(7) After Schedule A2 insert the new Schedule A3 set out in Schedule (Schedule to be inserted as Schedule A3 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) to this Act.

(8) A person appointed, before the coming into force of this section, under section 28 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 for the purpose of obtaining information in relation to the functions of fire and rescue authorities in England (including a person taken to have been so appointed by virtue of subsection (3) of that section) is to be taken—
(a) if an inspector, to have been appointed under subsection (A1) of that section, and
(b) if an assistant inspector or other officer, to have been appointed under subsection (A5) of that section.”

(Mike Penning)

The new clause amends, in relation to England, the provision in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 about inspections. New subsections (A1), (A2) and (A5) change the process for appointing inspectors, assistant inspectors and other officers and provide for one of the inspectors appointed to be the chief fire and rescue inspector for England. That person will have to prepare documents setting out details of proposed inspections (see new section 28A). New section 28B of the 2004 Act will impose new reporting requirements.

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.16 pm

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims

(Mike Penning): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new schedule 1—Schedule to be inserted as Schedule A3 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

Government new clause 30—Public records.

New clause 63—Police and Crime Commissioners: parity of funding between police and families at inquests—

“(1) A police and crime commissioner has the duties set out in this section when the police force they are responsible for is a Properly Interested Person for the purposes of—
(a) an inquest into the death of a member of an individual’s family, or
(b) an inquest into the deaths of members of a group of families,
under the Coroners Act 1988.

(2) The police and crime commissioner must make recommendations to the Secretary of State as to whether the individual’s family or the group of families at the inquest require financial support to ensure parity of legal representation between parties to the inquest.

(3) If a police and crime commissioner makes a recommendation under subsection (2) then the Secretary of State must provide financial assistance to the individual’s family or the
group of families to ensure parity of funding between families and the police.

(4) The individual’s family or the group of families may use funding authorised under this section solely for the purpose of funding legal representation at the inquest.

This new clause would put into law the principle of parity of funding between police and families at inquests. It would ensure that funding to a bereaved family, or a group of bereaved families, for purposes of legal representation during an inquest is an amount broadly equal to the level of funding that the police force receives. This new clause seeks to place an obligation on the PCC to recommend to the Home Secretary as to whether a bereaved family, or a group of bereaved families requires funding to support their legal representation at the inquest. The Home Secretary must provide such funding if it is recommended.

New clause 64—Police complaints and the media—

“(1) Subject to subsection (3), the Prime Minister must commission an independent inquiry into the operation of the police complaints system in respect of relationships between the police and media.

(2) The inquiry must include, but is not limited, to—

(a) how adequately police forces investigated complaints about police officers in dealing with people working within, or connected to, media organisations,

(b) the thoroughness of any reviews by police forces into complaints specified in subsection (a),

(c) in the cases where a complaint in subsection (a) led to a criminal investigation, the conduct of prosecuting authorities in investigating the allegation,

(d) the extent to which police officers took illegal payment to suppress investigations of complaints of relationships between police officers and people working within, or connected to, media organisations,

(e) the implications of subsections (a) to (d) for the relationships between media organisations and the police, prosecuting authorities, and relevant regulatory bodies, and recommended actions.

(3) The inquiry can only commence once the Secretary of State is satisfied that it would not prejudice any ongoing relevant legal cases.”

This new clause would compel the Prime Minister to instigate an independent inquiry such as Leveson 2 into the relationships between the press and police and the extent to which that has operated in the public interest.

New clause 65—IPCC functions following complaints about the police’s handling of an event which has led to large scale loss of life—

“(1) The Independent Police Complaints Commission (the ‘Commission’) shall undertake the functions set out in subsection (3) to (5) when—

(a) there has been an event which has led to large scale loss of life, and

(b) the conditions in subsection (2) have been met.

(2) Subsection (1) applies when, for that event—

(a) the Commission has received complaints of a serious nature about the actions of the police either before, during or in response to the event, or as part of a police investigation into the event,

(b) the Commission has been asked to undertake such action by fifty per cent plus one or more of the total of—

(i) representatives of those deceased due to the event, and

(ii) any injured survivors of the event.

(3) The Commission shall report to the individuals identified in section 2(b) during any police investigation into the disaster regarding the progress of the investigation, and how the individuals identified in section 2(b) can assist with it, including, if there are no lawyers representing the individuals identified in section 2(b), the implications of engaging lawyers at that stage.

(4) Following a further request to the Commission by fifty percent plus one or more of the representatives of those deceased due to the event, the Commission shall set up a panel (the “Commission’s Panel”) which shall register as a data controller under the Data Protection Act 1998 and review all documentation relating to the event, the deceased and the representatives and report thereon.

(5) In establishing the Commission’s Panel under subsection (4), the Commission must consult the individuals identified in subsection 2(b).

(6) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report in subsection (4) before Parliament.

(7) While a review under subsection (4) is in progress, the Commission’s Panel must report to the individuals identified in section 2(b) every three months on the progress of the review.”

Government amendments 85, 22 to 30, 86, 87 and 31.

Amendment 126, in clause 27, page 42, line 38, leave out from “(a)” to end of subsection, and insert—

“(iii) but the period between the allegation first coming to the attention of a person mentioned in paragraph (a) and any initiation of disciplinary proceedings does not exceed the period specified in the regulations.

(3A) The regulations under this section must specify that there is no maximum period of time after which historic allegation of misconduct cannot be investigated for cases which meet the following conditions—

(a) the case involves allegations of gross misconduct,

(b) the case is certified by the Secretary of State to be liable to lead to serious loss of confidence in the police service and the Secretary of State determines that investigating and, if appropriate, hearing the case is necessary and proportionate.

(3AA) The provisions of this section apply where the alleged misconduct, inefficiency or ineffectiveness took place prior to this Act coming into force.

(3AB) Regulations under this section must include sanctions for disciplinary proceedings in respect of a person defined under subsection (3A).”

This amendment would provide for disciplinary proceedings to take place a specified period after the allegation first comes to light, instead of a limit based on when the person concerned left a police force. It would also provide for this time period to be extended in cases of serious misconduct. It would also allow for proceedings to apply to retrospective cases and provides for sanctions for disciplinary proceedings.

Amendment 127, in clause 31, page 48, line 24, after “the”, insert “Independent”.

This amendment would retain the word “Independent” in the Office for Police Conduct (the new title for the current Independent Police Complaints Commission).


Please see explanatory statement for Amendment 127.

Amendment 129, page 48, line 33, after “the”, insert “Independent”.

Please see explanatory statement for Amendment 127.

Amendment 131, page 49, line 6, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

“(6) In subsection leave out “chairman of the Commission, or as another member of the Commission” and insert “Director General, or as another member of the Office”.

This amendment would ensure that both the Director General of the Independent Office for Police Conduct, and any member of the Office, must not have held any of the roles set out in Section 9(3) of the Police Reform Act 2002.

Amendment 130, page 49, line 14, after “the”, insert “Independent.”
Please see explanatory statement for Amendment 127.

Government amendments 32 to 61, 88, 63 to 84 and 14 to 17.

Government new clause 49—Retention of fingerprints and DNA profiles: PACE.


Government new clause 52—Cross-border enforcement: powers of entry to effect arrest.


New clause 12—Deaths in custody: mental health—

“(1) Section 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 is amended as follows.

(2) In Section 1(2)(c), at end insert ‘other than while deprived of their liberty under Schedule A1 to the Mental Capacity Act 2005.’”

New clause 22—Surrender of travel documentation—

“(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person is arrested under section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, or under article 26 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I.12) S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I.12), in respect of an offence mentioned in section 41(1) or (2) of the Counter Terrorism Act 2008,

(b) the person is released without charge and on bail under Part 4 of the 1984 Act or (as the case may be) Part 5 of the 1989 Order, and

(c) the release on bail is subject to a travel restriction condition.

(2) If police are satisfied that a person is in possession of travel documents, as a pre-condition of release from custody, the person must surrender their travel documentation.”

This amendment would require terrorist suspects to surrender passports and any other travel documentation as a pre-condition of release from custody.

New clause 23—Powers to require removal of disguises—

“(1) The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit section 60AA (Powers to require removal of disguises) and insert—

‘Section 60AA Powers to require removal of disguises.’

(1) Where a constable in uniform reasonably believes that an offence has been, or is being, committed he may—

(a) require any person to remove any item which the constable reasonably believes that person is wearing wholly or mainly for the purpose of concealing his identity;

(b) seize any item which the constable reasonably believes any person intends to wear wholly or mainly for that purpose.

(2) A person who fails to remove an item worn by him or her when required to do so by a constable in the exercise of his power under this section shall be liable, on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale, or to both.

(3) The powers conferred by this section are in addition to, and not in derogation of, any power otherwise conferred.

(4) This section does not extend to Scotland.”

This new clause would remove the requirement for prior authorisation in existing section 60AA so that where a constable reasonably believes that an offence has been, or is being, committed they may require the removal of items where they are used wholly or mainly for the purpose of concealing identity.

New clause 24—Access to Independent Mental Health Advocates—

“(1) A person detained in a place of safety under section 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 shall have the right to an independent mental health advocate (see section 130A of the Mental Health Act 1983).”

This new clause would extend the right to an independent mental health advocate to those detained under sections 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

New clause 25—Child sexual exploitation: duty to share information—

“The local policing body that maintains a police force shall have a duty to disclose information about children who are victims of sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse to relevant child mental health service commissioners in England and Wales.”

This new clause would place a duty on local police forces to share information with their local commissioners to improve local commissioning of mental health support for victims of child sexual exploitation.

New clause 26—Detention under the Mental Health Act 1983: training—

“(1) The chief police officer of every police force must ensure that provision is made for training police officers in the exercise the powers granted to them by sections 136 and 137 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

(2) The training provided under subsection (1) must include material on—

(a) diversity and equality, and

(b) cultural issues that police officers should be aware of when exercising power under the Mental Health Act 1983.

(3) The chief police officer of each police force must make an annual report to the Home Secretary on the provision they have made to comply with the requirements of this section.”

This new clause would require each police force to provide its officers with training on how to exercise power under the Mental Health Act, with particular reference to diversity issues.

New clause 29—Access to legal advice—

“(1) A person detained against their will in a place of safety under section 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 shall have the right to ask for and receive independent legal advice.”

This new Clause would ensure the individual detained under section 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 has access to legal advice.

New clause 40—Disallowing use of tasers on psychiatric wards—

“A police officer may not use a taser or electroshock weapon during a deployment on a psychiatric ward.”

This new clause would prohibit the use of tasers by police officers on psychiatric wards.

New clause 42—Deployment of police officers on psychiatric wards: reporting—

“(1) Any incident of police officers being deployed on a psychiatric ward must be reported to the Home Secretary by the chief police officer of the relevant force within one week of the incident.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must contain the following information—

(a) the nature of the incident,

(b) the number of police officers who were deployed,

(c) the actions taken by the officers during their deployment, and

(d) the outcome of the incident.”

This new clause would require the Home Secretary to be notified whenever police officers are deployed on psychiatric wards.
New clause 43—Use of tasers on psychiatric wards: reporting—

“(1) Any incident of a police officer using a taser during a deployment on a psychiatric ward must be reported to the Home Secretary by the chief police officer of the relevant force within one week of the incident.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must contain the following information—

(a) the reason for the use of the taser,
(b) the action taken following the use of the taser, and
(c) the process that will be followed for reviewing the incident.”

This new clause would require the Home Secretary to be notified whenever a police officer uses a taser on a psychiatric ward.

New clause 45—Child sexual exploitation: assessment of needs for therapeutic support—

“(1) Where the police or a local authority have a reasonable belief that a child has been sexually exploited or subject to other forms of child abuse, the police or local authority must refer the child to a named mental health service.

(2) The named mental health service must conduct an assessment of the child’s needs and where appropriate make necessary arrangements for the child’s treatment or care.

(3) The Secretary of State must by regulations—

(a) define ‘named mental health service’ for the purpose of this section;
(b) specify a minimum level of “necessary arrangements” for the purpose of the section.”

This new clause would place a duty on the police or local authority to ensure that children who are believed to have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation are referred to an appropriate mental health service for assessment and appropriate support.

New clause 58—Prohibition on using a person’s home as a place of safety—

“(1) The Mental Health Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 136, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

“(1) The Mental Health Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a suitable place—

(a) as defined by this Act, an independent hospital or care home for mentally disordered persons or any other forms of care for the protection of other persons—

(b) if the person is already at a place of safety within the meaning of section 135, or

(c) the power to remove the person to a place of safety within the meaning of section 135(6) shall not include a house, flat or room where a person is living.”

This amendment would prevent a person’s home from being used as places of safety for the purposes of section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

New clause 59—Detention under the Mental Health Act 1983: Access to an appropriate adult—

“(1) A person detained in a place of safety under section 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 shall have the right to an appropriate adult.

(2) For the purposes of subsection 1, ‘appropriate adult’ means:

(a) a relative, guardian or other person responsible for the detained person’s care;

(b) someone experienced in dealing with mentally disordered or mentally vulnerable people but who is not a police officer or employed by the police; or

(c) some other responsible adult aged 18 or over who is not a police officer or employed by the police.”

This new clause would extend the right to an appropriate adult to those detained under sections 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Government new clause 2—Cross-border enforcement: minor and consequential amendments.

Government amendments 89 to 95.

Amendment 123, in clause 75, page 92, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) In section 135 (warrant to search for and remove patients), leave out subsection (6) and insert—

“(6) Subject to section 136A, in this section “place of safety” means residential accommodation provided by a local social services authority under Part III of the National Assistance Act 1948, a hospital as defined by this Act, an independent hospital or care home for mentally disordered persons or any other suitable place.”

This amendment is consequential to amendment 124.

Amendment 124, page 92, line 33, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

“(6) After section 136 insert—

‘136A Prohibition on using police stations as places of safety

(1) A person may not, in the exercise of a power to which this section applies, be removed to, kept at or taken to a police station as a place of safety.

(2) The powers to which this section applies are—

(a) the power to remove a person to a place of safety under a warrant issued under section 135(1);

(b) the power to take a person to a place of safety under section 135(3A);

(c) the power to remove a person to, or to keep a person at, a place of safety under section 136(1);

(d) the power to take a person to a place of safety under section 136(3).

(3) In this section “person” means a person of any age.”

This amendment would prevent a police station from being used as a place of safety for the purposes of sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Amendment 125, in clause 76, page 93, line 25, leave out sub paragraph (i) and insert—

“(i) In a case where the person is removed to a place of safety, the time when the constable takes that person into custody (within the meaning of section 137 of the Mental Health Act 1983) in order to remove them to that place.”

This amendment would ensure that the period of detention started at the point a person was detained rather than the time they arrived at a place of safety.

Government amendments 96 to 106, 109, 110, 117 and 118.

New clause 66—Guidance: unattributable briefings—

“(1) The College of Policing shall issue a code of practice relating to police-media relations.

(2) This code should set out clear guidance to ensure that all police media communications are reportable, quotable and attributable unless in exceptional circumstances.

(3) The code of practice shall be issued in line with requirements of section 39A of the Police Act 1996.”

This new clause would require The College of Policing to issue a code of practice relating to police-media relations. The aim of this clause is to ensure that all police media communications should be reportable, quotable and attributable unless in exceptional circumstances.

Mike Penning: May I start by saying, genuinely, that this Bill has progressed with the will, respect and the help of Members on both sides of the House. As there are several new Government amendments in this group, I thought it only right and proper that I address some of them. I will also address some of the amendments
It is our intention to introduce a robust and independent inspection regime for fire and rescue authorities in England. New clause 48 and new schedule 1 will support that objective by strengthening the inspection framework currently provided for in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The amendments provide for the appointment of a chief fire and rescue inspector, who will be required to prepare a programme for the inspection of fire and rescue services. The Secretary of State will have the power to require inspections outside the published programme if necessary.

Fire and rescue inspectors will be required to produce reports on their inspections, and the chief inspector will make an annual report to Parliament—something that does not currently take place. We will enable fire inspectors to carry out joint inspections with Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary. That will be particularly important where police and crime commissioners and metro mayors take on the responsibilities of fire and rescue authorities.

Finally, these provisions will ensure that inspectors have access to the information they need to undertake a rigorous and independent examination of fire and rescue authorities and the persons employed by them. That means that no door will be locked and all information will be available to the inspector.

Although we believe that the vast majority of inspections will be undertaken by consent, we need to be alert to the fact that additional powers might be needed. If inspectors do not feel that they are getting the access that they deserve and need to produce reports, they will have the power to ask for such things. These amendments will help fire and rescue authorities be more transparent and more accountable.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): May I say to my right hon. Friend that, as a former holder of this part of his post, I entirely welcome and support these amendments? The inspectorate is a thoroughly good idea, but may I raise one technical issue? There is provision for delegation to another public body. Many of us think that it would be much better if new schedule 1 were phrased so as to permit the use of external contractors to carry out certain elements of the inspection on behalf of inspectors where outside expertise may not be readily available in a public body. At the moment, the wording of new clause 48 and new schedule 1 does not appear to permit delegation to external contractors, who may well have expertise in operational audit, which is precisely what we need to make inspections robust and independent. Will he reflect on that?

Mr Speaker: Order. No one could accuse the hon. Gentleman of excluding from his intervention anything that he thought might at any time, in any way, to any degree be material, and I have a sense that when he practised law regularly he operated in a similar vein.

Mike Penning: I understand exactly where my hon. Friend is coming from, especially on the point about audit. However, at the moment, we do not feel that there is a need to use external specialists in that way; if we find out later that there is, the inspector could ask the Home Secretary for those specific measures. The fire service has enough expertise to ensure that the regime works. It will be completely different from the current regime.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to another former Fire Minister. There used to be an honourable tradition that Fire Ministers were West Ham United supporters, but sadly that was broken by the right hon. Gentleman.

We have gone from the fire services inspectorate to the National Audit Office and then to nothing, and we are now going back to the fire services inspectorate. Has the Minister taken into account, for example, the United Kingdom Accreditation Service, which could give external advice to the new inspectorate, very much along the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill)? Will the new chief inspector also be the national adviser for fire? I would be grateful if the Minister explained a little of the background.

Mike Penning: I am conscious that I am in the hands of experts who were Ministers long before I was, but as an ex-firefighter, I was really quite surprised to see how the inspections took place when I came into the role. They did not take place as envisaged by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) when he introduced the relevant legislation. There was a genuine feeling that we had to address the costs and how the inspections were done. To be perfectly honest, the system has not worked. We cannot continue with the situation where one fire and rescue force inspects another and they tell each other what they can and cannot inspect.

This proposal is separate, which is why we have put the new inspector alongside Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary. They will tell us exactly what expertise they require. As ex-firefighters, the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and I can assume what they will need to look at, but I accept that some fire and rescue services will need to draw on financial expertise from other areas.

Robert Neill: I promise to try not to trouble my right hon. Friend anymore, but will he clarify something? I agree with his response to the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), but is he saying that if evidence is presented, Ministers will not rule out making an appropriate arrangement whereby commissioning can take place if the chief inspector thinks it appropriate in relation to any inspection without us being required to make further legislative arrangements in the House? I am sure he will understand that the need for further legislation would defeat our objective.

Mike Penning: Absolutely. I can say categorically that we do not want to handcuff the inspector. If an inspector needs to bring in further expertise, whether from UKAS or others, they will be able to bring that to the attention of the Ministers responsible. There will not be a requirement to come to the House.

This is a really positive move for the fire service, and the chiefs have welcomed it. They have been supportive in the meetings that I have had with them. I am not sure whether they all support the proposal, because the ones
who do not support it might not have been banging on my door quite as hard as the ones who do. Naturally, I will come back to the issue in responding to the debate if we have time.

I will touch briefly on DNA and fingerprint retention, which is an extremely important and sensitive topic. New clauses 49 and 50 will help the prevention and detection of crime by enabling DNA profiles and fingerprints to be retained on the basis of convictions outside England and Wales, in the same way as the material could be used if the offence had taken place in England and Wales. We are trying to protect the public. The measures, which have been requested, will apply specifically to offences committed outside England and Wales that would be offences in England and Wales. The amendments made by new clauses 40 and 50 to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Terrorism Act 2000 will enhance the effectiveness of the national DNA and fingerprint databases and help our police keep us safe, which we all want, especially in the light of the heightened threat.

New clauses 51, 52 and 53 and new schedule 2 will strengthen the existing cross-border powers of arrest provided for in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and appear to be supported across the House.

I want to listen to the shadow Home Secretary’s comments, so I will touch only briefly on the new clauses that he has tabled, which we have discussed together with the shadow policing Minister, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). I know that the Home Secretary, too, has discussed them with the shadow Home Secretary. It may assist the House if I say a few words about them now. As I said earlier, we welcome the constructive approach from the Opposition, and in particular from the Hillsborough families and the campaign group. We would not be discussing these issues now without their bravery, for which I praise them. The work carries on; it will not stop, whatever happens today.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The Minister mentioned the Hillsborough families, some of whom are here today to hear his words. Will he give categorical assurances to them and to other campaigners on historical injustices that that sort of thing could never happen again once new clause 63 becomes law?

Mike Penning: No Minister could stand at the Dispatch Box in any Parliament in the world and give such a categorical assurance. We have moved an enormous way forward, through the perseverance of the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary. Although we are trying as hard as we can, without consequential effects on other legislation, to make sure that a terrible situation such as Hillsborough never happens again, I cannot categorically give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he asks for. I know that that will disappoint him, but he will understand where I am coming from. All through today’s debate and beyond, when the Bill goes to the other House, I will be as helpful as I can.

We recognise the strength of feeling on these issues, and particularly the public concern to ensure that police officers who commit the most serious acts of wrongdoing can be held to account for their actions, no matter when they come to light. We are talking here not about criminal actions, for which criminal proceedings can be brought against individuals, but about disciplinary action against a police officer.

Having looked carefully at the new clauses tabled by the shadow Home Secretary, and following discussions that I have had with the shadow Policing Minister, we will table an amendment in the House of Lords to allow, in exceptional circumstances, an unlimited extension of the 12-month time limit that we propose in the Bill. It is understood that that does not apply to every offence. We will work with the shadow Home Secretary and his team—and, I hope, the Hillsborough families and Bishop James—on the drafting of the relevant regulations so that we can make sure that they do what it says on the tin. We will keep the 12-month rule, but in exceptional circumstances, based on regulations, we will be able to look at historical cases—not criminal cases—and take action against a former police officer. The 12-month time limit will remain, but we will work on the regulations. That is a significant move on our part.

The measure will apply to police officers serving with a police force at the point at which the provisions come into force. In line with established principles, we do not believe that it would be appropriate to apply such a provision retrospectively. However, this is a significant move so that, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) suggests, families will have further protection in future.

On new clause 66, which is about the police and the media, I assure the House that the consultation that is going on with the College of Policing, which we have discussed with the shadow ministerial team, is actively looking at the guidance on the issue. I am not going to predict exactly what the college will come forward with, but it would not be actively looking at the issue if it was not there, and we will wait for the college to come forward.

4.30 pm

New clauses 63 and 65 are about support for bereaved families. That is a really important area, and we are looking at it. The Home Secretary has asked Bishop James to compile a report on not just the financial issue but the whole aspect of how we could improve things so that families do not go through a situation such as Hillsborough ever again. I am not ruling anything out or anything in—we will wait for Bishop James’s report.

Whatever happens in the House this afternoon—I do not know whether Her Majesty’s Opposition will divide the House on the issue, but we will wait and see—the matter will not stop there. We will still work with Bishop James and wait for the report, before going forward depending on the will of the House.

On new clause 64, which is about Leveson part 2, the Government have made it clear on many occasions—not least at the Dispatch Box—that we will wait for the criminal proceedings that are still ongoing to come to a conclusion, and then the Home Secretary will move forward.

I have tried to highlight some of the issues involved in these amendments. There are a lot of other proposals that we can discuss this afternoon, but I wanted to set out the Government’s position on some of the Opposition’s new clauses and on some of the amendments and new clauses that I have tabled.
Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I would like to begin by agreeing with the Minister that some good progress has been made in the course of our deliberations on the Bill. There have been improvements, which we will discuss later, on tackling child sexual exploitation and on the police bail regime—particularly as it applies to those suspected of being involved in terrorism activity. As he has just indicated, there has also been progress on police misconduct, which I will come to.

However, the Bill presents an opportunity to do much more to improve police accountability, and that is an opportunity that we in the House now need to grab. Today, I want to present a package of proposals that respond to the historic verdict of the Hillsborough inquest, which finally concluded, after 27 years, that, as the families had known from day one, the loss of their loved ones was not an accident and they had been unlawfully killed, but that that fact had been covered up for all those years.

This package seeks to rebalance this country and to make it fairer. It seeks to rebalance it away from the establishment and in favour of ordinary families. It is a package that will stand as a permanent tribute to the dignity and determination of the Hillsborough families. Knowing them as I do, they would want nothing more than that no other family in the future should go through what they have gone through.

Let me take the House briefly through this package of proposals. New clause 63 would give bereaved families equal funding for legal representation at inquests where the police are involved. It seeks to establish the crucial principle that there should be parity between the two sides. The reason that is important is that it says very clearly that the public interest lies in finding the truth. That is how public resources should be directed: they should not be directed towards creating an unbalanced contest at an inquest, with public money used to protect vested interests in the public sector.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am happy to confirm that the Liberal Democrats will support this proposal. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, had it been in place at the time of the first inquest, the truth might have emerged at that stage, and the families would not have had to go through such a dire long wait to get to the truth?

Andy Burnham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support. He is absolutely right. I will come on to explain precisely how this would have helped to even the playing field and give the families the chance to get truth at the first time of asking. The original inquest catastrophically failed on that account, and that needs to be very clearly understood as we consider this amendment.

Amendment 126 seeks to close the long-standing loophole of retirement being used by police officers as a route to evade misconduct proceedings. New clause 64 seeks to hold the Government to their promise to the families had known from day one, the loss of their loved ones was not an accident and they had been unlawfully killed, but that that fact had been covered up for all those years. Amendment 127

128 seek to strengthen the Independent Police Complaints Commission. New clause 67, which will be considered later, seeks to strengthen the offence of misconduct in public office.

Let me start with the area where there is greatest consensus—police misconduct. I listened carefully to what the Minister said, and I am grateful for the movement that he indicated to the shadow Police Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), in Committee whereby there should not merely be an arbitrary 12-month period after retirement, because, as we know, police wrongdoing may come to light much later. We are glad that the Government have indicated that they are prepared to move on this matter in the other place and table an amendment to that effect. While I will not press my amendment to a vote, I would still like to press the Minister a little further on this point. He is saying that this should be applied only in the most exceptional circumstances, but that potentially rules out many people who might be guilty of gross misconduct but would not be caught by his “exceptional” test. He needs to reassure the House on this point.

Mike Penning: That is why I offered to work closely with colleagues across the House on the regulations, which will be very important. We do not include everybody, because then there is no point in having exceptional cases, but it is very important to understand what “exceptional” means.

Andy Burnham: That is a good offer and I thank the Minister for it. I think we can move forward on that basis. I hope we all know what we are trying to achieve—that is, if serious wrongdoing comes to light about an individual who is beyond 12 months retired, it must be possible for misconduct or disciplinary proceedings to be initiated against them. Our amendment says that there should then also be sanctions that are able to be applied against that individual. I say to the Minister that we will want to insist on that point as well.

If we can agree to move forward on that basis, that is a considerable example of progress that matters greatly to the Hillsborough families, who, as they were continuing their 27-year struggle, felt very aggrieved when they saw individuals who had retired on a full pension and who they felt were beyond reach and could not be held to account. I believe that this should apply retrospectively. Misconduct is misconduct whenever it occurred, and people should be held to account for their actions.

Steve Rotheram: I thank the Minister for coming partly towards the position that we believe should be taken, but can we clarify one point? We are talking about serious wrongdoing—malfeasance and gross misconduct—by police officers. We have mentioned Hillsborough, so many people will spin that with regard to the conduct of officers—ordinary officers—at that disaster in 1989. There are no accusations against many of the ordinary officers, who performed heroically; it was the senior officers who let people down, and then, in some cases, took the opportunity to get away scot free through the cop-out of using ill health—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a speech, he can stand up to indicate when he wishes to do so, but this an intervention, and interventions must be a little shorter.
Andy Burnham: It was a long intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it was a good one. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) makes a very important point. I do not think that any attempt is being made to blame ordinary policemen and women. That is not the purpose of the amendment. It is important for me to say very clearly to those police officers who are out there keeping the streets safe that this is not an attack on them. The package is about not allowing the misdeeds of the past to taint the present and those police officers who are working today. That is such a crucial point, because if we do not deal properly with such allegations, we allow the situation to contaminate the present and to corrode trust in today’s police service. None of us in this House wants that, so my hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point, which cannot be stressed enough.

Mike Penning: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for being so generous in giving way. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) is absolutely right. If we had not included the point about exceptional circumstances, those sorts of people could have been captured, and that is not what we want. We are not looking at an officer who commits a speeding offence just before he retires; we are looking at those people who should be brought to justice, and that is exactly what we should be doing.

Andy Burnham: That is right. This is about people who have been guilty of serious misconduct in public office, and it is crucial that they cannot use retirement as a means of evading accountability for that misconduct. The change to which the Minister appears to be agreeing closes a long-standing loophole and frustration for members of the public. It exposes the police to a considerably more challenging regime, but rightly so. Any profession needs to be held accountable to the highest standards. We will work with the Minister to get it right. I believe that we can do so, but I stress that this is about upholding the reputation of the vast majority of police officers, who serve the public with distinction.

The issue of police-press relations is the biggest area of unfinished business, although, in fact, we have not even really started to make any changes with respect to putting right the wrongs of Hillsborough. As we know, the briefing of the press in those first days after the tragedy caused incalculable harm and damage, not just to the families who had lost loved ones, but to the thousands of people, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton, who had returned from the match in a state of trauma, only to read a couple of days later that the police were blaming them for the deaths of their friends and family.

That is why feelings are so strong, not just in Merseyside but across the country. It simply cannot be right that a police force is able, unattributably, to brief malicious and unproven information to a newspaper. We need a stronger and more transparent regime for press relations, so that false impressions cannot be put out there with the intention of setting a narrative about a particular incident. Families who are fighting for justice often find that it is very difficult to overturn the false version of events. That was certainly the case for the Hillsborough families.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I totally agree with the points that my right hon. Friend is making. Does he agree that among the problems with Hillsborough were not only the off-the-record briefings that took place later, but the on-the-record briefings to get the narrative right from the beginning?

Andy Burnham: I agree on both levels. This was a cover-up perpetrated on the record, off the record and in the Committee rooms of this House. It went to the very top—even to 10 Downing Street, where the head of press at the time briefed that a “tanked-up mob” caused the disaster. This cover-up went to the highest level. What chance did ordinary families have when faced with the might of the establishment seeking to perpetrate a lie on that scale? It has been a 27-year fight, as we now know.

4.45 pm

This whole area is a major piece of unfinished business, and it is why we have suggested new clause 66. I think I heard the Minister say that he would work with us, with the College of Policing and with the National Police Chiefs Council on new clause 66 to get this right. I believe my hon. Friend the shadow Policing Minister is having some useful discussions with them. They have responded to Labour’s initiative in this area and have already begun working on a code of conduct for police-press relations. We want to work with the Minister to get this absolutely right, because there has been a common thread in a number of injustices down the years: an unhealthy relationship between police and press can sow the seeds for a cover-up that is difficult to overturn.

New clause 64 invites the House to reinforce the promise made by the Prime Minister to the victims of press intrusion. Let me go back to what the Prime Minister said in November 2012:

“When I set up the inquiry,”—the Leveson inquiry—

“...I also said that there would be a second part to investigate wrongdoing in the press and the police...we remain committed to the inquiry as it was first established.”—[Official Report, 29 November 2012; Vol. 554, c. 446.]

He also said:

“It is right that it should go ahead, and that is fully our intention.”—[Official Report, 29 November 2012; Vol. 554, c. 458.]

It has been put to me that that promise was made face to face with some of the victims of hacking and press intrusion—people such as the McCanns and Milly Dowler’s family. It seems to Labour Members as though the Government have subtly shifted their position in the intervening years. As we heard a moment ago from the Minister, it is no longer a question of when the inquiry will go ahead; it is a question of whether it will go ahead. The Government now say that following the conclusion of the outstanding investigations on the matter, they will take a decision on whether the second stage of the inquiry will go ahead.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): That promise was made not just to the victims and their families but to the Chairs of three Select Committees in the Prime Minister’s room before the inquiry was announced. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it is important that we get Leveson 2—perhaps not with Leveson, because he has moved on to do other things,
but with somebody else. There is nothing wrong with the Government beginning the process, choosing a chair of the committee and getting the mechanics together. We do not really have to wait until the end of the criminal proceedings.

Andy Burnham: I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend. There is a huge amount of unfinished business. These issues are present in so many of the injustices that we have seen, where there has been inappropriate contact between police and press. We await the conclusions of the Daniel Morgan panel, for instance, which might best illustrate some of these issues.

That is true of other events as well. We remember the way in which the media were manipulated in the case of the Shrewsbury 24, for example. There have been many examples of this over time. Indeed, part 1 of the Leveson inquiry found unhealthy links between senior Met officers and newspaper executives, which led to the resignation of the then Met police chief and others. The issue cannot be left there. Public officials and police officers have also been convicted of offences related to these matters.

The Minister really needs to provide an explicit answer on this specific point today. He cannot wriggle out of this commitment. It is not the kind of commitment you can wriggle out of, given everything that those people have been through. A promise should be a promise, when it is made to people who have suffered in the way that many of the victims of press intrusion have suffered. I know that the Hillsborough families feel exactly the same. They were the victims of the biggest example of inappropriate police briefing of newspapers—and it was not just one newspaper. People think it was just one newspaper that reported the lies, but many of them reported the lies that were given to Whites news agency in Sheffield, and those lies went round the world. Only this week, I had an email from someone in the United States saying that they were astonished to find out the truth when they watched the recent BBC2 documentary on Hillsborough, and that for 27 years they had thought that the events were the result of hooliganism. It is impossible to exaggerate the harm that those lies caused.

I say to the Minister tonight that we need a better answer. If he were to stand up now at the Dispatch Box and say clearly to the House that there will be a second-stage inquiry into the culture of relations between the police and the press, I would be the first to say that we would not press our new clause 64 to a vote. However, I take his point that there are ongoing investigations. I take his point that some of the investigations will have a material impact on issues that we are considering. We are not saying that we want the inquiry to start right now. We accept that there are matters to be concluded in the courts before it can proceed. What we are after is the removal of any doubt that it will proceed at the appropriate moment and that the promise the Prime Minister gave to those victims will be honoured. That is what we are seeking to establish tonight. That is what we are asking the Minister to lay down very clearly.

The Minister makes a fair point that there are ongoing investigations. I take his point that some of the investigations will have a material impact on issues that we are considering. We are not saying that we want the inquiry to start right now. We accept that there are matters to be concluded in the courts before it can proceed. What we are after is the removal of any doubt that it will proceed at the appropriate moment and that the promise the Prime Minister gave to those victims will be honoured. That is what we are seeking to establish tonight. That is what we are asking the Minister to lay down very clearly.

This goes beyond party politics. The victims and their families have suffered enough, and Members on both sides of the House owe it to them to make good on the promise that was given to them. That is why I look forward to Members from both sides of the House joining us in the Lobby tonight, because it clearly looks as though the Government are not going to give way.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): These families have suffered enough—we in this Chamber are united on that—so does my right hon. Friend agree that a statement from the Minister today saying that the second inquiry will go ahead would put an end to their suffering? They have suffered enough. Let this be the end.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend puts it very well. That is what I have seen when working with the Hillsborough families, as have others when they have been fighting for justice. Those people are affected not just by the original trauma they suffered, but by how the system grinds them down afterwards, making them fight for everything, not giving them an inch and slowly draining the life out of them. How cruel is that? It is just wrong—is it not?—that the government machine thinks it can operate in that way. As I will move on to say,
I spoke today to a family about going to meetings with 14 lawyers sitting around the table and just a couple of family members. That is just not right. We all know it is not right. Any of us who have been Ministers will have seen that style of meeting, and it is just not right. It is time to change it. We should not make these families fight for everything, but support them, and tip the scales in their favour and away from the powerful. Why not do so?

**Mike Penning:** May I just tell the right hon. Gentleman that I do not know what has happened with other Ministers, but I have never sat in such a meeting and anyone who has had a meeting with me as a Minister will know, as right hon. and hon. Members know, that that is not the way I operate and that I never have operated in that way?

**Andy Burnham:** I have a lot of time for the Minister, as he knows, but such people are listening to this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) is not in her place, but if the victims of contaminated blood are listening to this debate, they will immediately recognise what I am saying. If the victims of organophosphates—sheep dip—poisoning are listening today, they will understand what I am saying. If the people waiting for the announcement about the battle of Orgreave investigation are listening, they will understand what I am saying. There are so many people who have not been given justice by the system, and that just is not right. It really is not right, and that is why I keep saying that we must make Hillsborough a moment of change when we can tip the scales in favour of ordinary families and away from the establishment.

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): In an attempt to act as a peace broker, given that the positions of both sides have been made perfectly clear, may I ask whether the shadow Home Secretary will accept a commitment to proceed with Leveson 2 after the investigations have taken place and whether, if that is acceptable, the Minister could make such a commitment today?

**Andy Burnham:** That is a good point. It would be good enough if we got a cast-iron commitment. Ministers have reintroduced a doubt—in media briefings, they have said, “Oh, it probably won’t go ahead now”—and have muddied the waters. If they clarified that tonight, that would be good enough. If they said, “It will go ahead after the proper time has elapsed, given the criminal proceedings that are still outstanding”, that would be fine and everyone would understand it. If they said, “It will go ahead after the proper time has elapsed, given the criminal proceedings that are still outstanding”, that would be fine and everyone would understand it. If they gave that commitment tonight, there would be no need for a vote because we would have done our job, but if they cannot give such a commitment, that would be revealing in itself. If the Minister cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and give such a clear commitment, or rather reaffirm it to the people to whom Ministers have said, “Yes, we will do it,” then we will have forced the issue so that Ministers are held to account for their promise. That is what we are doing tonight. Ministers have the chance to do the right thing: to stand at the Dispatch Box and say, “Yes, we will do it. We will honour what we said.” If they do not do so, we will ask Members of decency and integrity on both sides of the House to stand with us and to go through the Lobby with us tonight to hold Ministers to account for the promise they made.

Finally, let me turn to our new clause 63 on parity. The new clause seeks to establish the principle of parity of legal funding for bereaved families at inquests involving the police. In introducing it, I want to say that it is very important that people do not see Hillsborough as a one-off belonging to a bygone era. To be honest, many bereaved families still face a very similar experience when they go to an inquest. They often find themselves pitched into an adversarial and aggressive courtroom when they are still raw with grief. They are unable to match the spending of the police or the public sector in what they spend on their own legal representation. Those families find their lives picked apart. They are made to look like they are perpetrators, not victims. That is a very common experience. Many people who suffer do not have the huge support that the Hillsborough families had. They are ordinary families battling away on their own, with no one else coming to support them. That is why the principle of parity is so tremendously important.

5 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend’s remarks will be heard by Rachel Gumbs, the daughter of Philmore Mills, who died in hospital while being restrained by the police. Another constituent has raised an issue relating to his mum. Her children were abducted by their father, and she has spent nearly two decades without being able to contact them. My constituent is in litigation against the police, and feels a similar kind of bereavement, as he has been kept away from his brothers and sisters. He hopes that the approach we are discussing could enable people like him, who are taking cases against the police, to get access to some kind of resources. Would that be possible?

**Andy Burnham:** That is exactly what lies behind the new clause. My right hon. Friend has just made my point. We will all have examples from our experience as constituency MPs. We know families who have been at inquests that have been highly unsatisfactory experiences, and where they did not get legal support. I will come to a few examples, to show how unfair it is. The public sector spends taxpayers’ money like water on hiring the best QCs to line up in the courtroom and defend its reputation. Ordinary families are scrabbling around, re-mortgaging their houses and doing whatever they can to try to put up some kind of fight against that. How wrong is that?

Public money should pay to establish the truth. That means that there should be parity between the two sides in that process. It should not be the case that the public sector packs a courtroom with highly paid QCs. That is such an important principle to establish coming out of Hillsborough—to be honest, if there is to be one lasting legacy from Hillsborough, that should be it. I was tempted by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) to make this point before. The Hillsborough families were represented by Michael Mansfield at the recent inquest. If that had been the case back in 1990, there is no chance on God’s earth
that the cruel and inhumane 3.15 pm cut-off time would have been allowed to stand. Have we ever had a situation in this country before where bereaved families have been told that they cannot have information about what happened to their loved ones in their dying minutes? That was the case here. Have we ever had a situation before where only after 27 years are families finally told who gave their loved ones the kiss of life and carried them over the pitch? What an affront to natural justice that is. Yet it was allowed to stand, because those families did not have someone who could challenge it.

A few weeks ago, Margaret Aspinall, chair of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, came to Parliament to deliver a very personal reflection on what it was like all those years ago. I am very grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members who attended; I am sure they will agree that it was an intensely moving occasion. Margaret described the indescribable pain and hurt she felt when she was sent a cheque of just over £1,000, which was supposedly compensation for the life of her son James. She said she had to put it towards the legal fund that the group was asking members to contribute to. In itself that was not enough because she had the cost of travelling to the inquest in Sheffield every day. She was living on the breadline and having to borrow money from her family and her mum to make it all work. How can it be right that families in such circumstances, who have not done anything wrong, find themselves in that situation? It cannot be right that they should be scrimping, saving and doing all those things, when taxpayers' money is being paid for the other side to do them down.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right to highlight the inequality of arms between families and the state, and he will know that INQUEST has campaigned tirelessly on that issue. He should also consider the time that it takes for an inquest to happen, and how those delays are recorded. An inquest may not happen for five or six years, in which time all sorts of untruths can flourish, but it will be recorded in the statistics as having taken only a year.

Andy Burnham: That is right, and as has been hinted at, that delay is often used to grind people down even further. It really does not work, and Parliament must decide whether we are prepared to let people carry on going through such an entirely unsatisfactory process. I do not think we should.

In people's experiences today we can see parallels with those of the Hillsborough families. To give a current example, a young boy, Zane Gbangbola, died in 2014 in the floods in his home in Surrey. The family contest that hydrogen cyanide was brought into the house from a former landfill site that had not been properly sealed. It is a high-profile case, yet the family have been turned down three times for legal aid. This ordinary family were just going about their business, and all of a sudden their son is dead and Mr Gbangbola is permanently in a wheelchair. The inquest starts today, and the only reason that the family have quality legal representation is because they were given an anonymous £25,000 donation on Friday. That cannot possibly be right.

Mr Walker: The right hon. Gentleman will also know that when being assessed for financial support, it is not just the immediate family who have their finances looked at, but also the extended family, which is extraordinarily unfair.

Andy Burnham: That is extraordinarily unfair, although this Government have made things even more unfair with their cuts to legal aid. People are not getting through and they are not getting funding when they apply in the way that they would have done in the past. They are unrepresented at these inquests, which cannot be right.

Mr Kevan Jones: I accept that cases such as Hillsborough required a lot of input from lawyers. Asking as someone who has a knee-jerk reaction that we should not be feeding lawyers, is it possible for the Chief Coroner to lay down rules in some of these cases so that if a public authority comes forward with banks of lawyers, the other side should be given legal representation, or the public authority told that those lawyers are not needed?

Andy Burnham: The amendment is designed to develop the same effect and to state that there should be parity of legal funding. That is an incentive for the public sector not to spend too much on its own. If it has to fund families as well, that might bring down the legal bill—it might not add any further costs.

Mr Jones: We now have the Chief Coroner. In the past a lot was wrong—I sat on the Coroners and Justice Bill Committee, and changes could still be made to the coroners service in this country. Some recognition of the parity that my right hon. Friend refers to would be welcome, but as I know from local government and other sectors, the knee-jerk reaction these days is to get a lawyer involved and, in some cases, I am not sure that we necessarily need that.

Andy Burnham: We need inquisitorial inquests rather than adversarial inquests. In the case of Hillsborough, the Lord Chief Justice made a specific ruling when he quashed the original inquest. He hoped, given that the police had clearly tainted the evidence, that the new inquest would not degenerate into an adversarial battle, but—I am afraid to say—that is exactly what happened. At public expense, one individual in particular, hired to represent the former officers, a Mr John Beggs, went into the courtroom and repeated all kinds of lies and innuendo about supporters of Liverpool football club. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and I were there; we witnessed it—and it was a particularly unpleasant thing to witness. It is even more galling to think that we were paying for that.

It is not just the cost but how people are questioned that is gross and unjust. I will give one final example to illustrate. The House will know that, after a long fight by her family, an inquest was recently held into the death of Cheryl James, who died at the Deepcut barracks in Surrey. The QC acting for Surrey police was the same Mr John Beggs. I know, from speaking to Cheryl's father, that the family were deeply hurt by an intrusive and aggressive line of questioning that focused on several very personal questions. They were particularly hurt by one untrue allegation levelled at them. According to
Mr Beggs, Mr James, in making inquiries to Surrey police, had distracted the latter from the Milly Dowler investigation. Can Members imagine how he felt when he heard that? In trying to get to the truth about what happened to his daughter, he found himself the subject of an outrageous, appalling slur, which the Dowler family, such is their decency, stepped in to correct.

It should not be like this. It must not be like this. It is well known that police forces are instructed to hire this individual if they feel in a tight spot, and they pay huge amounts of public money to do so. It should not be allowed to carry on. We should call time on it today.

Mr Kevan Jones: My right hon. Friend is making a very good point—that kind of adversarial inquest is wrong—but, to repeat, could not the Chief Coroner lay something down in guidance to coroners to stop such behaviour? Not only is it not good for families; it does not help get to the truth either.

Andy Burnham: No, it does not. My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I cannot see why that should not happen. Equally, I cannot see why the Government would not accept the Bill, proposed by Lord Wills in another place, to create a national office to support bereaved families so that each family does not have to reinvent the wheel and go through all the learning needed to get ready for an inquest. That is another good proposal.

To finish, we are seeking to establish a simple principle.

In the words of Mr James, this is about “parity of arms”—if it has to be like that. If there is to be an adversarial battle in the courtroom, we should at least give bereaved families the same ability as the public sector to defend themselves. That is an unanswerable principle, and I am sorry the Government have decided they cannot support it tonight. I know they are saying they are waiting for the conclusion of Bishop James’s report, but this is bigger than Hillsborough—it is very much evident in Hillsborough, but it is much bigger—and concerns a number of families facing a similar injustice today.

Is it not the case that public money should fund the establishment of the truth and, in particular, help people to get to the truth at the first time of asking, so that the truth can be used by public bodies to learn—to look at where they went wrong and see how they can improve? Instead, they do the opposite. They go into those courtrooms to defend themselves and reputations, spending large amounts of taxpayers’ money in doing so. I hope that the Government would agree with the spirit of what I am saying tonight. If they do, I would hope for a clear commitment this evening that they support the aim of parity of funding for families at inquests. From there, I hope we might be able to move forward. From what I can gather, however, the Government have not done enough, and unless the Minister is able to provide this level of reassurance, we will press the new clause to a vote.

5.15 pm

We are determined to make Hillsborough a moment of real change in this country. It must be a watershed, after which power shifts into the hands of ordinary people and away from those in positions of power. That is what people expect this Parliament to do. We cannot face a 27-year injustice and then feel that we do not have to act or that we can carry on as we were. We cannot. Ordinary families are facing injustices today and are being ground down as they battle to get the truth and justice. Let us do the right thing. I call on all Members to support the package that we are putting forward. Let us finally make this a fairer country, in which power is more evenly shared among people from all backgrounds.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. We have about an hour and a half before the winding-up speeches start, and there are eight Members wishing to speak. If we can keep to about 10 or so minutes, everyone should be able to contribute.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): I would not criticise for a moment the shadow Home Secretary for speaking for 45 minutes. He had a lot to say and spoke with great passion. He knows a lot about the bereaved Hillsborough families and all the associated issues, so I do not want to criticise him. If I may, however, before coming on to talk about new clause 23, I would like to say something gently to the right hon. Gentleman.

I do not know the Silk—I have never met him—to whom he twice referred and accused of unattractive conduct. That Silk was speaking on instructions, and I assume that, in line with the traditions and professional standards of the Bar, he did not set out deliberately to attack people. He was acting for the two relevant public authorities on the two separate occasions. It was his duty to put the cases for those clients. The cases might well have been unattractive and might well have come across as deeply upsetting to the people who were cross-examined, but it was his professional duty to act in that way. Another barrister might have done it differently or another client might have given different instructions, but it is a bit mean, if I may say so, to call out a particular barrister here in the House of Commons.

Norman Lamb: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Edward Garnier: I do not want to be distracted when we have so little time. I just wanted to defend the method by which members of the profession have to represent their clients. That aside, there is little on which I wish to criticise the shadow Home Secretary.

In the short time available I want to speak to new clause 23, which removes the requirement for prior authorisation in section 60AA of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, so that “Where a constable...reasonably believes that an offence has been, or is being, committed he may require any person to remove any item” when it is used “wholly or mainly for the purpose of concealing identity”. The context in which I tabled the new clause—with about 22 other right hon. and hon. Members—goes back, as I said, to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Section 60 states: “If a police officer of or above the rank of inspector reasonably believes...that incidents involving serious violence may take place in any locality in his police area, and that it is expedient to give an
authorisation under this section to prevent their occurrence, or...that persons are carrying dangerous instruments or offensive weapons in any locality in his police area without good reason, he may give an authorisation that the powers conferred by this section are to be exercisable at any place within that locality for a specified period not exceeding 24 hours.”

That section gave the police a geographically limited and time-limited power to do certain things. That was extended in 2001 by the addition of section 60AA, which gave the police a power, in that geographical area and for that limited time, to require the removal of disguises. Provided that there was prior authorisation, provided that that authorisation was written, and provided that it was for 24 hours unless extended by another officer for a further 24 hours, within that limited location, the constable in uniform was enabled to “require any person to remove any item which the constable reasonably believes that person is wearing wholly or mainly for the purpose of concealing his identity” and to “seize any item which the constable reasonably believes any person intends to wear wholly or mainly for that purpose.”

So it was not until 2001 that the 1994 Act was amended to allow the police, in certain limited circumstances, to be authorised to deal with disguises.

As the House will recall, in August 2011 there were widespread riots throughout the country, following which the Government issued a consultation paper to consider whether three things needed to be looked at: the use of the word “insulting” in the 1994 Act, new powers to request the removal of face coverings, and new powers to impose curfews. The Government thought it appropriate to consult about new powers relating to such matters as disguises, saying:

“The...consultation aims to progress the commitment made by the Prime Minister following the recent disorder in respect of new powers to request the removal of face coverings. After the ransacking and arson by looters wearing masks to conceal identification, the Government announced that the police would be given extended powers to demand the removal of face coverings under any circumstances, where there was reasonable suspicion of criminal activity.”

Interestingly, the Government did not respond to the consultation other than in relation to “insulting words or behaviour”; the law was amended in that regard. In respect of the power to require the removal of face coverings, the law remains as it was in 2001. As I have said, that power is geographically limited and time-limited, and requires prior authorisation.

I have had the benefit of two meetings with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims, who generously allowed me, and two of my hon. Friends, to try to persuade him that the law needed to be changed. On that occasion there were only eight officials in the room, but he seemed to be unpersuaded, on the basis of the advice that he had been given by officials and police officers, that a change in the law was necessary. Indeed, I think it was suggested to me that our new clause would weaken the powers of the police to remove disguises.

We need to recognise that the people who attend demonstrations wearing balaclavas or other face coverings are not doing that simply to prevent their identities from being discovered. Clearly, if a demonstration involves unlawful activity and the police are able to film it, or if it is covered by local authority CCTV cameras, there is no better way for people to avoid detection, or avoid being caught, than disguising their faces. In most, although not all, criminal cases, the identity of the perpetrator is a fairly central part of the prosecution case. I am reasonably sure that in the olden days when robbers used to run into banks with shotguns and hold them up, normally wearing stockings over their faces, they were not wearing silk stockings on their heads because they liked the feeling of silk on their faces; they were wearing those silk stockings—or even tights, in which case it would be nylon on their faces—in order to prevent themselves from being discovered.

The same thing, I suspect, goes for people who are intent on pretty unattractive behaviour in the streets here in London, and in Manchester at last year’s Conservative party conference, where people in masks spat at delegates going into the conference hall, but they also do it to intimidate. There is nothing more intimidating than seeing somebody covered like that coming at you or demonstrating with a view to causing trouble. Yes, of course, there are laws already on the statute book or, no doubt, under common law which make it possible for a police officer to arrest somebody wearing a face mask if they are committing an offence. But in the event that there is a large-scale demonstration and there are not enough police officers to make it safe or practical for the police officer to go in, and therefore the police need to rely upon video evidence or film evidence of the perpetrator, it strikes me as unreal for a police officer to rely upon the existing power, which is geographically limited and time-limited, in order to deal with the matter.

Mike Penning rose—

Sir Edward Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend getting restless?

Mike Penning: I am just conscious that I may not have enough time to cover everything in my winding-up speech. My right hon. and learned Friend indicated earlier that I was not persuaded. I did listen to the police officers, but a review of the PACE code A is coming through for stop-and-search later this year. We will insert face coverings into that review so we have a better understanding, and if a change is necessary, that will take place. I think that is a significant concession.

Sir Edward Garnier: That is a change of attitude, and I am grateful for it, but I am not sure that a review is what we need; what we need is action. My understanding is that the police do not want this change because they think—at least some of them do—that the power they have is adequate for what they need to do, but it is not, because these events are happening. People are being terrified, and people are being inhibited from going about their lawful business in the countryside and in urban areas, and it is not good enough for us to rely on a change in the PACE code or following some review.

The Government did not reply to their own consultation in 2011, and I do need to press them a little harder to ensure that this matter is properly ventilated. One of my jobs as a Member of Parliament is to express the concerns of the public from my constituency, and from other parts of the country as well, who are dissatisfied about the level of policing for this sort of behaviour.
Mike Penning: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend realises that a review of PACE is nothing to do with what the police want. We did a review of stop-and-search because it was being inappropriately used by the police, and that is why we changed the rules. If we find during the PACE review that the legislation is not being used in the way our constituents would expect, PACE will be changed. That is why we are doing the review. PACE reviews do not come up very often; this is a golden opportunity.

Sir Edward Garnier: I look forward to seeing the terms of the review, and I trust the Minister when he says it is going to be useful, but right now constituents in rural and urban areas are very distressed at the way in which face masks are used to terrify and to hide the identity of criminals. The sooner this matter is debated—with reasonable time to conclude it—on the Floor of this House or in the other place—

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am one of the co-signatories of my right hon. and learned Friend’s new clause. The problem with the situation at the moment is that the constable on duty may require a face covering to be removed but he does then require post-authorisation from a senior officer on duty. In the Blackpool case and in my own case on the badger culls, face covering to be removed but he does then require the moment is that the constable on duty may require a Friend’s new clause. The problem with the situation at one of the co-signatories of my right hon. and learned Friend realises that a review of PACE is nothing to with what the police want. We did a review of stop-and-search because it was being inappropriately used by the police, and that is why we changed the rules. If we find during the PACE review that the legislation is not being used in the way our constituents would expect, PACE will be changed. That is why we are doing the review. PACE reviews do not come up very often; this is a golden opportunity.

Sir Edward Garnier: I look forward to seeing the terms of the review, and I trust the Minister when he says it is going to be useful, but right now constituents in rural and urban areas are very distressed at the way in which face masks are used to terrify and to hide the identity of criminals. The sooner this matter is debated—with reasonable time to conclude it—on the Floor of this House or in the other place—

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am one of the co-signatories of my right hon. and learned Friend’s new clause. The problem with the situation at the moment is that the constable on duty may require a face covering to be removed but he does then require post-authorisation from a senior officer on duty. In the Blackpool case and in my own case on the badger culls, face covering to be removed but he does then require the moment is that the constable on duty may require a Friend’s new clause. The problem with the situation at one of the co-signatories of my right hon. and learned Friend realises that a review of PACE is nothing to with what the police want. We did a review of stop-and-search because it was being inappropriately used by the police, and that is why we changed the rules. If we find during the PACE review that the legislation is not being used in the way our constituents would expect, PACE will be changed. That is why we are doing the review. PACE reviews do not come up very often; this is a golden opportunity.

Sir Edward Garnier: I look forward to seeing the terms of the review, and I trust the Minister when he says it is going to be useful, but right now constituents in rural and urban areas are very distressed at the way in which face masks are used to terrify and to hide the identity of criminals. The sooner this matter is debated—with reasonable time to conclude it—on the Floor of this House or in the other place—

Mr Charles Walker: I wish to speak to new clauses 26, 29, 42 and 43, all of which stand in my name. I will try to be brief. First, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), for all the time she has taken over the past few weeks to discuss my concerns with me. I also wish to thank the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims, who has made himself available to me, and the Home Secretary. As hon. Members will know, there is significant concern about the interaction between policing and mental health services, and I wish to turn my attention to that issue.

New clause 26 would place an obligation on chief constables to ensure that their police officers were properly trained in diversity and equality in relation to mental health issues, and specifically issues that relate to ethnic minorities. I have worked closely with Black Mental Health UK over the past five years, and it has raised concerns directly with the Home Office and Members for a number of years. I want to read out a paragraph from its briefing. It states:

“The joint Home Office and Department of Health review of sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 acknowledged that in particular Black African Caribbean men—are disproportionately over-represented in S136 detentions compared to the general population’ and that ‘Black African Caribbean men in particular reported that the use of force was more likely to be used against them by the police.’”

These are legitimate and real concerns, they have been subject to academic research and they need to be addressed.

Nearly three years ago, the Home Secretary co-hosted a fantastic conference at the QEII Centre with Black Mental Health UK, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims spoke at it. Great strides are being made, but we need to ensure that further progress happens in the months and years ahead. New clause 26 would therefore require chief police officers to make an annual report to the Home Secretary on what progress has been made in relation to diversity and equality training. I will not push it to a vote tonight, as I have had assurances from Ministers that the matter will be looked at seriously.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): This issue goes to the heart of the concept of policing by consent. I do not think that anybody who has had any involvement in policing will be unaware of the friction that exists
between policing and many members of the UK’s black communities. Does my hon. Friend agree that an explicit step in the direction he suggests will go a long way towards building bridges between UK policing and a very significant minority group in the UK?

Mr Walker: I agree with my hon. Friend, which is why I am delighted that my concerns have received such close attention from Ministers and will continue to receive attention. I look forward to further updates. The Government are working very closely with Black Mental Health UK and its director Matilda MacAttram, and I hope that those conversations will continue.

I said that I would try to speak for only five minutes, but I might have to stray a little bit over that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

New clause 29 relates to the deployment of police officers on wards and the use of Tasers. I am well aware that the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) will be speaking to new clause 40 on Tasers. I cannot be absolutist in my approach. I know that Black Mental Health UK never wants to see police officers used on mental health wards, and I share that view, but there will always be occasions where that possibility remains. When police officers are deployed to mental health wards, there should be an almost immediate notification to the police and crime commissioner and the Independent Police Complaints Commission that that deployment has taken place. I know that Home Office Ministers are working closely with the Department of Health on collating better statistics about the use of force and restraint, but we cannot wait 365 days before receiving that information. When police are deployed on mental health wards, that information needs to be made available immediately. Again I have received assurances from Ministers that work will be done on that matter. I know that time is short, but when the Minister sums up, I hope that he will again reassure me and Matilda MacAttram that that work will be done.

Finally, I turn to the use of Tasers on mental health wards. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk will argue, with great justification and passion, that Tasers should never be used on mental health wards. My heart is with him, but my head says that there may be some highly charged situations where a Taser needs to be used. Right now, we know that Tasers are being used, but we are not collating or collecting the information, and there is no way for the House to know what is going on, or for concerned individuals to find out what is going on. When a Taser is used—I hope that they will never be used—a report needs to be made within a week to the police and crime commissioner and the IPCC. I am not suggesting for a minute that any police officer will take the action of using a Taser lightly, but we must remember that we are talking about Tasers and force being used in safe hospital environments. Again, I have received assurances from Ministers in relation to the issue, and I hope that the Minister will refer to those assurances in responding to the debate.

Finally, I draw the Minister’s attention to a trial in Los Angeles, where Tasers are linked to body cameras by Bluetooth, so that the camera starts recording immediately when a Taser is drawn. It does not need to be manually started by the police officer. Perhaps the Home Office would like to look at that.

I apologise for having spoken for a little longer than I said I would, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Keith Vaz: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), who has raised so many important issues. He and the House have insufficient time to discuss all these issues, so I want to confine my remarks to just a couple of aspects of this group of amendments, the first of which relates to the Government’s decision to accept the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee to place an initial 28-day limit on pre-charge bail.

I am sorry that the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims has left the Chamber, because I wanted to pay tribute to him for being one of the very few Ministers we have encountered who writes back to the Committee and says that the Government will adopt some of our recommendations. He did so in respect of a 28-day limit on pre-charge bail, an issue that we have raised on a number of occasions. Most recently, in our report on police bail, we considered the case of Mr Paul Gambaccini and the need to prevent police bail from going on and on without limit. The limit is very welcome and very important.

I want to concentrate next on new clause 22, which relates to the surrender of travel documentation. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) will speak to that new clause when he makes his winding-up speech, but I support it very strongly. It will go a long way towards addressing in the law our concern about terrorist suspects who can leave the country because they have not given up their passports or even been asked for them.

In the Home Affairs Committee’s review of counter-terrorism, we took interesting evidence from the sister of Siddhartha Dhar. Mr Dhar fled the United Kingdom while on police bail and despite being asked politely by the police to send in his passport. In fact, he never received the polite letter that the Metropolitan police sent to him asking him to hand in his passport, because he left the country when he was released from custody. He was already in Syria when that letter was sent.
What the Government propose in the Bill is welcome, but new clause 22 goes a little further. I very much hope that the Government will change their mind and accept it, because it is in keeping with the evidence given to us by the head of counter-terrorism, Mark Rowley, who said that when someone surrenders a passport immediately, the police and the security services know where that passport is and that, if someone breaches that requirement—in other words, if they do not hand over their passport—they should be in breach of their bail conditions.

**Mike Penning:** I understand that, in my absence, the right hon. Gentleman might have said something nice about me, so it was probably a good job that I was not here.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the police have the power now to go with an individual when granting bail and physically take their passport or travel document before they release them?

**Keith Vaz:** They do indeed, but they did not do so in the case that I mentioned, which is the problem. We do not know how many other such cases there have been. We know about that case because it came into the public domain, and Mr Dhar ended up on a YouTube video telling us what he was doing. There might be other cases, but people are not very open about admitting mistakes. I accept that the power the Minister mentions may have been used before, but enshrining it in legislation as proposed in new clause 22 would be helpful.

5.45 pm

My final point relates to new clause 64, tabled by the shadow Home Secretary, on the importance of Leveson 2. I was one of the Chairs of Select Committees who met the Prime Minister, along with the then Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, who is now the Secretary of State, and Sir Alan Beith—now Lord Beith—when he chaired the Justice Committee. We were called to see the Prime Minister when he was about to announce the establishment of Leveson 1. He made very good arguments, which we accepted, that we should have two inquiries rather than one, and he promised that we would have a second inquiry once Leveson 1 had been completed.

Before Leveson 1 started, I went to see Lord Justice Leveson, who said that he did not think he would be around in the same role for Leveson 2, so if there is to be a Leveson 2 inquiry, it will be without Leveson, as he is doing other things that will take a number of years. When the Home Secretary gave evidence to our Committee on 16 December, she said that there were two cases outstanding and that she did not think Leveson 2 could start until those two cases were dealt with. Although I accept that, we have now found out that there are still outstanding matters that need to be considered. I do not know whether those are the two cases to which the Home Secretary referred. Perhaps the Minister who winds up the debate can tell us the number.

That situation could go on forever. There is no reason why we should not have a second Leveson inquiry, or Leveson 2 without Leveson, as I said. We could start the process of appointing a chairman and initiating the mechanics, perhaps with a panel, as was the case with Leveson 1, and when the legal proceedings have concluded, the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister could come to the House and say, “We will now start the second inquiry.” Why wait for all those proceedings to be concluded before starting that process?

That would give comfort not just to those who fought so hard in the Hillsborough case, but to other members of the public, some of whom have had helicopters flying over their houses when they happened to be abroad because of the relationship between the police and the press—we only get to know about the high-profile cases. There is a very good reason why we should have the second inquiry, and I hope very much that that will be done.

In a highly unusual move, with the Scottish National party acting as the honest broker between the Government and the Opposition, the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), who has left the Chamber, came up with a form of words that the shadow Home Secretary was prepared to accept. How wonderful! I do not know whether there will be discussions behind the Chair, but there is an opportunity to avert a vote if the Government say, “We are going to have it, but we are not going to have it yet.” That is all they need to say. Judging by what the shadow Home Secretary said, the Government will accept that, and we can proceed with Report and Third Reading without dividing the House on the important changes in policing law that the Government are proposing, many of which we accept—I certainly do—as being part and parcel of modernising our police force.

**Robert Neill:** It is appropriate that I follow the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, as I am conscious of the fact that my predecessor as Chair of the Justice Committee was present when those assurances were given. I do not doubt the good intentions of the Minister and I am prepared to cut the Government slack over the matter, but there is an important point that the right hon. Gentleman has just made: it is not purely the high-profile cases that are of concern to many professionals in the criminal justice system.

The shadow Home Secretary spoke movingly and passionately about the impact of Hillsborough and other such scandals, but of equal concern to lawyers such as me—I have had 25 years in the criminal courts—is the long-term day-to-day cosiness of relationships that, I am sorry to say, develop between police officers, not necessarily at the highest level but at an operational level, and reporters. Unless something is done to deal with that, there is a risk of miscarriages of justice. However these things are done, they do not come purely on the back of headline catching; there is a more insidious culture in some ways, which can be dealt with only through very firm management by the leadership of the police service, and if that is lacking it needs to be looked at appropriately.

I accept the concern about outstanding cases, but there is no doubt that this issue is potentially important. Any practitioner at the Bar will know of any number of occasions where the local press—this is not just about the nationals—has been aware, surprisingly, that a particular person was going to be arrested or that a particular search was going to be carried out. I am afraid that that cannot happen accidentally, so there is an issue here of general concern.

Let me turn briefly to new clause 23, to which I am a signatory. Again, I accept that the Minister wants to take the issue forward, but I agree with the sentiments expressed by my right hon. and learned Friend the
Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier). There is inevitably a reluctance among officials—I used to find that—as a Minister—and senior officers to complicate regulations if they think that what they have got will do. I do not doubt that the advice the Minister has been given was given in good faith, but I say as a London MP who speaks to officers on the beat—on the frontline—in my constituency that their concerns about the inadequacy of the current provisions are genuine, and their experience perhaps does not mirror the advice the Minister may be getting from some of the top brass in the service. That advice may also not always mirror the concerns of my constituents, who go up to London to work and who are sometimes caught in these particularly unpleasant and intimidating demonstrations. My right hon. and learned Friend therefore makes an important point in his new clause.

Let me turn now to the main issue I wanted to raise, which I hinted at in my two interventions on the Minister: new clause 48 and the fire inspection regime. As I said to the Minister, who was generous in his responses to me, we welcome some of the change. In some ways, I wish I had been able to bring it in when I was the Minister responsible for the fire services, but the political and administrative climate was not there for it to be done, so I genuinely congratulate him on introducing it. He has more front-line experience of the fire services than I do, having actually done the job of putting fires out. My involvement with the fire services goes back to my involvement with the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) some—I hate to say it—30 years ago, when I was the leader of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, immediately after the abolition of the Greater London Council. I would like to say that I lied about my age to join up, but that was not quite the case. However, I have been involved with the fire services in one way or another ever since.

At the time, we had the old-school inspectorate. Then we moved to an arrangement with a chief adviser. I think we all hoped that peer review and the work of bodies such as the Chief Fire Officers Association and others would achieve improvement from within. However, the Minister is right to have concluded that that arrangement is not delivering all that we want, and the recent evidence in the Public Accounts Committee report sets that out very clearly. It is therefore right to move to the inspectorate, and I warmly support it.

The reason I have raised what seems an arcane and technical point is this. I have taken on board what the Minister has said, but I want to amplify why I think it is right. One problem with the old inspectorate was that it tended to be a bit of an old boys’ club for retired senior officers. Almost invariably, the inspectors and the assistant and acting inspectors came from a very narrow group of retired senior officers, and there was a bit of a revolving door. There were therefore real questions about the inspectorate being up to the minute in its knowledge and about the degree of independence that it would bring. An inspector can have to say pretty hard things to a chief officer and his management team, and that is not always easy if someone has come fairly recently from within the ranks of a fairly close-knit service.

That is why there should, where appropriate, be greater flexibility to bring in a contractor with expertise in the appropriate fields. That may not be for the whole of an inspection, but it could be for a specific part. The obvious example is in relation to financial matters, but this would also work in relation to things such as the assurance of operational resilience, because there is now expertise in the private sector, as well as in the public sector, that can appropriately be brought to bear.

James Cleverly: In the new environment where we are encouraging greater collaboration between the blue-light services, might the fire inspectorate not also want to lean on senior members of the other uniformed blue-light services to add their expertise and to support the inspectorate as part of this multi-agency working?

Robert Neill: My hon. Friend is also the former chair of a London fire and emergency planning authority, and he makes an important point. All of us who have taken an interest in fire services over the years favour greater collaboration between the blue-light services, and I know that that is where the Minister wants to go. We all want a formula that will achieve that, but my concern is that the current wording of the Bill might make that harder, although I have absolutely no doubt that that is not the intention of Ministers. The reason I raise this concern is that, as it reads, proposed new subsection (A5), which will be placed in section 28 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, does not seem to cover the use of contractors.

Mike Penning: I will look very carefully at this issue during the Bill’s passage from this House, should it get a Third Reading this evening, to the Lords. If I need to clarify the position, I will do so by means of a Government amendment in the Lords.

Robert Neill: I am immensely grateful to the Minister for that. That shortens greatly what I have to say. To fortify my right hon. Friend in what he says, let me say that the Public Accounts Committee found evidence that the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Local Government Association did not regard the peer review process as an adequate self-improvement tool. If he is happy to continue to talk to those with an interest in the sector and to deal with what might be an unintended lacuna, I and many others who wish him well in this endeavour, and who wish the fire and rescue services well, will be very happy to work with him to achieve that objective.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): New clause 12, which stands in my name, would amend section 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. It would scrap the distressing rules that provide that dementia sufferers who die in care homes while subject to a deprivation of liberty safeguard are classed as being in state detention.

I first took this issue up after being contacted by families who told me of their distress at having to wait to bury their loved ones because inquests are required into the deaths of dementia sufferers who are subject to a DoLS, irrespective of the circumstances of their death.

Councils were inundated with DoLS applications from care homes after a Supreme Court ruling in 2014, which effectively lowered the threshold for what constitutes deprivation of liberty in care. Guidance issued by the Chief Coroner to local coroners following the Supreme Court judgment said that all persons who died subject to a Chief Coroner to local coroners following the Supreme Court judgment said that all persons who died subject
to a DoLS order must be the subject of a coroner’s investigation, whether or not their death was from natural causes, because such persons are deemed for the purposes of the 2009 Act to be in state detention.

The new clause was suggested by the Chief Coroner himself in response to, and in recognition of, the distress caused to relatives. The Chief Coroner indicated to the Law Commission and the Government that a simple amendment to the 2009 Act might solve the problem of unnecessary cases being reported to the coroner, at least in the short term. The amendment proposed by the Chief Coroner said:

“For the purposes of this Act, a person who dies while subject to an authorisation granted under Schedule A1 to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 depriving that person of his or her liberty and detaining him or her in a hospital or care home does not die while in custody or otherwise in state detention.”

Constituents have contacted me, including one woman who wrote after her mother died in a nursing home. She told me:

“My mum suffered from dementia and other health problems and we sat with her for four days and nights before she passed away. Within one hour of her death, uniformed police arrived and we were asked to leave the room.”

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I have had a very similar case of a constituent whose mother was in a nursing home and died. Almost immediately, the police came, and for 10 days had hold of her body. Does that not cause great distress to people at a time of mourning, and is it not why we really need to tighten up the rules regarding deprivation of liberty?

6 pm
Ann Coffey: My hon. Friend is right. Many people across the country have experienced that kind of unnecessary distress and trauma.

Since the tabling of this amendment on 25 May, the Law Commission issued its interim statement, “Mental Capacity and Deprivation of Liberty”, which said that there is a compelling case for replacing DoLS and that the Coroners and Justice Act should be amended to remove the proposed new scheme from the definition of “state detention”. I quote:

“The current law—which requires an inquest where a person dies while under a DoLS even if the cause of their death was entirely natural—was seen to be causing unnecessary work for coroners and upset to families. We received reports, for example, of police arriving at the deceased’s deathbed; one consultee reported their impression of a ‘crime scene’; another referred to issues over whether the deceased’s body should be taken to the official mortuary rather than by the family’s preferred funeral director.”

The Law Commission has therefore recommended that the Coroners and Justice Act be amended when the new system is introduced. I am proposing that we take the opportunity to amend it now, through this Bill. The Law Commission’s report is an interim one, so we will have to wait for the final report, and then for legislation to be drafted and enacted. That could take up to two years, during which many more families will continue to suffer distress.

We talk a lot about supporting carers. I know from my own personal experience how distressing it can be to watch a loved relative struggle to cope with dementia and their families struggle to support them. It is heartless then to put relatives who have cared to the limits of their emotional capacity through this further trauma at the time of the death of their loved one.

I am not going to press the amendment, but I hope that the Minister has heard what I have said and that he will talk to his colleagues in the Department of Health.

Mike Penning: That is exactly what we are doing. We are looking at this across Government, not only in the light of the Law Commission’s partial report. Work has already taken place. I thank the hon. Lady for saying that she will not press the amendment. It is a probing amendment, and she is probing in exactly the right direction.

Ann Coffey: I thank the Minister for that positive reply. When the Bill goes to the Lords, I look forward to seeing the Government’s response in amending it.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I rise to speak to the new clauses tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) and by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health, I start my remarks with the caveat that the changes the Bill makes to sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 are very substantial and significant. Over the past few years, there has been considerable improvement in the way in which police forces and police officers deal with people in mental health crisis.

New clauses 42 and 43, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne, relate to police officers being deployed in psychiatric wards. New clause 42 raises some important questions about occasions when police officers are requested to take action within health-based settings, particularly acute psychiatric settings. That speaks to an important developing relationship between the police and the health service. Sometimes, because of the particular nature of an individual’s condition, or other circumstances, it may be appropriate for police to be deployed in psychiatric settings, but that should happen only in very exceptional circumstances. We might need to look at how acute psychiatric units go about risk-profiling patients who are currently in acute psychiatric settings in order to ensure that it is very rare and exceptional for police officers to be called on to take action within those settings. I broadly support the intentions of the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend, who has done a lot of very important work in this area, of which he is a champion.

I also have a lot of sympathy for my hon. Friend’s new clause 43, which is about Tasers. I agree that only in the most exceptional circumstances should Tasers be used within acute psychiatric settings and that we should have very clear guidance and guidelines as to the appropriate time for the deployment of that kind of force.

New clause 58, tabled by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, who has not yet had an opportunity to speak to it, raises important issues in relation to implementing the changes to sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act. It refers to the controversial idea of a person’s private dwelling being characterised as a place of safety. This speaks to the relationship between policing and the health service in terms of the operation of places of safety. We need to think about how we can provide a broader range of alternative places of safety, some of which might be based not in
the national health service but in the voluntary sector or in crisis houses, and about the capacity of the system to provide appropriate places of safety.

Mike Penning: This is a really important point. To be brutally honest, unless we say, “No, we will be the port of last resort”, we will continue to be the first place that people come to, and that then pushes other Departments into getting their act together to do something. The police are now having to say, as we are saying in the Bill, that they will not hold people in police cells inappropriately, as they have been doing for too many years. That will force other Departments to do exactly what my hon. Friend is talking about.

James Morris: I thank the Minister for that intervention. There may be a role for police and crime commissioners to explore the need to work more closely with the health service and others to provide the capacity for appropriate places of safety such that police officers do not have to make the sorts of decisions implied by new clause 58.

The overall changes to sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act are essential and quite transformative. We have to be very clear about what we mean by the exceptional circumstances in which people are detained, perhaps moving to a system where it becomes inappropriate in all circumstances even for adults to be detained in police cells. I recognise that there may be a need to define the exceptional circumstances in which that might happen. The proposed changes are positive. The new clauses I have discussed raise important questions that the Minister should consider in summing up.

Norman Lamb: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris). I also welcome the contribution made by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), who does an awful lot of campaigning on this issue.

I have tabled a number of new clauses and amendments. The first issue I want to deal with is whether we should disallow the use of Tasers on psychiatric wards. Before I get into the detail, I, like other speakers, want to acknowledge the inspiring leadership of many police officers, working closely with mental health services, means that, in all but the most extreme cases, the use of police cells for such purposes has ended in some parts of the country. In London, for example, hardly any adults go into police cells as a result of section 136, and the same is true about the west midlands over the past two years. If those areas of the country with impressive leadership can do it, we should challenge every part of the country to do so, and the Bill should lead the way.

I welcome the fact that the Minister himself said on Second Reading:

“We have to be brutally honest, unless we say, ‘No, we will be the port of last resort’.”—[Official Report, 7 March 2016, Vol. 607, c. 102-103.]

That is absolutely right. We cannot use the fact that the NHS is under pressure as an excuse not to do this. If it is wrong, it is wrong, and it needs to be challenged.

My amendment 124 would, in effect, prohibit the use of police cells as a place of safety for adults. I welcome the fact that the Government are implementing, through this Bill, the joint review’s recommendation to end the use of police cells for children and young people. However, the inspiring leadership of many police officers, working closely with mental health services, means that, in all but the most extreme cases, the use of police cells for such purposes has ended in some parts of the country.

I want to challenge the assumption that force is necessary at the level with which it is used at the moment. Black Mental Health UK refers in its briefing for this debate to the United Nations committee against torture, which has stated that Taser X26 weapons provoke extreme pain and constitute a form of torture and that in certain cases they can also cause death. Although they are termed non-lethal, almost 10 known deaths have been associated with the use of Tasers in the past 10 years.

I want to get a debate going on the subject. I am delighted that the Home Secretary herself has said:

“I have been hearing stories, for example, of Tasers having been used in mental health wards and you think, ‘Hang on a minute, what is happening here?’”

That is what we should all be doing: we should be questioning whether that is appropriate, and that is why I tabled new clause 40.

My amendment 124 would, in effect, prohibit the use of police cells as a place of safety for adults. I welcome the fact that the Government are implementing, through this Bill, the joint review’s recommendation to end the use of police cells for children and young people. However, the inspiring leadership of many police officers, working closely with mental health services, means that, in all but the most extreme cases, the use of police cells for such purposes has ended in some parts of the country. In London, for example, hardly any adults go into police cells as a result of section 136, and the same is true about the west midlands over the past two years. If those areas of the country with impressive leadership can do it, we should challenge every part of the country to do so, and the Bill should lead the way.

I welcome the fact that the Minister himself said on Second Reading:

“Unless we actually put a stop to that”—the use of police cells—

“and say, ‘Enough is enough,’ we will not get the provision we need from other agencies.”—[Official Report, 7 March 2016, Vol. 607, c. 102-103.]

That is absolutely right. We cannot use the fact that the NHS is under pressure as an excuse not to do this. If it is wrong, it is wrong, and it needs to be challenged.

My new clause 45 would ensure that, in every case where there has been evidence of child sexual exploitation, the victims are referred for a mental health assessment. “Future in mind”, the report that I published in March 2015 following a taskforce that we set up to consider children’s mental health services, set out the need for trauma-focused care and for sexually abused and exploited children to receive

“a comprehensive specialist initial assessment, and referral to appropriate services providing evidence-based interventions according to their need.”

The new clause seeks to implement that recommendation.

In its briefing for this debate, the Local Government Association supports the intention, but again raises concern about investment. Are we really saying that the lack of availability of mental health services is a reason not to ensure that every child who has suffered sexual exploitation gets the chance to receive a proper assessment? Surely we have to set what is right in legislation and then ensure that we provide the facilities to make it happen. Anything short of that is not acceptable.

6.15 pm

There are many individuals who, after suffering abuse and exploitation as a child, go on to be very ill in adult life. They suffer from things such as dissociative disorder,
which I had a briefing on recently. It completely takes over a person’s life: it means that they cannot work and that they have difficult relationships throughout their life. To lose it to society is extremely bad, so let us make sure that we get those children the assessment of their needs that they deserve.

New clause 58 would prohibit the use of a person’s home as a place of safety under section 136. Under section 135, when a police officer goes to someone’s home, it may be appropriate for them to stay with that person, but the organisation Mind has raised serious concerns about taking someone by force to their home, it may be appropriate for them to stay with that person as a place of safety under section 136.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern about detention at home, which I raised in Committee? Although it is welcome that this Bill will try to reduce the number of people going into police cells, the de facto position may be to take people home because of the lack of beds elsewhere, even though that might not be the best place for the individual concerned.

Norman Lamb: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The fear is that that will become the default position in some localities because of the lack of resources available. That would be a big mistake. In circumstances where section 136 is used, surely the person should be taken to a health-based place of safety. A real effort is under way around the country—it is showing signs of success—through the use of approaches such as the street triage service, to reduce substantially the use of section 136 at all and to deal with issues in a more informal way. However, where it has to be used, we must make sure that the person is taken to the right place.

James Morris: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that perhaps we need to think about the definition of “health-based place of safety”? The definition is in the control of the national health service, but perhaps it needs to be broader so that it can mean a voluntary organisation or elsewhere. That would be one way of improving our capacity.

Norman Lamb: I noted the hon. Gentleman’s remarks in his speech a few moments ago and he is absolutely right. A crisis house or a place of safety provided by a particular community for one of its people may well be the best place for them to go. We should be willing to open up the definition in an appropriate way.

New clause 59 centres on the right of those detained under sections 135 and 136 to an appropriate adult. Anyone detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 has a right to an independent mental health advocate, except when the detention is under sections 135 or 136. In such circumstances, the person may be very vulnerable, so surely the Bill should embrace the idea, as Mind has argued, that they should have a right to an appropriate adult.

Finally, I want to address the issue of when the clock should start. I welcome the fact that the Bill reduces to 24 hours the maximum length of time for which someone should be held under section 136 while the assessment takes place. There is a critical question, however, about when the clock starts. If there is pressure on resources and facilities, someone could be kept in a police van and driven around a city—that does happen sometimes. That time, under the Government’s proposed definition, would not count. Some hours could pass before the person arrived at the place of safety. Mind’s argument, which is contained in amendment 125, is that the clock should start when a person is detained rather than when they arrive at a place of safety.

Mike Penning: One of my concerns about that is that we set a target of taking the individual who needs that help somewhere quickly, rather than taking them to the right place for their needs.

Norman Lamb: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, and I understand that we have to balance all these things. I am trying to ensure that legislation puts pressure on agencies to provide sufficient resource to meet a clear need. That is not the case at the moment.

I conclude by saying that the amendments and new clauses in this group are all designed to improve the rights of people with mental ill health, who are too often let down by the system at the moment.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I wish to address new clause 23 and take the Minister on a very short metaphorical journey with me, although perhaps nowhere near as far as new clause 23 seeks to go. I am sorry if I am trying the patience of the Minister and the House, because the Minister has been exceptionally courteous today, as he has been to me on previous aspects of the Bill.

Let me explain the mischief of face coverings, with which the House is well acquainted. In my intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), I mentioned two events: the Conservative party conference in Manchester, and an incident in my constituency in which, during the badger cull, two people in masks parked outside a farmhouse several evenings in a row as it was getting dark, deliberately intending to intimidate. A similar thing happened at the Blackpool conference. I was there when people, women in particular, were intimidated by people in masks. If only the police had been able to ask those people to take off the masks, I think the intimidation would have stopped almost on the spot. I suspect that in those two incidents, the mere act of the constable on duty asking those people to take off the masks would have stopped the mischief there and then.

That is the journey on which I want to take my right hon. Friend the Minister. It is perhaps not the entirety of new clause 23, but let us simply look at section 60AA of the Public Order Act 1994, which requires a constable on duty to obtain prior written consent before a mask is taken off—[Interruption.] The Minister is going to intervene. May I just explain where I am coming from on this? Very often, a constable will get on the radio and ask people to take off the masks. In circumstances: the Conservative party conference in Manchester, and an incident in my constituency in which, during the badger cull, two people in masks parked outside a farmhouse several evenings in a row as it was getting dark, deliberately intending to intimidate. A similar thing happened at the Blackpool conference. I was there when people, women in particular, were intimidated by people in masks. If only the police had been able to ask those people to take off the masks, I think the intimidation would have stopped almost on the spot. I suspect that in those two incidents, the mere act of the constable on duty asking those people to take off the masks would have stopped the mischief there and then.

That is the journey on which I want to take my right hon. Friend the Minister. It is perhaps not the entirety of new clause 23, but let us simply look at section 60AA of the Public Order Act 1994, which requires a constable on duty to obtain prior written consent before a mask is taken off—[Interruption.] The Minister is going to intervene. May I just explain where I am coming from on this? Very often, a constable will get on the radio and ask people to take off the masks. It is perhaps not the entirety of new clause 23, but let us simply look at section 60AA of the Public Order Act 1994, which requires a constable on duty to obtain prior written consent before a mask is taken off. I am grateful to the Minister for that.

Finally, I want to address the issue of when the clock should start. I welcome the fact that the Bill reduces to 24 hours the maximum length of time for which someone should be held under section 136 while the assessment takes place. There is a critical question, however, about when the clock starts. If there is pressure on resources and facilities, someone could be kept in a police van and driven around a city—that does happen sometimes. That time, under the Government’s proposed definition, would not count. Some hours could pass before the person arrived at the place of safety. Mind’s argument, which is contained in amendment 125, is that the clock should start when a person is detained rather than when they arrive at a place of safety.

Mike Penning: One of my concerns about that is that we set a target of taking the individual who needs that help somewhere quickly, rather than taking them to the right place for their needs.

Norman Lamb: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, and I understand that we have to balance all these things. I am trying to ensure that legislation puts pressure on agencies to provide sufficient resource to meet a clear need. That is not the case at the moment.

I conclude by saying that the amendments and new clauses in this group are all designed to improve the rights of people with mental ill health, who are too often let down by the system at the moment.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I wish to address new clause 23 and take the Minister on a very short metaphorical journey with me, although perhaps nowhere near as far as new clause 23 seeks to go. I am sorry if I am trying the patience of the Minister and the House, because the Minister has been exceptionally courteous today, as he has been to me on previous aspects of the Bill.

Let me explain the mischief of face coverings, with which the House is well acquainted. In my intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), I mentioned two events: the Conservative party conference in Manchester, and an incident in my constituency in which, during the badger cull, two people in masks parked outside a farmhouse several evenings in a row as it was getting dark, deliberately intending to intimidate. A similar thing happened at the Blackpool conference. I was there when people, women in particular, were intimidated by people in masks. If only the police had been able to ask those people to take off the masks, I think the intimidation would have stopped almost on the spot. I suspect that in those two incidents, the mere act of the constable on duty asking those people to take off the masks would have stopped the mischief there and then.
Section 60AA—

[Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

does my right hon. Friend the Minister want me to give way? If he does as I suggest, I think we will achieve what we want to achieve.

Mr Kevan Jones: I want to speak to new clause 24, which stands in my name and those of several of my hon. Friends. I will also refer to the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker).

The hon. Member for Broxbourne raised the fact that the state’s power to deprive someone of their liberty is one of the most draconian acts at its disposal. As the right hon. Member for North Norfolk said, someone who is detained under the Mental Health Act 1983, other than under sections 135 or 136, is entitled to a mental health advocate. If they are detained under sections 135 or 136 of that Act, they are not. The only way in which they could access legal advice, as I think the hon. Member for Broxbourne said, is if they are detained at a police station.

Quite rightly, the Government want to prevent people from being taken to police stations in the first place—I give them credit for this—because a police cell is clearly not the correct place for someone who is in mental health crisis. The important thing is that such individuals need some advocacy. At the moment, if an individual is not taken to a police cell or a police station, they will not have access to independent legal advice or any type of advocacy. New clause 24 is designed to get some parity with the rest of the 1983 Act, in which people do have advocacy. I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who responded to a similar amendment in Committee, has just taken her seat. She has promised to look at this issue.

I do not intend to press the new clause to a vote, but it is important that we put in place a system under which people who are detained under sections 135 and 136 of the 1983 Act can, at least, access some advice. I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk in new clause 59, which is designed to do a similar thing by ensuring that individuals have access to an adult who could speak or advocate on their behalf. I have had discussions with the Minister, and she has given undertakings to look at how that could be done.

I agree with the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) that many of the things in the Bill are not necessarily the responsibility of the police. They have stepped up to the mark, in many cases, to fill a gap created by a lack of funding or support. In some cases, because of the disjunction between mental health services, local authorities and others, the police are seen as the last resort. He is right to highlight that.

That brings me on to new clause 26, which has been tabled by the hon. Member for Broxbourne, and which I welcome. There is good practice already in many police forces, which undergo mental health training—in Durham, the chief constable has instigated a whole force review to make sure that people have access to mental health training—but it is important that we have consistency. Police forces will be empowered and given greater expertise if they know how to use not just sections 136 and 137 of the 1983 Act, but other sections. I pay tribute to police forces up and down the country, because there is some good practice.

In Committee, we referred to the concordat, which is a good move forward in ensuring that there is a joined-up approach at local level between police forces, local authorities and the health service. I tabled an amendment in Committee to put that concordat into some sort of statutory framework. I know that the Minister is exploring with colleagues at the Department of Health how we can get some agreement, or some sort of reporting, on what is happening at a local level.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk has the done the House a great service by tabling new clause 40 because it concerns a subject that is not being talked about. I totally agree with him; I can envisage no circumstances in which it would be necessary to use a Taser on a mental health ward. The right hon. Gentleman praised Black Mental Health UK, which has done a lot of work on the issue. When I met Black Mental Health UK, I was struck by the stark fact that something has to be done. I know that the Home Secretary and the Minister have looked at the figures, and the only mathematical conclusion we can reach is that people from black and Afro-Caribbean communities are being detained under the 1983 Act disproportionately compared with any other section of the community. Those figures cannot just be the result of chance. I urge the Government to look seriously at the matter and think about how we can put mechanisms in place to ensure that that is not the case.

On new clause 43, I agree with the hon. Member for Broxbourne that if the use of Tasers is not going to be prohibited, we should at least have statistics to show when and where they are being used. New clause 58 is similar to an amendment that I tabled in Committee. I give credit to the Government for their efforts to ensure that people in mental health crisis do not end up in a police cell, but unless we have very close monitoring and reporting, we might end up in the de facto position that the right hon. Member for North Norfolk has just mentioned in relation to sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act.

6.30 pm

Mr Charles Walker: The hon. Gentleman is making a fantastic speech. Is it not remarkable just how far this House has come in the past four years? In this debate, we are putting the interests of mental health patients at the centre of what we are discussing, and he should take great credit for that personally.

Mr Jones: I should not be the only one taking credit for that. The hon. Gentleman should do so as well, as should many other people in the House. To give credit to the Government, they have taken this issue seriously and both the Ministers who served on the Committee are committed to ensuring that we get the best outcomes for people in mental health crisis in the criminal justice system.

We should soon have a situation in which police cells will not be the first resort, as they have been in the past. I am not criticising the police for taking people to the cells; they were often the only places available. However, we need to monitor closely what happens to people
when they are detained under sections 135 and 136 of the Act. I would not want keeping people at home to become the de facto position. That might be helpful for the statistics on keeping people out of police cells, but people's homes might not be the best possible place for individuals in crisis. The hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis made the point that they do not necessarily have to be placed in a health facility. The hon. Member for Broxbourne has said on numerous occasions that this country needs a network of places of safety for individuals in mental health crisis. Those places could be run by health authorities, by charities or by others, but we need such a network because neither a police cell nor, in some cases, a hospital is the best place for certain people in crisis.

I am glad that the proposed changes to the Bill are being taken seriously by the Government. I pay tribute to the way in which both Ministers have addressed these matters in Committee. Even though some of the proposals are not going to be put in the Bill, I believe that the Ministers, working with colleagues in the Department of Health, will be able to achieve a situation in which people in mental health crisis do not end up in the criminal justice system. That should be our aim.

Jim Fitzpatrick: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). I shall not be referring to the mental health provisions in the Bill, but I commend colleagues who have already spoken about that and who have been personally responsible for taking this issue so far and for encouraging the Government to listen to the arguments that they have been putting forward for years. I also commend the Government for their response to the debates that took place in Committee and, more generally, for their attitude towards mental health. I also want to commend the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), for the way in which he spoke to his new clauses almost as part of the campaign on Hillsborough. He spoke passionately and powerfully and I hope that the Government will respond positively to his requests for the new clauses to be accepted, if only in principle. I look forward to the Minister's response to the debate.

I want to speak briefly to new clause 48 and new schedule 1, which propose the re-creation of a national fire service inspectorate in England. My friend the Minister is, like me, a former firefighter. When I ask him to do things in our exchanges on fire brigade matters, he sometimes throws back at me the fact that I did not do them when I was Fire Minister and asks why should he do them now. I want to ask him why he is recreating the fire service inspectorate when we did away with it and put other arrangements in place. I will be interested to hear his explanation. I welcome the fact, as the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and others have done, that the Government recognise there is a vacuum and that something has to be created to fill the gap. Whether that is an inspectorate as set out in the new clause or whether that wording changes when the Bill goes to the House of Lords, the fact that the Government are moving in this direction is welcome.

In Westminster Hall last week, we discussed with the Minister the increasing number of calls related to flooding that the fire service now deals with, the transition towards dealing with more medical emergency calls and the arrangements with the national health service for the fire service to do more social care visits alongside fire safety visits. These changes all demonstrate the fact that the fire service is moving into different territory, and that different skills are being developed which require different resources as well as the staff to carry them out.

As I mentioned in Westminster Hall, criticisms are being levelled at the fire service, parts of which are being blamed for the reductions in the service. The fire and rescue service has been a victim of its own success in recent decades, having cut the number of calls and fires and reduced the number of deaths and serious injuries. That has resulted in the loss of fire stations, fire appliances and firefighters. The Minister will remember that I stated in that debate that there are nearly 7,000 fewer firefighters in the UK now than there were in 2010. That fact has raised a number of eyebrows, and questions are being asked about attendance times being met and resources being available. People are now asking whether the service is still equipped to do the job that it needs to do.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has great experience in the fire and rescue service in a number of capacities. The operational issues that he is rightly raising are important, but will he acknowledge the Public Accounts Committee's finding that in the wake of the abolition of the Audit Commission, the governance, scrutiny and oversight of many fire and rescue services and the cosy relationship between the authorities and those services were unsatisfactory in terms of providing value for the taxpayer's pound?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Absolutely, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That point was also raised by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, and I am sure that the Minister will also put forward an argument for putting in place a means of making those measurements.

Having said all that, I am curious about the lateness of the arrival of the new clauses. The Minister referred positively to the consensus in Committee and to the ability of both sides to help each other out to make progress on the Bill. I commend the shadow Fire Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), for arguing for a provision to assess the ability of the fire service to carry out its functions. To the Minister's credit, he has now tabled the new clause and the new schedule to address that issue.

I mentioned in an intervention my curiosity about whether the Government had considered the United Kingdom Accreditation Service as a potential vehicle to carry out the function that is being proposed here. The Minister knows that I had 23 years in the fire service, 13 of which were spent as an operational firefighter, and I participated in drills in the fire station as set out by Her Majesty's inspectorate. I have to question the value of those drills, because we would train for weeks to get them right but they still did not always go entirely right. I question the value of putting in that amount of rehearsal. I wonder whether all that practice actually made the whole exercise worthless.

We decided to abolish Her Majesty's inspectorate because of the scepticism and cynicism surrounding it—the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst referred to an old boys' network earlier—and I would have...
hoped that the Government would now be proposing something new. However, they seem to be proposing a re creation of what went before. Having moved it to the Department for Communities and Local Government and then back to the Home Office, there seems to be replication so that, along with Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary and Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons, we will now have Her Majesty’s inspectorate of fire services.

I look forward to hearing more from the Minister and to listening to the debates in the other place, where I suspect the Bill will get more scrutiny than it has in this place. Public confidence in the fire service is high and has always been high, but the fire service needs professional underpinning and validation not only for public confidence and value for money, but for the safety of firefighters who put themselves on the frontline to protect the public. I look forward to a more extensive debate when the Bill goes to the other place, and to some comments from the Minister when he sums up. This is a positive step forward, but we need to make sure that the fire service can demonstrate to its own satisfaction, to our satisfaction and to that of the public that it is equipped, resourced and able to do the job we all admire it for and want it to carry on doing in the future.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): May I first apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker? Although I was in the Chamber for the Minister’s opening speech, I had to chair a Delegated Legislation Committee—you were kind enough to put me on the Panel of Chairs—so I am sorry that I have not been present for the whole of this debate.

I want to speak to new clause 23, which was so ably introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier). I understand that it will not be pushed to a vote, that there will be a review in relation to PACE and that the Minister has listened carefully to all the arguments that have been made. If we are to have a review, there is an opportunity—I will use my brief remarks to talk about it—to have a debate in this country about face coverings generally. Many people in our country feel that it is quite un-British, and is not necessary for any reason, except in exceptional circumstances.

I do not want to suggest that we should take heavy-handed, universal action to prevent people from covering their face in this country, because that is also in a sense un-British. Fundamentally, as a nation, we actually believe in the freedom of people to live their lives in the way that, for whatever reason, they want, so long as they do not alarm or intimidate others. I know that other countries—for example, France and Belgium, which are perfectly moderate, sensible, freedom-loving countries—have decided to ban face coverings in public, but we probably do not want to proceed in that way in this country.

If we are to have a review, I believe that this is an opportunity to have a debate. I certainly join my hon. Friends who have expressed concern about certain situations in which people feel intimidated, such as in the environs of a hunt, an animal research laboratory, or a demonstration outside Parliament. People are of course entitled to demonstrate—nobody is denying that—but it is very intimidating for the police and the public to see people engaged in demonstrations with any kind of face covering.

I understand that it is perfectly possible under present arrangements for the authorities to issue written instructions so that a police constable can require people to remove their face coverings and all the rest of it, but I would like us to go further. I suggest that the way to deal with this problem is to say—in a particular situation that might be threatening, intimidatory, violent or confrontational on both sides—there should certainly be a right for a police constable to require somebody to remove a face covering. It should be possible for a chief constable to have such a right, as well as to lay down general prohibitions against face coverings.

It should also be possible—there should be a public debate about this, because I know that there are different points of view—for the Home Secretary to issue a ban against face coverings in certain situations or in particularly sensitive geographical places, such as the central areas of the cities of London and Westminster, the central part of our capital city, which is sensitive for all sorts of reasons, or in hospitals, schools, law courts and doctors’ surgeries. I know not everybody in the House will agree, but many members of the public are concerned about this.

6.45 pm

Nobody is more pro religious people than myself and nobody would want to do more than me to defend the right of religious people or any other group of people to dress in any way they want, but there are certain situations and certain parts of the country—certain public places—where the public as a whole, although they are very tolerant of other people’s attitudes and way of life, do not like the idea of face coverings.

That is all I wanted to say. I hope that, as the Minister has promised a review, he will be open-minded about this. He may wish to comment on what I have suggested when he sums up.

Mike Penning: It is a real privilege to sum up the debate on this group of amendments. I thank the shadow Policing Minister, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), for giving me more time—he could easily have risen to speak to the amendments. I am pleased that I have a bit of time to talk through some of the points that have been raised, and I have already given some indication of what I will say in interventions on right hon. and hon. Members. I have been told off by the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, but that is understandable. It was not the first time, and it will not be the last time.

I want to say a little about the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on the new inspectorate. At the outset, may I say that my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst was brutally honest when he said he would have liked to have made this change, but was prevented by circumstances when he was the Minister? Perhaps the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse—my predecessor in many different capacities, including as a firefighter—was also prevented from doing so by different circumstances when he was Minister.
We must learn from our mistakes—to be brutally honest, we all make mistakes in life—so the first thing to say is that it is absolutely correct that the inspectorate will not be an old boys’ network. It will be based on Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary, and on police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy reviews. Firefighters will not have weeks to practise their escape drills, which I remember so vividly from when I was in the job. For people of a certain age, such escapes were done on the old ladders, which were on big wheels that could get firefighters to places some of the modern ladders will not reach.

Importantly, the inspector will have the power to bring in the experts he or she thinks fit to do inspections. The inspector should not be an ex-chief fire officer from somewhere, which is similar to the arrangements in Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary. I know that will ruffle a few feathers within the network, with people saying, “We’re experts, we know best”, but it is important for the inspector to come in and ask, “Why? Why do you do it that way?” and then to bring in other expertise. I think that is the way to do it.

I think the former Fire Minister, the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse, will find that when we started to talk about this issue—it was raised in Committee by the shadow Fire Minister, the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown)—I had only been in the job for two weeks, because the role of Police and Fire Minister was very new. However, I knew what I wanted to do, as did the Home Secretary, and I freely admit that a little bit of encouragement from the shadow Minister has helped us on our way. There are areas in which we will be able to work much more along the lines of how Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary does its inspections, so that people are not prepared for the day having known about the inspection for weeks in advance, as happened in my time.

I want to speak to some of the Government amendments that I did not have the opportunity to talk about earlier, and I will turn to some of the excellent contributions made during this debate. One of the most important areas of agreement that I have reached, with the Home Secretary’s permission, is in relation to the 12-month rule for officers who have retired or left the force. Since long before I held my current position, it has always struck me as strange that, criminal proceedings apart, an officer of no matter what rank could step down and start their pension almost the day before they became subject to investigations within the police force. In some cases that does not happen. I have the duty of signing documents that revoke police officers’ pensions when they have broken the rules so badly that they lose their pension. I do that quite regularly. It is difficult to sign something that will dramatically change someone’s future, and I do not in any way do so lightly. I often quiz my officials about whether it is the right way to go, not least because a good proportion of the contributions to the pension were that person’s own contributions, not the state’s contributions. However, the rules are quite specific in those cases.

Although we did not want to leave things completely open—I know the shadow Home Secretary will understand that—we thought there was a real opportunity to leave a great legacy on behalf of the Hillsborough victims. The change to the 12-month rule will be for exceptional circumstances. It is difficult to put them into primary legislation, so we will do it by regulations. I hope that the shadow Front-Bench team will work with us on those regulations, along with other parties in the House. They will be one of the biggest legacies of what we are doing.

I am sorry that we do not quite agree with Her Majesty’s Opposition on two issues. On Leveson 2, the Home Secretary has set her position out in front of the Home Affairs Committee, and I have set it out too. I am categorically not saying that it is not going to happen, but no decision will be made until after the criminal investigations. That is the position that the Home Secretary has set out—it is way above my pay grade—and that is how it will stay.

Norman Lamb: I do not want to compete with the SNP in offering to be honest broker, but could the Minister not say that when the cases have concluded the Government will reaffirm the commitment to Leveson 2? It would be straightforward to say that now, and it would be widely welcomed.

Mike Penning: The point has been made on numerous occasions. The Home Secretary has said, and I have said, that we will wait for the inquiries and proceedings to finish and then announce our position on Leveson 2.

Andy Burnham: The Minister has made the position clear, but in doing so he will not have pleased many people who are campaigning for justice for people who have suffered press intrusion. Will he be explicit that what he has just outlined is in fact a weakening of the Government’s position? A couple of years ago, the Prime Minister promised that there would be a stage 2, but tonight we are being told that that is now up in the air and up for grabs.

Mike Penning: I have been absolutely explicit, as has the Home Secretary. There is no weakening and no change. We will wait for the conclusion of the proceedings. If the shadow Secretary of State wants to push the issue to a Division I will have to accept that, but he has to accept that all the way through the process I have been clear, as has the Home Secretary—as I said earlier, no Home Secretary has gone further for the victims of Hillsborough than this one—that we are not ruling anything out but will wait until after the conclusion of the criminal cases that are taking place.

We also disagree on another area—it is a shame, but I respect the view of others in the House, and if we have to go through the Lobby we will. Bishop James Jones is carrying out his review as requested, and we are not going to pre-empt what he will say in that review. There are assumptions about what will be in it, and some will be right and some will be wrong.

Whatever happens in any Division, things will not stop there. If the Opposition win, so be it. If we win the Divisions tonight, we will still wait for the conclusions of the investigations, the court cases and Bishop Jones’s review. Our position will stay exactly the same.

Andy Burnham: The issue of parity of legal funding at inquests at which the police are represented goes beyond Hillsborough. It affects many families fighting many injustices. It goes beyond the work of Bishop James Jones. Could we at least have a commitment that
[Andy Burnham]

the Government will work with us to seek that parity and equality of legal funding at inquests? That commitment would mean something.

Mike Penning: All the way through, we have worked with Her Majesty’s Opposition and done everything we can. I know this might be playing at semantics, but I slightly disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. Bishop Jones’s work will make a huge difference for future cases, because of the experiences of what people have so sadly gone through for 27 years. His review is not just about Hillsborough; it will give guidance to Governments of whatever colour in the future. That is why we have decided to wait for all of his review’s recommendations. It will affect people now and in the future. I understand the points being made, though, and perhaps we can come to an agreement on this issue. We will continue to work together on it beyond this debate, no matter what the results of the votes, because it is the most important thing to be done.

I will address some of the contributions that have been made about mental health. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) talked about the issue extensively in Committee. When I was Minister with responsibility for disabilities I had long and fruitful meetings with the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), the Minister in the coalition Government with responsibility for mental health, and we agree on 90% on this issue—we speak from the same platform in many ways. Many changes to how the police deal with and look after—I got this role, getting something to eat before going out on patrol. The constables would be given notes, particularly on mental health hospital before and during my time in the Army, because my mother worked as a mental health nurse. I asked mum—she is retired now—“Is there a case in which you would have to use this sort of force?” and she said, “Sadly, in exceptional circumstances there is.” However, she also emphasised the quality of training in mental health facilities and how someone can be restrained safely.

Mr Charles Walker: I am sure I heard my right hon. Friend correctly, but to confirm, is he saying that Ministers will work with interested parties—for example, with me or the right hon. Member for North Norfolk alluded to, but Tasers have saved lives. I talked earlier about what my heart tells me and what my brain tells me. I used to volunteer in a mental health hospital before and during my time in the Army, because my mother worked as a mental health nurse. I asked mum—she is retired now—“Is there a case in which you would have to use this sort of force?” and she said, “Sadly, in exceptional circumstances there is.” However, she also emphasised the quality of training in mental health facilities and how someone can be restrained safely.

Mr Charles Walker: I am sure I heard my right hon. Friend correctly, but to confirm, is he saying that Ministers will work with interested parties—for example, with me or the right hon. Member for North Norfolk. I am sure I heard my right hon. Gentleman say earlier that we have to move to exactly that point. That is a role for police and crime commissioners. If we devolve the powers in question, it will give more powers to PCCs, and rightly so. If we believe in and are aiming for localism, PCCs should know what is going on in their part of the world, and that information should be made available to the public and not left opaque. That will take work—I am delegating more work to my colleagues on the Treasury Bench, and to others across the Government, because this is not just a Home Office matter. Someone said earlier that this measure should not be in the Bill, but it is there because it needs to be.

Norman Lamb: In monitoring the use of Tasers, will the Minister ensure that we consider the ethnic dimension of who they are used on, and that that information is made publicly available and there is transparency?

Mike Penning: That is vital. When I was the Minister responsible for disabilities, one issue under discussion was the disproportionate number of black men who are tasered in mental health facilities. Indeed, there is a disproportionately high proportion of black men in mental health facilities, as we know there is in prisons and throughout the criminal justice system. We cannot just say, “Let’s get on with it”; we must do something about that, including by raising people’s educational standards, aspirations and so on.
The other important issue that the right hon. Gentleman raised concerns people who have been abused, whether it is sexual abuse or other types of abuse. We must ensure that they get the right care early on, and we must not assume that that abuse will show up in someone’s first medical analysis. I know that from friends who suffer from post-traumatic stress—I have friends who served in the Falklands who are only now showing the signs.

Norman Lamb: I accept that problems might show up only later on, but if the Minister does not accept that my new clause would provide for an automatic referral, will he accept that the Government should make clear that it should be standard process that a child is referred for an assessment of their mental health needs, as the Children’s Society suggests?

Mike Penning: This is probably way beyond my portfolio, but as a father I would ask, if someone is assessing a child who has been abused, how can they not assess them for mental health damage that may have occurred? That is the natural thing to do—I will probably get shot for saying that, but at the end of the day that is probably the moral position. How that is done is for the right hon. Gentleman’s former Department and social services to address.

I turn to facial coverings and new clause 23, which was tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) and other colleagues. I think we have reached a consensus. I arranged for Assistant Chief Constable Paul Netherton to lead on the issue for the whole country within the police. Very unusually for a senior police officer, or indeed for any police officer, he said, “Don’t give me any more powers. I am happy with the powers we have,”

In our meetings, however—I am happy to share this with the House—it was conceded that the way the current legislation is being interpreted through guidance is an issue. There is also some confusion about the powers under section 60AA of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which concerns the need for a written authority. In reality, the police get on their radios and say, “This is the situation. I want to remove it. I think that an offence is going to take place.” The request is instantly given, and it is signed later on. That is not breaking any law; that is how the procedure works on a daily basis.

The Home Secretary and I both understand that there are real concerns about whether the measure is being implemented in a way that ensures public confidence as well as that of the police. Rather than change the law against the advice that I am getting from the police, we have proposed a review into the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 code A. That does not happen often, but this autumn a review will take place into stop and search. The powers in the Bill are similar to those stop-and-search powers, and we will ask for them to be included in that code. That significant change will alleviate some of the concerns, but we must ensure that we provide those powers.

Sir Edward Garnier: I would not want the Minister to think that I am ungrateful for what he is suggesting—I would never be that. However, it would be helpful if he would write to me setting out precisely what he is proposing and stating the likely amendments to PACE. He mentioned a review of PACE, but he did not necessarily mention an amendment to that Act. If he would be clear on paper, that would be useful.

Mike Penning: Not only will I write to my right hon. and learned Friend, but I will put a copy of the letter in the Library of the House. There are cross-party concerns about some of these issues. I listened carefully to his point, but that issue is not part of the Bill and is, as he said in his speech, for later. He may think that I am trying to kick the issue into the long grass, and that is exactly what I am doing for the purposes of this Bill...

I hope that the way in which I and the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands, dealt with the debate in Committee has helped the Bill to progress positively. It is a long time since I received such encouragement for a Bill—other than for the Mesothelioma Act 2014, which I took through the House with a little bit of disagreement. I am adamant that this Bill, and the measures it contains, will be a legacy for the Hillsborough families and the campaign that they have taken forward for 27 years. I am sorry that we cannot agree on everything, but as I have indicated, even if we disagree tonight, we will probably agree tomorrow.

Question put and agreed to.
New clause 48 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Schedule 1

Schedule to be inserted as Schedule A3 to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

“SCHEDULE A3

ENGLISH INSPECTORS

Interpretation

1 (1) This paragraph applies for the purposes of this Schedule.

2 (2) References to an English inspector are to an inspector appointed under section 28(A1).

3 (3) References to the inspection function are to the function conferred on the English inspectors by section 28(A3).

4 (4) References to a person providing services to a fire and rescue authority are to a person providing services, in pursuance of contractual arrangements (but without being employed by a fire and rescue authority), to assist the fire and rescue authority in relation to the exercise of its functions.

5 “Public authority” includes any person certain of whose functions are functions of a public nature.

Delegation

2 An English inspector may arrange for the inspection function to be exercised (to such extent as the inspector may determine) by another public authority on behalf of the inspector.

Working with Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Constabulary

3 An English inspector, when exercising the inspection function, must co-operate with Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Constabulary.

4 An English inspector may act jointly with Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Constabulary where it is appropriate to do so in order to ensure the efficient and effective exercise of the inspection function.

Assistance for other public authorities

5 (1) The chief fire and rescue inspector for England may, if he or she thinks it appropriate to do so, provide assistance to any other public authority for the purpose of the exercise by that authority of its functions.
Policing and Crime Bill

6 (1) An English inspector may serve on a relevant person a notice requiring the person—
(a) to provide the inspector with any information or documents that the inspector reasonably requires for the purpose of the exercise of the inspection function;
(b) to produce or deliver up to the inspector any evidence or other things that the inspector reasonably requires for that purpose.

This is subject to sub-paragraphs (6) to (8).

(2) In sub-paragraph (1), “relevant person” means—
(a) a fire and rescue authority in England;
(b) an employee of a fire and rescue authority in England;
(c) a person providing services to a fire and rescue authority in England;
(d) an employee of a person providing services to a fire and rescue authority in England.

(3) A notice under this paragraph must—
(a) specify or describe the information, documents, evidence or other things that are required by the inspector;
(b) specify the period within which the information, documents, evidence or other things must be provided, produced or delivered up.

(4) A notice under this paragraph may specify the form and manner in which any information, documents, evidence or other things are to be provided, produced or delivered up.

(5) An English inspector may cancel a notice under this paragraph by written notice to the person on whom it was served.

(6) A notice under this paragraph must not be used to obtain information, or any document or other thing, from a person if—
(a) the information, or the document or other thing, was obtained by that person (directly or indirectly) from a body or other entity mentioned in sub-paragraph (7), or
(b) the information, or the document or other thing, relates to a body or other entity mentioned in that sub-paragraph.

(7) The bodies and other entities referred to in sub-paragraph (6) are—
(a) the Security Service,
(b) the Secret Intelligence Service,
(c) the Government Communications Headquarters, or
(d) any part of Her Majesty’s forces, or of the Ministry of Defence, which engages in intelligence activities.

(8) A notice under this paragraph must not require a person—
(a) to provide information that might incriminate the person;
(b) to provide an item subject to legal privilege within the meaning of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (see section 10 of that Act).

(9) In this paragraph—
“document” means anything in which information of any description is recorded;
“English inspector” includes—
(a) a person appointed under section 28(A5) as an assistant inspector or other officer;
(b) a person authorised by an English inspector to act on behalf of the inspector for the purposes of this paragraph.

Powers of English inspectors to obtain information etc

7 (1) An English inspector may serve on a person a notice requiring the person to allow the inspector access, which the inspector reasonably requires for the purpose of the exercise of the inspection function, to—
(a) premises that are occupied for the purposes of—
(i) a fire and rescue authority in England,
(ii) a person providing services to a fire and rescue authority in England, and
(b) documents and other things on those premises.

(2) A notice under this paragraph must—
(a) specify or describe the premises to which the inspector requires access;
(b) specify the time when access is required (which may be immediately after the service of the notice).

(3) Where there are reasonable grounds for not allowing the inspector to have access to the premises at the time specified under sub-paragraph (2)(b), the requirement under this paragraph has effect as a requirement to secure that access is allowed to the inspector at the earliest practicable time specified by the inspector after there cease to be such grounds.

(4) An English inspector may cancel a notice under this paragraph by written notice to the person on whom it was served.

(5) In this paragraph “document” and “English inspector” have the same meanings as in paragraph 6 (and, for that purpose, the reference in paragraph (b) of the definition of “English inspector” in paragraph 6(9) to paragraph 6 is to be read as a reference to this paragraph).

Failure to comply with notice under paragraph 6 or 7

8 (1) If a person who has received a notice under paragraph 6 or 7—
(a) fails or refuses without reasonable excuse to do what is required by the notice, or
(b) (in the case of a notice under paragraph 6) knowingly or recklessly provides information in response to the notice that is false in a material respect,
the chief fire and rescue inspector for England may certify in writing to the High Court that the person has failed to comply with the notice.

(2) The High Court may then inquire into the matter and, after hearing any witness who may be produced against or on behalf of the person, and after hearing any statement offered in defence, deal with the person as if the person had committed a contempt of court.

Sensitive information: restriction on further disclosure

9 (1) Where an English inspector, in exercise of the inspection function, receives information within sub-paragraph (2), the inspector must not disclose the information, or the fact that it has been received, unless the relevant authority consents to the disclosure.

(2) The information is—
(a) intelligence service information;
(b) information obtained from a government department which, at the time it is provided to the inspector, is identified by the department as information the disclosure of which may, in the opinion of the relevant authority—
(i) cause damage to national security, international relations or the economic interests of the United Kingdom or any part of the United Kingdom, or
(ii) jeopardise the safety of any person.

(3) Where an English inspector discloses to another person information within sub-paragraph (2) that the inspector received in exercise of the inspection function, or the fact that the inspector has received such information in exercise of the inspection function, the other person must not disclose that information or that fact unless the relevant authority consents to the disclosure.
A prohibition on disclosure in sub-paragraph (1) or (3) does not apply to disclosure by one English inspector to another.

In this paragraph—

“English inspector” includes—

(a) a person appointed under section 28(A5) as an assistant inspector or other officer;
(b) a person authorised by an English inspector to act on behalf of the inspector for the purposes of paragraph 6 or 7;

government department” means a department of Her Majesty’s Government but does not include—

(a) the Security Service,
(b) the Secret Intelligence Service, or
(c) the Government Communications Headquarters (“GCHQ”);

intelligence service information” means information that was obtained (directly or indirectly) from or that relates to—

(a) the Security Service,
(b) the Secret Intelligence Service,
(c) GCHQ, or
(d) any part of Her Majesty’s forces, or of the Ministry of Defence, which engages in intelligence activities;

“Minister of the Crown” includes the Treasury;

“relevant authority” means—

(a) in the case of intelligence service information obtained (directly or indirectly) from or relating to the Security Service, the Director-General of the Security Service;
(b) in the case of intelligence service information obtained (directly or indirectly) from or relating to the Secret Intelligence Service, the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service;
(c) in the case of intelligence service information obtained (directly or indirectly) from or relating to GCHQ, the Director of GCHQ;
(d) in the case of intelligence service information obtained (directly or indirectly) from or relating to Her Majesty’s forces or the Ministry of Defence, the Secretary of State;
(e) in the case of information within sub-paragraph (2)(b)—

(i) the Secretary of State, or
(ii) the Minister of the Crown in charge of the government department from which the information was obtained (if that Minister is not a Secretary of State).

Provision of intelligence service information to English inspectors

(1) A person who provides information that is intelligence service information to an English inspector exercising the inspection function must—

(a) make the inspector aware that the information is intelligence service information, and
(b) provide the inspector with such additional information as will enable the inspector to identify the relevant authority in relation to the information.

(2) In this paragraph, “English inspector”, “intelligence service information” and “relevant authority” have the same meaning as in paragraph 9.

Like the provision made by amendment NC48, this new Schedule is about the inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England. It makes provision in relation to English inspectors about delegation, joint working with her Majesty’s Inspectors of Constabulary and the giving of assistance to public authorities. It also confers power on English inspectors to obtain information from fire and rescue authorities (and their employees) and from persons providing services to fire and rescue authorities (and their employees) to obtain access to premises occupied for the purposes of fire and rescue authorities and persons providing services to them.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 30

PUBLIC RECORDS

“(1) In Schedule 1 to the Public Records Act 1958 (definition of public records), in Part 2 of the Table at the end of paragraph 3, insert at the appropriate place—

“Office for Police Conduct.”

(2) The records that become public records for the purposes of that Act as a result of the amendment made by subsection (1) include all records of the Office for Police Conduct of the kind mentioned in paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 1 to that Act (whether created before or after the coming into force of this section, and whether created under that name or under the name of the Independent Police Complaints Commission).

(3) If the amendment made by subsection (1) comes into force before subsection (1) of section 31 comes into force, the reference in that amendment to the Office for Police Conduct is, until subsection (1) of that section comes into force, to be read as a reference to the Independent Police Complaints Commission.”—(Mike Penning.)

This new clause provides for the records of the Office for Police Conduct to become public records for the purposes of the Public Records Act 1958.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 63

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS: PARITY OF FUNDING BETWEEN POLICE AND FAMILIES AT INQUESTS

“(1) A police and crime commissioner has the duties set out in this section when the police force they are responsible for is a properly interested person for the purposes of—

(a) an inquest into the death of a member of an individual’s family, or
(b) an inquest into the deaths of members of a group of families,

under the Coroners Act 1988.

(2) The police and crime commissioner must make recommendations to the Secretary of State as to whether the individual’s family or the group of families at the inquest require financial support to ensure parity of legal representation between parties to the inquest.

(3) If a police and crime commissioner makes a recommendation under subsection (2) then the Secretary of State must provide financial assistance to the individual’s family or the group of families to ensure parity of legal representation between families and the police.

(4) The individual’s family or the group of families may use funding authorised under this section solely for the purpose of funding legal representation at the inquest.”—(Andy Burnham.)

This new clause would put into law the principle of parity of funding between families and the police at inquests. It would ensure that funding to a bereaved family, or a group of bereaved families, for purposes of legal representation during an inquest is an amount broadly equal to the level of funding that the police force receives. This new clause seeks to place an obligation on the PCC to recommend to the Home Secretary as to whether a bereaved family, or a group of bereaved families requires funding to support their legal representation at the inquest. The Home Secretary must provide such funding if it is recommended.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 155, Noes 264.

Division No. 16] [7.8 pm]

Ayes
Abbott, Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin

Mikes 155, Noes 264.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Nigel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afiyie, Adam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldous, Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan, Lucy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Heidi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amess, Sir David</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew, Stuart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansell, Caroline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argar, Edward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkins, Victoria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Mr Richard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker, Mr Steve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Harriett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barclay, Stephen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barwell, Gavin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellingham, Sir Henry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beresford, Sir Paul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry, Jake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingham, Andrew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackman, Bob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackwood, Nicola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boles, Nick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bone, Mr Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borwick, Victoria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottomley, Sir Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Karen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady, Mr Graham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazier, Mr Julian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgen, Andrew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brine, Steve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokenshire, rh James</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce, Fiona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckland, Robert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns, Conor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns, rh Simon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrowes, Mr David</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt, rh Alistair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns, rh Alun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartlidge, James</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caufield, Maria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalk, Alex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihaq, Rehman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chop, Mr Christopher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill, Jo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, rh Greg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleverly, James</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton-Brown, Geoffroy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffey, Dr Thérèse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Damian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colville, Oliver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa, Alberto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davies, Mims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinename, Caroline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djanogly, Mr Jonathan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donelan, Michelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double, Steve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowden, Oliver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doyle-Price, Jackie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drummond, Mrs Flick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan, rh Sir Alan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunne, Mr Philip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliott, Tom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Michael</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellison, Jane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elphicke, Charlie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeichner, Daniel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Holly Lynch and Jeff Smith
Question accordingly negatived.

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 26 April).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 64

Police complaints and the media

‘(1) Subject to subsection (3), the Prime Minister must commission an independent inquiry into the operation of the police complaints system in respect of relationships between the police and media.

(2) The inquiry must include, but is not limited to—
(a) how adequately police forces investigated complaints about police officers in dealing with people working within, or connected to, media organisations,
(b) the thoroughness of any reviews by police forces into complaints specified in subsection (a),
(c) in the cases where a complaint in subsection (a) led to a criminal investigation, the conduct of prosecuting authorities in the investigation,
(d) the extent to which police officers took illegal payment to suppress investigations of complaints of relationships between police officers and people working within, or connected to, media organisations,
(e) the implications of subsections (a) to (d) for the relationships between media organisations and the police, prosecuting authorities, and relevant regulatory bodies, and recommended actions.

(3) The inquiry can only commence once the Secretary of State is satisfied that it would not prejudice any ongoing relevant legal cases.”—(Andy Burnham.)

This new clause would compel the Prime Minister to instigate an independent inquiry such as Leveson 2 into the relationships between the press and police and the extent to which that has operated in the public interest.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 155, Noes 268.

Division No. 17] [7.20 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Benn, rh hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blenkinsop, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah

Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliot, Tom
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Field, rh Frank  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fiello, Robert  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Flynn, Paul  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Furniss, Gill  
Gapes, Mike  
Gardiner, Barry  
Glindon, Mary  
Goodman, Helen  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hanson, rh Mr David  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hendrick, Mr Mark  
Hermon, Lady  
Miller, Meg  
Hollern, Kate  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Johnson, Diana  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Graham  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, Mr Kevan  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kane, Mike  
Kinahan, Danny  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lavery, Ian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Ian C.  
Lynch, Holly  
MacTaggart, rh Fiona  
Madders, Justin  
Malhotra, Seema  
Mann, John  
Marris, Rob  
Marsden, Mr Gordon  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCartney, Jason  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McGovern, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McMahon, Jim  
Meale, Sir Alan  
Mears, lan  
Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
Morden, Jessica  
Morris, Grahame M.  
Mulholland, Greg  
Murray, Ian  
Nanney, Lisa  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Owen, Albert  
Pearce, Teresa  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Toby  
Powell, Lucy  
Rayner, Angela  
Reed, Mr Jamie  
Rees, Christina  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Rimmer, Marie  
Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Ryan, rh Joan  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Sherriff, Paula  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smeeth, Ruth  
Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
Smith, Angela  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Owen  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh Mr John  
Starmer, Keir  
Tami, Mark  
Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
Trickett, Jon  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Vaz, Valerie  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Phil  
Winnick, Mr David  
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel  

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
Sue Hayman and  
Jeff Smith  

**NOES**  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, Stephen  
Barwell, Gavin  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Bingham, Andrew  
Blackman, Bob  
Blackwood, Nicola  
Boles, Nick  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Borwick, Victoria  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bradley, Karen  
Brady, Mr Graham  
Brazier, Mr Julian  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshield, rh James  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Robert  
Burns, Conor  
Burns, rh Sir Simon  
Burrowes, Mr David  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Cartlidge, James  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Ruhman  
Chope, Mr Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Colville, Oliver  
Costa, Roberto  
Davies, Mims  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
Donelan, Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, Oliver  
Dowling, Jackie  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Dunne, Mr Philip  
Elliott, Tom  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellison, Jane  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Graham  
Evennett, rh Mr David  
Fallon, rh Michael  
Fernandes, Suella  
Field, rh Mark  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Marcus  
Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, Mr David  
Ghani, Nusrat  
Gibb, Mr Nick  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damien  
Greening, rh Justine  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Gummer, Ben  
Gyimah, Mr Sam  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matthew  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
Heald, Sir Oliver  
Heappey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Hinds, Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Hopkins, Kris  
Howlett, Ben  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, Mr Nick  
Jackson, Mr Stewart  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jerick, Robert  
Johnson, Boris  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, Joseph  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, rh Mr Marcus  
Kennedy, Seema  
Kinahan, Danny  
Kirby, Simon  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Lancaster, Mark  
Latham, Pauline  
Leadsom, Andrea  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, Sir Edward  
Leslie, Charlotte  
Lethwin, rh Mr Oliver  
Lewis, Brandon  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Lumley, Karen  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackintosh, David  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Mak, Mr Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mann, Scott  
Mathias, Dr Tania  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, Johnny  

1515  
1516  
13 JUNE 2016  
1516  
Policing and Crime Bill  
Policing and Crime Bill
Clause 12

Definition of police complaint

Amendment made: 85, page 20, line 39, leave out from first “person” to end of line 40 and insert

“is not to be taken to have authorised another person to make a complaint on his behalf unless”—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment adjusts the wording of the amendment to section 12(6) of the Police Reform Act 2002 so that it fits better with paragraph (b) of that provision.

Clause 17

Sensitive information received by IPCC: restriction on disclosure

Amendments made: 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.

Clause 17 makes provision about the handling of sensitive information received by the IPCC. The categories of information to which it applies include “intercept information” which is currently defined by reference to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. This amendment, and amendments 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30, amend clause 17 to take account of the provision made by the Investigatory Powers Bill about the interception of communications (and the consequential repeal by that Bill of Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000).

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—

“‘protected information’, in relation to a relevant warrant, means information relating to any of the matters mentioned in section 49(4) of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 in relation to the warrant;”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“‘relevant warrant’ means—

(a) a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, or

(b) a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 6 of that Act.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—


Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 22, page 28, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 23, page 28, leave out lines 40 to 42.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 24, page 28, line 45, at end insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 25, page 29, line 11, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 26, page 29, line 12, leave out “interception”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 27, page 29, leave out lines 19 to 21 and insert—

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 28, page 29, line 25, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 29, page 29, line 30, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.

Amendment 30, page 29, line 35, leave out “intercept information” and insert

“interception.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 22.
Clause 26

INVESTIGATIONS BY THE IPCC: WHISTLE-BLOWING

Amendment made: 31, clause 26, page 42, line 14, at end insert—

“(I) In section 63 of the Police Act 1996 (Police Advisory Board for England and Wales), in subsection (3)(b), after “Part 2” insert “or 2B”. “—(Mike Penning.)

Clause 26 makes provision for investigations by the IPCC into concerns raised by whistle-blowers. It provides for the Secretary of State to make regulations on certain matters relating to those investigations. The amendment to section 63 of the Police Act 1996 means that, before making the regulations, the Secretary of State must supply the Police Advisory Board for England and Wales with a draft and take into consideration any representations made by the Board.

Clause 32

EXERCISE OF FUNCTIONS

Amendments made: 32, clause 32, page 49, line 19, after “place”, insert

“except as otherwise provided by subsection (4A)”. This amendment is consequential on amendment 33.

Amendment 33, page 49, line 28, at end insert—

“(4A) In subsection (7), for “Commission”, in the first place it occurs, substitute “Office”. “—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment revises a consequential amendment to section 10 of the Police Reform Act 2002.

Clause 33

POWERS OF INSPECTORS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION, ACCESS TO POLICE PREMISES ETC

Amendments made: 34, clause 33, page 51, leave out lines 37 and 38 and insert—

“(c) where the notice is served on a person who has a right of appeal under paragraph 6D, give details of that right of appeal.”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 48.

Amendment 35, page 51, line 39, at beginning insert

“In a case where a notice is served on a person who has a right of appeal under paragraph 6D, “—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 48.

Amendment 36, page 51, line 40, leave out from “which” to end of line 41 and insert

“the appeal could be brought”. This amendment is consequential on amendment 48.

Amendment 37, page 52, line 28, leave out


“any of Parts 1 to 7 or Chapter 1 of Part 9 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.”

Clause 33(1) inserts a new paragraph 6A in Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996. This allows notices to be served requiring the provision of information for the purposes of inspections carried out by the inspectors of constabulary under section 54 of the Police Act 1996. The notices may not require the provision of certain types of information. Currently, two of those types are described by reference to provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. This amendment, and amendments 38, 39 and 40, amend clause 33 to take account of the prohibitions on disclosure of information contained in the Investigatory Powers Bill.

Amendment 38, page 52, line 35, leave out from “operator” to “in line 36.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 37.

Amendment 39, page 52, line 37, leave out

“(within the meaning of that Chapter)”. Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 37.

Amendment 40, page 52, line 37, at end insert—

“(I) In sub-paragraph (9), “communications data”, “postal operator” and “telecommunications operator” have the same meanings as in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (see sections 223 and 224 of that Act).”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 37.

Amendment 41, page 52, line 45, at end insert “, or

(c) a person authorised by an inspector of constabulary to act on behalf of the inspector for the purposes of this paragraph.”

Clause 33(1) inserts a new paragraph 6A in Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996, dealing with the service of notices requiring the provision of information reasonably required for the purposes of an inspection by the inspectors of constabulary under section 54 of the Police Act 1996. This amendment allows any person acting on behalf of an inspector of constabulary to serve a notice under paragraph 6A.

Amendment 42, page 53, line 18, after “required” insert

“(which may be immediately after the service of the notice)”. This amendment is consequential on amendment 47.

Amendment 43, page 53, leave out lines 19 and 20. This amendment is consequential on amendment 47.

Amendment 44, page 53, leave out lines 27 to 29. This amendment is consequential on amendment 47.

Amendment 45, page 53, line 33, at end insert

“(and, for that purpose, the reference in paragraph (c) of the definition of “inspector” in paragraph 6A(10) to paragraph 6A is to be read as a reference to this paragraph)”. Clause 33(1) inserts a new paragraph 6B in Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996, dealing with the service of notices requiring access to premises occupied for police purposes where access is reasonably required for the purposes of an inspection by the inspectors of constabulary under section 54 of the Police Act 1996. This amendment allows any person authorised to act on behalf of an inspector of constabulary to serve a notice under paragraph 6B.

Amendment 46, page 54, line 1, leave out “or 6B”. This amendment is consequential on amendment 47.

Amendment 47, page 54, line 2, leave out “or 6B”. This amendment means that there is no right of appeal against a notice served under paragraph 6B of Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996 (as inserted by clause 33(1)). Paragraph 6B provides for the service of notices requiring access to premises occupied for police purposes where access is required for the purposes of an inspection under section 54 of the Police Act 1996.

Amendment 48, page 54, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) The right of appeal conferred by sub-paragraph (1) does not apply where the notice is served on a person who is—

(a) a member of a police force; (b) a special constable;
(c) a member of the civilian staff of a police force, including the metropolitan police force (within the meaning of Part 1 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011);
(d) a local policing body or a person employed by a local policing body;
(e) a person providing services, in pursuance of contractual arrangements (but without being employed by a chief officer of police of a police force or its local policing body), to assist a police force in relation to the discharge of its chief officer’s functions;
(f) a person employed by a person providing services as mentioned in paragraph (e)."

Paragraph 6D of Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996 (as inserted by clause 33(1)) provides for a right of appeal against a notice served under paragraph 6A (which confers power to serve notices requiring the provision of information reasonably required for the purposes of an inspection under section 54 of the Police Act 1996).

The amendment means that the right of appeal does not apply where the notice is served on a member of a police force or the other persons listed in the amendment.

Amendment 49, page 54, line 11, leave out “or 6B”.
This amendment is consequential on amendment 47.
Amendment 50, page 54, line 19, leave out “intercept information” and insert “protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.
Clause 33(1) inserts a new paragraph 6E in Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996 which makes provision about the handling of sensitive information received by the inspectors of constabulary.

The categories of information to which it applies include “intercept information” which is currently defined by reference to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. This amendment, and amendments 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59, amend clause 33 to take account of the provision made by the Investigatory Powers Bill about the interception of communications (and the consequential repeal by that Act of Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000).

Amendment 51, page 54, line 45, at end insert “, or (c) a person authorised by an inspector of constabulary to act on behalf of the inspector in receiving information (whether under paragraph 6A or otherwise);”.
This amendment is related to amendment 41 and ensures that the restrictions on the disclosure of information under paragraph 6E of Schedule 4A to the Police Act 1996 (as inserted by clause 33(1)) apply to any person authorised by an inspector of constabulary to receive information on behalf of the inspector.

Amendment 52, page 55, leave out lines 8 to 10.
Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 50.

Amendment 53, page 55, line 11, at end insert—

"protected information", in relation to a relevant warrant, means information relating to any of the matters mentioned in section 49(4) of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 in relation to the warrant;”.

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 50.

Amendment 54, page 55, line 28, leave out “intercept information” and insert “protected information relating to a relevant warrant”.
Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 50.

Amendment 55, page 55, line 29, leave out “interception”.
Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 50.

Amendment 56, page 55, leave out lines 38 to 40 and insert—

"relevant warrant” means—

(a) a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, or

(b) a warrant under Chapter 1 of Part 6 of that Act.”
Amendment 71, page 251, line 40, at end insert—

‘( ) In subsection (2)(b) for “Commission” substitute “Office of or in respect of the Director General”.

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 72, page 252, line 9, at end insert—

‘( ) The repeal of section 28 does not affect an order made under that section before its repeal or the power under that section to revoke or amend any such order.”

This amendment adds a saving provision in connection with the repeal of section 28 of the Police Reform Act 2002.

Amendment 73, page 253, line 34, at end insert—

‘( ) For the title to the Schedule substitute “The Office for Police Conduct”.”

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 74, page 254, leave out lines 24 to 27 and insert—

‘( ) in paragraph (b) for “by it in the carrying out of its functions” substitute “in the carrying out of its or the Director General’s functions”.’

This amendment revises a consequential amendment to Part 14 of Schedule 2 to the Police Reform Act 2002.

Amendment 75, page 254, line 30, at end insert—

‘( ) After “its” insert “or the Director General’s.”’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 76, page 255, line 24, leave out “another member of the Office’s staff” and insert

“a person”.

This amendment revises a consequential amendment to paragraph 19(2A) of Schedule 3 to the Police Reform Act 2002.

Amendment 77, page 255, line 36, leave out “person designated under sub-paragraph (2) who is” and insert “the Director General or a member of the Office’s staff”.

This amendment revises a consequential amendment to paragraph 19(6A) of Schedule 3 to the Police Reform Act 2002.

Amendment 78, page 255, line 41, after “(2)(b)”, insert “and (7)(a)”.’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 79, page 257, line 21, at end insert—

‘( ) in sub-paragraph (13), before “or (4)” insert “, (2B)”.’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 80, page 257, line 21, at end insert—

‘( ) In paragraph 24 (action by appropriate authority in response to an investigation report), in sub-paragraph (11) before “or (4)” insert “, (2B)”.”

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 81, page 257, line 22, at end insert—

‘( ) in sub-paragraph (1), before “or (4)” insert “, (2B)”.’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).
Amendment 82, page 257, line 34, at end insert—

( ) in sub-paragraph (6) (as inserted by this Act)—

(i) after “sub-paragraph (2)” insert “or completed under sub-paragraph (2A)”; and

(ii) after “submissions” insert “or completion”.

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 83, page 258, line 18, at end insert—

‘( ) In paragraph 21 (power to discontinue an investigation), in sub-paragraph (4)(b) omit “itself.”’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 84, page 258, line 25, after “1(1)” insert “—

(a) after “(2),” insert “(2A);”;

(b) “.”

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 14, page 258, line 26, leave out sub-paragraph (4) and insert—

‘( ) In paragraph 4(1)—

(a) in the words before paragraph (a), for “it appears to the person in charge” substitute “the Director General determines”; and

(b) for the words after paragraph (b) substitute “the Director General must proceed under sub-paragraph (2)”.

( ) For paragraph 4(2) substitute—

“(2) The Director General must—

(a) prepare a record of the determination,

(b) notify the appropriate authority in relation to the person whose conduct is in question of the determination, and

(c) send to it a copy of the record of the determination prepared under paragraph (a).”

( ) After paragraph 5(1) insert—

“(1A) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply where the person in charge of the investigation is the Director General acting personally, but the Director General must complete a report on the investigation.”

( ) In paragraph 5(2)(a) for “the report” substitute “a report submitted under sub-paragraph (1) or completed under sub-paragraph (1A)”. ( ) In paragraph 6(1) after “paragraph 5” insert “(1) or on its completion by the Director General under paragraph 5(1A)”.

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 2 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (minor and consequential amendments to the Police Reform Act 2002).

Amendment 15, page 259, line 21, at end insert—

“62 (1) The Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3A (regulations relating to disciplinary matters), in subsection (1B)(a) (as inserted by this Act) for “Independent Police Complaints Commission” substitute “Director General of the Office for Police Conduct.”

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 3 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (other minor and consequential amendments).

Amendment 16, page 260, line 23, at end insert—

‘“The Director General of the Office for Police Conduct.”’

This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 3 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (other minor and consequential amendments).

Amendment 17, page 262, line 4, at end insert—

““The Director General of the Office for Police Conduct.”” — [Mike Penning.] This amendment adds a further consequential amendment to Part 3 of Schedule 8 to the Bill (other minor and consequential amendments).

New Clause 49

RETENTION OF FINGERPRINTS AND DNA PROFILES:

PACE

‘(1) Part 5 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (questioning and treatment of persons by police) is amended as follows.

(2) In section 63F (retention of section 63D material: persons arrested for or charged with a qualifying offence), after subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) In subsection (2), references to a recordable offence include an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales (and, in the application of subsection (2) where a person has previously been convicted, this applies whether or not the act constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).”

(3) In that section, after subsection (11) insert—

“(12) For the purposes of the definition of “excluded offence” in subsection (11)—

(a) references to a recordable offence or a qualifying offence include an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence or (as the case may be) a qualifying offence if done in England and Wales (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted), and

(b) in the application of subsection (2)(b) of that definition in relation to an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales, the reference to a relevant custodial sentence of 5 years or more is to be read as a reference to a sentence of imprisonment or other form of detention of 5 years or more.”

(4) In section 63H (retention of section 63D material: persons arrested for or charged with a minor offence), after subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) In subsection (2), the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).”

(5) In that section, in subsection (3), after “section 63F(11)” insert “(read with section 63F(12)).”

(6) After section 63I insert—

“63HA Retention of material: persons convicted of an offence outside England and Wales after taking of section 63D material

(1) This section applies where—

(a) section 63D material is taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of an offence,

(b) at any time before the material is required to be destroyed by virtue of this Part of this Act, the person is convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales, and

(c) the act constituting the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b) would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales.

(2) The material may be retained indefinitely.

(3) This section does not apply where section 63KA applies.”
(7) In the heading of section 63J, at the end insert “: other cases”.

(8) In section 63K (retention of section 63D material: exception for persons under 18 convicted of minor offence), after subsection (1) insert—

“(1A) In subsection (1)(a)(ii), the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).”

(9) In that section, after subsection (5) insert—

“(5A) In subsection (5), the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales.”

(10) After section 63K insert—

“63KA Retention of section 63D material under section 63IA: exception for persons under 18 convicted of first minor offence outside England and Wales

(1) This section applies where—

(a) section 63D material is taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of an offence,

(b) at any time before the material is required to be destroyed by virtue of this Part of this Act, the person is convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales,

(c) the act constituting the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b) would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales but would not constitute a qualifying offence,

(d) the person is aged under 18 at the time of the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b), and

(e) the person has not previously been convicted of a recordable offence.

(2) In subsection (1)(e), the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).

(3) Where the person is sentenced to imprisonment or another form of detention for less than 5 years in respect of the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b), the section 63D material may be retained until the end of the period consisting of the term of the sentence plus 5 years.

(4) Where the person is sentenced to imprisonment or another form of detention for 5 years or more in respect of the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b), the material may be retained indefinitely.

(5) Where the person is given a sentence other than a sentence of imprisonment or other form of detention in respect of the offence mentioned in subsection (1)(b), the material may be retained until the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the person was convicted.

(6) But if, before the end of the period within which material may be retained by virtue of this section, the person is again convicted of a recordable offence, the material may be retained indefinitely.

(7) In subsection (6), the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales.”

(11) In section 63N (retention of section 63D material given voluntarily), after subsection (4) insert—

“(5) The reference to a recordable offence in subsection (3)(a) includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence if done in England and Wales.

(6) The reference to a recordable offence in subsections (3)(b) and (4), and the reference to a qualifying offence in subsection (4), includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside England and Wales where the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence or (as the case may be) a qualifying offence if done in England and Wales (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).” — (Mike Penning.)

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

This new clause amends the provision made by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 for the retention of biometric material so that, where appropriate, convictions outside England and Wales are treated in the same way as convictions in England and Wales.

New Clause 50

RETENTION OF FINGERPRINTS AND DNA PROFILES: TERRORISM ACT 2000

(1) Schedule 8 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (detention) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 20B (retention of paragraph 20A material: persons detained under section 41), after sub-paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) In sub-paragraph (2) —

(a) the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom where the act constituting the offence would constitute—

(i) a recordable offence under the law of England and Wales if done there, or

(ii) a recordable offence under the law of Northern Ireland if done there,

and, in the application of sub-paragraph (2) where a person has previously been convicted, this applies whether or not the act constituted such an offence when the person was convicted;

(b) the reference to an offence in Scotland which is punishable by imprisonment includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom where the act constituting the offence would constitute an offence under the law of Scotland which is punishable by imprisonment if done there (and, in the application of sub-paragraph (2) where a person has previously been convicted, this applies whether or not the act constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).

(3) In paragraph 20C (retention of paragraph 20A material: persons detained under Schedule 7), after sub-paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) In sub-paragraph (2) —

(a) the reference to a recordable offence includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom where the act constituting the offence would constitute—

(i) a recordable offence under the law of England and Wales if done there, or

(ii) a recordable offence under the law of Northern Ireland if done there,

and, in the application of sub-paragraph (2) where a person has previously been convicted, this applies whether or not the act constituted such an offence when the person was convicted);
(b) the reference to an offence in Scotland which is punishable by imprisonment includes an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom where the act constituting the offence would constitute an offence under the law of Scotland which is punishable by imprisonment if done there (and, in the application of sub-paragraph (2) where a person has previously been convicted, this applies whether or not the act constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).”

(4) In paragraph 20D (interpretation), after sub-paragraph (5) insert—

“(5A) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (4)—

(a) a person is to be treated as having previously been convicted in England and Wales of a recordable offence if—

(i) the person has previously been convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, and

(ii) the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence under the law of England and Wales if done there (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted);

(b) a person is to be treated as having previously been convicted in Northern Ireland of a recordable offence if—

(i) the person has previously been convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, and

(ii) the act constituting the offence would constitute a recordable offence under the law of Northern Ireland if done there (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted);

(c) a person is to be treated as having previously been convicted in Scotland of an offence which is punishable by imprisonment if—

(i) the person has previously been convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, and

(ii) the act constituting the offence would constitute an offence punishable by imprisonment under the law of Scotland if done there (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted);

(d) the reference in sub-paragraph (4)(b) to a qualifying offence includes a reference to an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom where the act constituting the offence would constitute a qualifying offence under the law of England and Wales if done there (and, as the case may be) under the law of Northern Ireland if done there (whether or not it constituted such an offence when the person was convicted).

(5B) For the purposes of paragraphs 20B and 20C and this paragraph—

(a) offence, in relation to any country or territory outside the United Kingdom, includes an act punishable under the law of that country or territory, however it is described;

(b) a person has in particular been convicted of an offence under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom if—

(i) a court exercising jurisdiction under the law of that country or territory has made in respect of such an offence a finding equivalent to a finding that the person is not guilty by reason of insanity, or

(ii) such a court has made in respect of such an offence a finding equivalent to a finding that the person is under a disability and did the act charged against the person in respect of the offence.”” —(Mike Penning.)

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

This new clause amends the provision made by Schedule 8 to the Terrorism Act 2000 for the retention of biometric material so that, where appropriate, convictions outside the United Kingdom are treated in the same way as convictions in the United Kingdom.

New Clause 51

EXTENSION OF CROSS-BORDER POWERS OF ARREST: URGENT CASES

In Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (cross-border enforcement), after section 137 insert—

“137A Additional cross-border powers of arrest etc: urgent cases

(1) A constable of a police force in England and Wales may arrest a person in England and Wales without a warrant if—

(a) the constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the person has committed a specified offence in Scotland or in Northern Ireland, and

(b) the constable also has reasonable grounds for believing that it is necessary to arrest the person—

(i) to allow the prompt and effective investigation of the offence, or

(ii) to prevent any prosecution for the offence from being hindered by the disappearance of the person.

(2) A constable of a police force in Scotland may arrest a person in Scotland without a warrant if—

(a) the constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the person has committed a specified offence in England and Wales or in Northern Ireland, and

(b) the constable is satisfied that it would not be in the interests of justice to delay the arrest either to enable a warrant for the person's arrest to be obtained and then executed under section 136 or to enable a power of arrest under section 137 to be exercised.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2)(b), it would not be in the interests of justice to delay an arrest for a purpose mentioned in that subsection if the constable reasonably believes that, unless the person is arrested without delay, the person will obstruct the course of justice in any way, including by seeking to avoid arrest or interfering with witnesses or evidence.

(4) A constable of a police force in Northern Ireland may arrest a person in Northern Ireland without a warrant if—

(a) the constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the person has committed a specified offence in England and Wales or in Scotland, and

(b) the constable also has reasonable grounds for believing that it is necessary to arrest the person—

(i) to prevent any prosecution for the offence from being hindered by the disappearance of the person.

(5) The power conferred by subsection (1) or (2) may be exercised by a constable appointed under section 24 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 in England and Wales or (as the case may be) in Scotland, but only in relation to a person suspected of having committed a specified offence in Northern Ireland.

(6) The following provisions apply in relation to an arrest under this section by a constable of a person suspected of having committed a specified offence in England and Wales or in Northern Ireland—

(a) where the arrest is in England and Wales under subsection (1) or in Northern Ireland under subsection (4), the constable has the powers of entry and search conferred by section 137E;

(b) where the arrest is in Scotland under subsection (2), the constable has the same powers of entry and search for the purpose of the arrest as a constable of a police force in Scotland would have if there were reasonable grounds for suspecting that the offence had been committed in Scotland;
(c) the constable has the powers conferred by section 139 in relation to the arrested person;
(d) the constable may use reasonable force, if necessary, in arresting the person or in exercising the powers conferred by sections 137E and 139.

(7) Where a constable is arresting under this section a person suspected of having committed a specified offence in Scotland, the constable has the same powers as a constable of a police force in Scotland would have if arresting the person for the offence in Scotland.

(8) In this section—
“constable of a police force”, in relation to Northern Ireland, means a member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland or the Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve;
“specified offence” means an offence specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State under section 137B.

137B Power to specify offences for the purposes of section 137A

‘(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument specify offences for the purposes of section 137A (see the definition of “specified offence” in subsection (8) of that section).

(2) An offence may be specified in regulations under subsection (1) only if—
(a) the offence is indictable, and
(b) the Secretary of State considers that it is necessary in the interests of justice to specify it for the purposes of section 137A.

(3) For the purpose of subsection (2)(a), an offence is indictable if—
(a) in the case of an offence under the law of England and Wales, it is an indictable offence in England and Wales;
(b) in the case of an offence under the law of Scotland, it may be tried on indictment in Scotland;
(c) in the case of an offence under the law of Northern Ireland, it is an indictable offence in Northern Ireland.

(4) The Secretary of State may not make regulations under subsection (1) unless the Scottish Ministers and the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland consent to the making of the regulations.

(5) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (1) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

137C Detention for the purpose of re-arrest

‘(1) A person arrested under section 137A in respect of a specified offence may be detained but only for the purpose of—
(a) enabling a warrant for the person’s arrest in respect of the offence to be obtained and then executed under section 136, or
(b) enabling the person to be re-arrested under section 137.

(2) The person may be detained for that purpose—
(a) for an initial period of 3 hours beginning with the time of the arrest;
(b) for a second period of no more than 21 hours beginning with the end of the initial period, but only if detention for that period is authorised by both an officer of at least the rank of inspector in the arresting force and an officer of a rank above that of inspector in the investigating force;
(c) for a third period of no more than 12 hours beginning with the end of the second period, but only if detention for that period is authorised by both an officer of a rank above that of inspector in the arresting force and an officer of a rank above that of inspector in the investigating force.

(3) An officer of the arresting force may give an authorisation for the purpose of subsection (2)(b) or (c) only if satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

(4) An officer of the investigating force may give an authorisation for the purpose of subsection (2)(b) only if satisfied that—
(a) there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the person has committed the specified offence,
(b) a constable intends that the person be arrested as soon as is reasonably practicable (whether by the obtaining and execution of a warrant under section 136 or under section 137) and is acting expeditiously for that purpose, and
(c) it is in the interests of justice to give the authorisation.

(5) An officer of the investigating force may give an authorisation for the purpose of subsection (2)(c) only if satisfied that—
(a) there continue to be reasonable grounds to suspect that the person has committed the specified offence,
(b) a constable intends that the person be arrested as soon as is reasonably practicable (whether by the obtaining and execution of a warrant under section 136 or under section 137) and is acting expeditiously for that purpose, and
(c) it is in the interests of justice to give the authorisation.

(6) If, at any time while the person is detained, an appropriate officer in the investigating force is satisfied that it is no longer in the interests of justice for the person to be detained—
(a) the officer must notify the arresting force, and
(b) the person must be released immediately.

(7) In subsection (6), “appropriate officer” means—
(a) in relation to the person’s detention for the initial period, any constable;
(b) in relation to the person’s detention for the second period, an officer of at least the rank of inspector;
(c) in relation to the person’s detention for the third period, an officer of a rank above that of inspector.

(8) In this section—
“arresting force” means the police force of which the constable who arrested the person under section 137A is a member;
“investigating force” means the police force that is investigating the specified offence which the person arrested under section 137A is suspected of having committed;
“specified offence” has the same meaning as in section 137A (see sections 137A(8) and 137B).

137D Rights of persons arrested under section 137A

‘(1) A person arrested under section 137A must be informed of the following matters as soon as is practicable after the arrest—
(a) the purpose for which the person may be detained under section 137C;
(b) the provision made by that section about the periods for which the person may be detained.

(2) The following provisions apply in relation to persons arrested under section 137A in respect of a specified offence committed in England and Wales (subject to regulations under subsection (5))—
(a) section 28 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (information to be given on arrest);
(b) section 56 of that Act (right to have someone informed when arrested);
(c) section 58 of that Act (access to legal advice);
(d) section 34 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (additional protection for children and young persons).
(3) The following provisions apply in relation to persons arrested under section 137A in respect of a specified offence committed in Scotland (subject to regulations under subsection (5))—

(a) section 3 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 (asp 1) (information to be given on arrest);

(b) Chapter 5 of Part 1 of that Act (rights of suspects in police custody).

(4) The following provisions apply in relation to persons arrested under section 137A in respect of a specified offence committed in Northern Ireland (subject to regulations under subsection (5))—

(a) article 30 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I.12)) (information to be given on arrest);

(b) article 57 of that Order (right to have someone informed when arrested);

(c) article 59 of that Order (access to legal advice);

(d) article 10 of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (S.I. 1998/1504 (N.I.9)) (additional protection for children and young persons).

(5) The Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument provide that any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2), (3) or (4)—

(a) do not apply as mentioned in that subsection in cases or circumstances specified in the regulations;

(b) apply as mentioned in that subsection subject to such modifications as may be specified in the regulations (which may be general modifications or modifications that apply only in cases or circumstances specified in the regulations).

(6) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (5) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(7) The Secretary of State may not make regulations under subsection (5) which relate to a provision mentioned in subsection (3) unless the Scottish Ministers consent.

(8) The Secretary of State may not make regulations under subsection (5) which relate to a provision mentioned in subsection (4) unless the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland consents.”—(Mike Penning.)

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

This new clause extends the cross-border powers of arrest conferred by Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by giving a constable of a police force in a particular part of the United Kingdom power to arrest a person in that part who is reasonably suspected of having committed a specified offence in another part. The Secretary of State has power by regulations to specify the offences. The powers of arrest are available only in urgent cases and for the purpose of enabling the person to be re-arrested either under section 136 (where a warrant is obtained) or under section 137. The clause also specifies limits on the period for which persons arrested under the new powers may be detained and makes other supplementary provision.

New Clause 52

CROSS-BORDER ENFORCEMENT; POWERS OF ENTRY TO EFFECT ARREST

In Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (cross-border enforcement), after section 137D (as inserted by section (Extension of cross-border powers of arrest: urgent cases)) insert—

“137E Entry and search for the purposes of arrest

(1) A constable may enter and search any premises—

(a) for the purpose of executing in England and Wales under section 136(2)(b) a warrant issued in Northern Ireland;

(b) for the purpose of executing in Northern Ireland under section 136(3)(a) a warrant issued in England and Wales;

(c) for the purpose of arresting a person in Northern Ireland under section 137(1) in respect of a relevant England and Wales offence;

(d) for the purpose of arresting a person in England and Wales under section 137(3) in respect of a relevant Northern Ireland offence;

(e) for the purpose of arresting a person in England and Wales under section 137A(1) in respect of a specified offence committed in Northern Ireland;

(f) for the purpose of arresting a person in Northern Ireland under section 137A(4) in respect of a specified offence committed in England and Wales.

(2) In subsection (1)—

(a) “relevant England and Wales offence” means—

(i) an offence that is an indictable offence in England and Wales;

(ii) an offence mentioned in section 17(1)(c) or (ca) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984;

(b) “relevant Northern Ireland offence” means—

(i) an offence that is an indictable offence in Northern Ireland;

(ii) an offence mentioned in article 19(1)(ba) to (c) of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I.12)).

(3) The powers of entry and search conferred by subsection (1)—

(a) are exercisable only if the constable has reasonable grounds for believing that the person whom he is seeking is on the premises, and

(b) are limited, in relation to premises consisting of two or more separate dwellings, to powers to enter and search—

(i) any part of the premises which the occupier of any dwelling comprised in the premises uses in common with the occupier of any other such dwelling, and

(ii) any such dwelling in which the constable has reasonable grounds for believing that the person whom he is seeking may be.

(4) The power of search conferred by subsection (1) is only a power to search to the extent that is reasonably required for the purpose for which the power of entry is exercised.

(5) In this section, “premises” includes any place and, in particular, includes—

(a) any vehicle, vessel, aircraft or hovercraft,

(b) any offshore installation,

(c) any renewable energy installation, and

(d) any tent or movable structure.

“Offshore installation” has the meaning given to it by section 44 of the Petroleum Act 1998.

“Renewable energy installation” has the same meaning as in Chapter 2 of Part 2 of the Energy Act 2004 (see section 104 of that Act).”—(Mike Penning.)

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

This new clause confers powers of entry and search for the purpose of making an arrest under Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (as amended by new clause 51). It applies only in relation to the exercise of powers of arrest in England and Wales or Northern Ireland and only in respect of indictable and certain other offences committed in England and Wales or Northern Ireland.
New Clause 53

CROSS-BORDER ENFORCEMENT: MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Schedule (Cross-border enforcement: minor and consequential amendments)—

(a) makes minor amendments of Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (cross-border enforcement), and

(b) makes amendments consequential on the other amendments of that Part made by this Chapter." —(Mike Penning)

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

This new clause introduces the Schedule inserted by NS2. It makes minor and consequential amendments of Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. In particular, it makes minor amendments to reflect changes made to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. It also makes other minor and consequential amendments.

New Schedule 2

“CROSS-BORDER ENFORCEMENT: MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

PART 1

AMENDMENTS OF PART 10 OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC ORDER ACT 1994

1 Part 10 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (cross-border enforcement) is amended in accordance with paragraphs 2 to 8.

Powers of constables of PSNI etc. under section 137

2 (1) Section 137 (cross-border powers of arrest etc.) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3), for “the conditions applicable to this subsection are satisfied” substitute “the condition applicable to this subsection is satisfied”.

(3) For subsection (6) substitute—

“(6) The condition applicable to subsection (3) above is that it appears to the constable that it would have been lawful for him to have exercised the powers had the suspected person been in Northern Ireland.”

3 In section 138 (powers of arrest: supplementary provisions), omit subsections (3) to (5).

Powers to search premises under section 139

4 (1) Section 139 (search powers available on arrests under sections 136 and 137) is amended as follows.

(2) In the heading, for “sections 136 and 137” substitute “sections 136, 137 and 137A”.

(3) For subsection (1) substitute—

“(1) The powers conferred by subsections (2) and (3) are available to a constable in relation to—

(a) a person arrested under section 136(1), (2)(b) or (3)(a); and

(b) a person arrested under section 137(1) or (3);

(c) a person arrested under section 137A in respect of a specified offence committed in England and Wales or Northern Ireland.”

(4) Omit subsection (3)(b).

(5) After subsection (3) insert—

“(3A) The powers conferred by subsection (3B) are available to a constable in relation to—

(a) a person arrested under section 136(1) or (3)(a) in the execution of a warrant issued in England and Wales in respect of an offence that is an indictable offence in England and Wales;

(b) a person arrested under section 136(1) or (2)(b) in the execution of a warrant issued in Northern Ireland in respect of an offence that is an indictment offence in Northern Ireland;

(c) a person arrested under section 137(1) in respect of an offence that is an indictable offence in England and Wales;

(d) a person arrested under section 137(3) in respect of an offence that is an indictable offence in Northern Ireland;

(e) a person arrested under section 137A(2) or (4) in respect of a specified offence committed in England and Wales;

(f) a person arrested under section 137A(1) or (2) in respect of a specified offence committed in Northern Ireland.

(3B) The constable may enter and search any premises in which the person was when arrested or immediately before he was arrested for evidence relating to the offence.”

(6) In subsection (4), after “subsection (3)” insert “or (3B)”.

(7) In subsection (7)—

(a) for “subsection (3)(b)” substitute “subsection (3B)”;

(b) for “that paragraph” substitute “that subsection”.

(8) In subsection (8), for “subsection (3)(b)” substitute “subsection (3B)”.

(9) After subsection (10) insert—

“10A Where a constable of a police force in England and Wales searches premises in the exercise of the powers conferred by subsection (3B) or where a constable of the British Transport Police searches premises in England and Wales in the exercise of that power—

(a) the constable has the same powers as the constable would have under section 19 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 if the search had taken place under section 32(2)(b) of that Act, and

(b) sections 21 and 22 of that Act apply in relation to anything seized in the exercise of the powers conferred by paragraph (a) above.

10B Where a constable of a police force in Northern Ireland searches premises in the exercise of the powers conferred by subsection (3B)—

(a) the constable has the same powers as the constable would have under article 21 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/1341 (N.I.12)) if the search had taken place under article 34(2)(b) of that Order, and

(b) articles 23 and 24 of that Order apply in relation to anything seized in the exercise of the powers conferred by paragraph (a) above.

10C Where a constable of a police force in Scotland searches premises in the exercise of the powers conferred by subsection (3B), or where a constable of the British Transport Police searches premises in Scotland in the exercise of that power, the constable has the same powers of seizure and retention as the constable would have if the search had taken place in the exercise of a power of the constable (by virtue of any rule of law) in relation to a person arrested and charged with an offence by the constable in Scotland.”

(10) In subsection (12)—

(a) in the definition of “premises”, at the end of paragraph (b) (before the “and”) insert—

(a) any renewable energy installation;”;

(b) omit the “and” after that definition;

(c) in the definition of “offshore installation” for “section 1 of the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act 1971” substitute “section 44 of the Petroleum Act 1998”;

(d) at the end of the subsection insert “; and
“renewable energy installation” has the same meaning as in Chapter 2 of Part 2 of the Energy Act 2004 (see section 104 of that Act).”

Reciprocal powers of arrest - minor correction

5 In section 140 (reciprocal powers of arrest)—
   (a) in subsection (1), for the words in brackets substitute “(arrest without warrant)”;
   (b) in subsection (5), for the words in the second set of brackets substitute “(arrest without warrant)”.

References to the British Transport Commission Act 1949 - updating

6 In each of the following places, for references to “section 53 of the British Transport Commission Act 1949” substitute “section 24 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003”—
   (a) section 136(1) and (2);
   (b) section 137(2A);
   (c) section 140(6A).

Other amendments

7 (1) Section 136 (execution of warrants) is amended as follows.
   (2) After subsection (4) insert—
     “(4A) The following provisions apply in relation to the execution under this section by a constable of a warrant issued in England and Wales or Northern Ireland—
     (a) where the warrant is executed under subsection (1), the constable has the same powers of entry and search for the purpose of executing the warrant as a constable of a police force in Scotland would have if the warrant had been issued in Scotland;
     (b) where the warrant is executed under subsection (2)(b) or (3)(a), the constable has the powers of entry and search conferred by section 137E;
     (c) where the warrant is executed under subsection (1), (2)(b) or (3)(a), the constable has the powers conferred by section 139 in relation to the arrested person;
     (d) the constable may use reasonable force, if necessary, in arresting the person or in exercising the powers conferred by sections 137E and 139.”
   (3) In subsection (5), omit paragraph (a).
   (4) In subsection (9), for “sections 137 to 139” substitute “sections 136, 137 and 137E to 139”.

8 (1) Section 137 (cross-border powers of arrest etc.) is amended as follows.
   (2) After subsection (7) insert—
     “(7A) The following provisions apply in relation to an arrest under this section by a constable under subsection (1) or (3)—
     (a) where the arrest is under subsection (1) in Northern Ireland or under subsection (3) in England and Wales, the constable has the powers of entry and search conferred by section 137E;
     (b) where the arrest is under subsection (1) or (3) in Scotland, the constable has the same powers of entry and search for the purpose of the arrest as a constable of a police force in Scotland would have if there were reasonable grounds for suspecting that the offence had been committed or attempted in Scotland;
     (c) the constable has the powers conferred by section 139 in relation to the arrested person;
     (d) the constable may use reasonable force, if necessary, in arresting the person or in exercising the powers conferred by sections 137E and 139.”
   (3) In subsection (8), omit paragraph (a).

PART 2

AMENDMENTS OF OTHER LEGISLATION

Finance Act 2007 (c.11)

9 (1) Section 87 of the Finance Act 2007 (cross-border exercise of powers) is amended as follows.
   (2) In subsection (2), for “Sections 136 to 139” substitute “Sections 136, 137 and 137E to 139”.
   (3) In subsection (4), for “sections 136 to 139” substitute “sections 136, 137 and 137E to 139”.

Crime and Courts Act 2013 (c.22)

10 (1) Section 55 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 (powers of immigration officers) is amended as follows.
   (2) In subsection (7), for “Sections 136 to 139” substitute “Sections 136, 137 and 137E to 139”.
   (3) In subsection (8), for “sections 136 to 139” substitute “sections 136, 137 and 137E to 139”.

Please see the explanatory statement for NC53.

Clause 60

LIMITS ON PERIOD OF BAIL WITHOUT CHARGE UNDER PART 4 OF PACE

Amendments made: 89, page 71, line 35, leave out “otherwise” and insert “in an FCA case or any other case”.

This amendment is related to amendments 90, 91, 92 and 93. The amendments make provision in connection with cases where the power to release a person on bail is exercised in relation to an offence which is being investigated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Amendment 90, page 72, line 2, at end insert—

“( ) an “FCA case” is a case in which—
   (i) the relevant offence in relation to the person is being investigated by the Financial Conduct Authority, and
   (ii) a senior officer confirms that sub-paragraph (i) applies.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 89.

Amendment 91, page 73, line 29, at end insert—

“( ) a member of staff of the Financial Conduct Authority who is of the description designated for the purposes of this paragraph by the Chief Executive of the Authority (in an FCA case).”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 89.

Amendment 92, page 74, line 8, after “by” insert “the Chief Executive of the Financial Conduct Authority.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 89.

Amendment 93, page 75, line 1 after “constable,” insert “a member of staff of the Financial Conduct Authority who is of the description designated for the purposes of this subsection by the Chief Executive of the Authority.”

Please see the explanatory statement for amendment 89.

Clause 74

EXTENSION OF POWERS UNDER SECTIONS 135 AND 136 OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT 1983

Amendments made: 94, page 91, line 21, leave out from beginning to “other” in line 23 and insert—

“( ) The power of a constable under subsection (1) may be exercised where the mentally disordered person is at any place,”
Currently, clause 74(4) prevents a constable entering a house, flat or room where a person is living for the purpose of exercising a power under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983, as amended by the clause. This amendment ensures that a similar restriction applies where the constable is already at a house, flat or room where a person is living and becomes aware that a mentally disordered person is at the place (whether or not he or she is the person living there). In such a case, a constable may be able to apply for a warrant under section 135 of the 1983 Act but cannot act without a warrant under section 136.

Amendment 95, page 91, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) For the purpose of exercising the power under subsection (1), a constable may enter any place where the power may be exercised, if need be by force.” — (Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 94.

Clause 77

PROTECTIVE SEARCHES: INDIVIDUALS REMOVED ETC UNDER SECTION 135 OR 136 OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT 1983

Amendment made: 96, page 95, line 30, leave out “in public”.—(Mike Penning.)

Clause 77 authorises searches of a person to whom a warrant under section 135(1) or (2) of the Mental Health Act 1983 relates, or who is detained under section 136(2) or (4) of that Act, where there are reasonable grounds for believing that the person may present a danger to himself or herself or to others. Currently, the clause specifies that the power may not be used to require a person to remove any of his or her clothing in public (other than certain specified items of outerwear). The amendment removes the words “in public” which means that this restriction applies even where the person is not in a public place.

Clause 78

APPLICATION OF MARITIME ENFORCEMENT POWERS: GENERAL

Amendments made: 97, page 96, line 13, after “waters” insert “or international waters”.

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 78 by providing for them to be exercisable in relation to foreign ships in international waters.

Amendment 98, page 96, line 15 after “waters” insert “or international waters”. —(Mike Penning.)

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 78 by providing for them to be exercisable in relation to ships registered under the law of a relevant territory (that is, the Isle of Man, any of the Channel Islands or a British overseas territory) in international waters.

Clause 79

RESTRICTION ON EXERCISE OF MARITIME ENFORCEMENT POWERS

Amendment made: 99, page 97, line 11, at end insert “or in international waters”.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendments 97 and 98.

Clause 80

HOT PURSUIT OF SHIPS IN SCOTLAND OR NORTHERN IRELAND WATERS

Amendments made: 100, page 97, line 28, leave out “relevant waters” and insert “England and Wales waters or international waters”.

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 80 by providing for them to be exercisable where a ship was in international waters immediately before the pursuit of the ship began.

Amendment 101, page 97, line 34, leave out subsection (2). —(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 100.

Clause 90

APPLICATION OF MARITIME ENFORCEMENT POWERS: GENERAL

Amendments made: 102, page 103, line 31, after “waters” insert “or international waters”.

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 90 by providing for them to be exercisable in relation to foreign ships in international waters.

Amendment 103, page 103, line 33, after “waters” insert “or international waters”. —(Mike Penning.)

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 90 by providing for them to be exercisable in relation to ships registered under the law of a relevant territory (that is, the Isle of Man, any of the Channel Islands or a British overseas territory) in international waters.

Clause 91

RESTRICTION ON EXERCISE OF MARITIME ENFORCEMENT POWERS

Amendment made: 104, page 104, line 33, at end insert “or in international waters”. —(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendments 102 and 103.

Clause 92

HOT PURSUIT OF SHIPS IN ENGLAND AND WALES OR NORTHERN IRELAND WATERS

Amendments made: 105, page 105, line 8, leave out “relevant waters” and insert “Scotland waters or international waters”.

This amendment extends the scope of the powers conferred by clause 92 by providing for them to be exercisable where a ship was in international waters immediately before the pursuit of the ship began.

Amendment 106, page 105, line 14, leave out subsection (2). —(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on amendment 105.

Clause 138

EXTENT

Amendments made: 109, page 142, line 43, at end insert—

“( ) sections (Extension of cross-border powers of arrest: urgent cases), (Cross-border enforcement: powers of entry to effect arrest), (Cross-border enforcement: minor and consequential amendments) and Schedule (Cross-border enforcement: minor and consequential amendments).” —(Mike Penning.)
This amendment provides for the new clauses inserted by new clauses 51, 52 and 53 and new Schedule 2 to form part of the law of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Title

Amendments made: 117, line 13 after “charge,” insert “to make provision about the retention of biometric material;”

This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clauses 49 and 50.

Amendment 118, line 17 after “enforcement;” insert “to make provision for cross-border enforcement;”. —(Mike Penning)

This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clauses 51, 52 and 53 and new Schedule 2.

New Clause 2

National Assembly for Wales: devolution of responsibility for policing

“(1) In Schedule 7 to the Government of Wales Act 2006 after paragraph 20 insert—

Policing

21 Policing, police pay, probation, community safety, crime prevention.

Exceptions—

National Crime Agency

Police pensions

National security.”—(Liz Saville Roberts.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 54—Powers to seize invalid travel documents.

Government new clause 55—Anonymity of victims of forced marriage.

Government new clause 56—Licensing functions under taxi and PHV legislation: protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Government new clause 57—Powers of litter authorities in Scotland.

New clause 3—Digital Crime Review—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall have a duty to provide for a review of legislation which contains powers to prosecute individuals who may have been involved in the commission of digital crime in order to consult such powers in a single statute.

(2) In the conduct of the review under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must consult with any person or body he deems appropriate, including but not limited to—

(a) Malicious Communications Act 1988, section 1,

(b) Protection from Harassment Act 1997, section 2, 2a, 4, 4a,

(c) Offences against the Person Act 1861, section 16, 20, 39, 47,

(d) Data Protection Act 1998, section 10, 13 and 55,

(e) Criminal Justice Act 1998, section 160,

(f) Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, section 30(1), (3), (5), (6), 78(5), 78(6),

(g) Computer Misuse Act 1990, as amended by Serious Crime Act 2015 and Police and Justice Act 2006,

(h) Contempt of Court Act 1981,

(i) Human Rights Act 1998,

(j) Public Order Act 1986, section 4, 4a, 5, 16(b), 18,

(k) Serious Organised Crime Act 2005, section 145, 46,

(l) Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006, section 48,

(m) Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2014, section 32, 34, 35, 36, 37,

(n) Protection of Children Act 1978,

(o) Obscene Publications Act 1959,

(p) Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 28, 29-32,

(q) Criminal Justice Act 2003, section 145, 146,

(r) Communications Act 2003, section 127, 128-131,

(s) Data retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014, section 4,

(t) Sexual Offences Amendment Act 1992, section 5,

(u) Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015,

(v) Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, section 33(5), 29(6),

(w) Criminal Damage Act 1971, section 2,

(x) Sexual Offences Act 2003, section 4, 8, 10, 62,

(y) Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, section 43,

(z) Magistrates Court Act 1980, section 127,

(A) Suicide Act 1961, section 2(1) as amended by Coroners and Justice Act 2009,

(B) Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, section 63,

(C) Theft Act 1968, section 21, and

(D) Criminal Law Act 1977, section 51(2)

(3) It shall be a duty of the Secretary of State to determine for the review any other statute under which persons have been prosecuted for a crime falling under section 1 of this Act.

(4) In the conduct of the review under subsection (1), the Secretary of State may consult with any person or body he deems appropriate, including but not limited to—

(a) the Police,

(b) Crown Prosecution Service,

(c) judiciary, and

(d) relevant community organisations.”

New clause 4—Surveillance and monitoring: offences—

“(1) A person commits an offence if the person—

(a) uses a digital device to repeatedly locate, listen to or watch a person without legitimate purpose,

(b) installs spyware, a webcam or any other device or software on another person’s property or digital device without the user’s agreement or without legitimate reason,

(c) takes multiple images of an individual unless it is in the public interest to do so without that individual’s permission and where the intent was not legitimate or lawful,

(d) repeatedly orders goods or services for another person if the purpose of such actions is to cause distress, anxiety or to disrupt that person’s daily life,

(e) erases data remotely whilst a digital device is being examined by the police or any other lawful investigation,

(f) monitors a digital device registered to a person aged 17 or less if the purpose of that monitoring is to obtain information about a third person,

(g) monitors any other person’s digital device if the intent of the monitor is either to damage or steal data from that person, or

(h) creates a false persona on line without lawful reason if the purpose of such a creation is to intend to attempt to defraud, groom, impersonate or seriously damage the reputation of any other person.
(2) A person guilty of an offence under subsections (1)(a) or (b) is liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 12 months or a fine.

(3) For the purpose of subsection (1)(a) “repeatedly” shall be deemed as on two occasions or more.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1)(d) is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding the statutory limit.

(5) A person guilty of an offence under subsections (1)(e), (f), (g) or (h) is liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 12 months.

(6) The Secretary of State shall introduce restrictions on the sale of spyware to persons under the age of 16 and requests all persons who are purchasing such equipment to state their intended use of such equipment.”

New clause 5—Digital crime training and education—

'(1) It shall be the responsibility of the Home Department to ensure that each Police Service shall invest in training on the prioritisation, investigation and evidence gathering in respect of digital crime and abuse.

(2) It shall be the responsibility of the Home Department to ensure that all Police services record complaints and outcomes of complaints of digital crime and abuse.

(3) It shall be the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to publish annual statistics on complaints and outcomes of digital crime and abuse.”

New clause 6—Offence of abduction of a vulnerable child aged 16 or 17—

“(1) A person shall be guilty of an offence if, knowingly and without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, he or she—

(a) takes a child to whom this section applies away from the responsible person; or

(b) keeps such a child away from the responsible person; or

(c) induces, assists or incites such a child to run away or stay away from the responsible person or from a child’s place of residence.

(2) This section applies in relation to a child aged 16 or 17 who is—

(a) a child in need as defined in section 17 of the Children Act 1989; or

(b) a child looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989; or

(c) a child housed alone under part 7 of the Housing Act 1996; or

(d) a child who is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm subject to section 47 1(b) of the Children Act 1989.

(3) In this section “the responsible person” is—

(a) a person with a parental responsibility as defined in the Children Act 1989; or

(b) a person who for the time being has care of a vulnerable child aged 16 and 17 by virtue of a care order, an emergency protection order, or protection from section 46 of the Children Act 1989; or

(c) any other person as defined in regulations for the purposes of this section.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both such imprisonment and fine; or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years.

(5) No prosecution for an offence above shall be instituted except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions.”

New clause 10—Prevention of child sexual exploitation and private hire vehicles—

“(1) The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 47(1) insert—

“(1A) A district council must carry out its functions under this section with a view to preventing child sexual exploitation.”

(3) At end of section 48 (1) insert—

“(c) a district council must carry out its functions under this section with a view to preventing child sexual exploitation”.

(4) Section 7 of the London Cab Order 1934 is amended as follows.

(5) After section 7(2) insert—

“(2A) Transport for London must carry out its functions under this section with a view to preventing child sexual exploitation.”

(6) Section 7 of the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 is amended as follows.

(7) After section 7(2) insert—

“(3) The licensing authority must carry out its functions under this section with a view to preventing child sexual exploitation.”

This new clause would place local authorities under a duty to consider how they can prevent child sexual exploitation when they issue licences for taxis and private hire vehicles.

New clause 13—Grooming for criminal behaviour: offence—

“(1) A person aged 18 or over (A) commits an offence if—

(a) A has met or communicated with another person (B) on at least two occasions and subsequently—

(i) A intentionally meets B,

(ii) A travels with the intention of meeting B in any part of the world or arranges to meet B in any part of the world, or

(iii) B travels with the intention of meeting A in any part of the world,

(b) A intends to say or do anything to or in respect of B, during or after the meeting mentioned in paragraph (a)(i) to (iii) and in any part of the world, which if done will—

(i) encourage,

(ii) persuade, or

(iii) intimidate

B with the effect that B commits a criminal offence from which A will, or intends to, profit.

(c) B is under 16, and

(d) A does not reasonably believe that B is 16 or over.

(2) For subsection (1)(b)(iii) to apply, A does not have to profit directly nor be the sole beneficiary of a criminal offence committed by B.

(3) In subsection (1) the reference to A having met or communicated with B is a reference to A having met B in any part of the world or having communicated with B by any means from, to or in any part of the world.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both,

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.”

New clause 14—Grooming for criminal behaviour: prevention orders—

“(1) A court may make an order under this section in respect of a person aged 18 or over (A) where—

(a) A has committed an offence under section (Grooming for criminal behaviour); or
(b) the court is satisfied that A’s behaviour makes it necessary to make such an order, for the purpose of protecting one or more persons aged 16 or under from being encouraged, persuaded or intimidated by A into committing a crime from which A intends to profit.

(2) A chief officer of police may by complaint to a magistrates’ court apply for an order under this section in respect of a person who resides in his police area or who the chief officer believes is in, or is intending to come to, his police area if it appears to the chief officer that—
(a) the person has committed an offence under section (Grooming for criminal behaviour); or
(b) the person’s behaviour makes it reasonable to make such an order, for the purpose of protecting one or more other persons aged 16 or under from being encouraged, persuaded, facilitated or intimidated into committing a crime from which others will, or intend to, profit.

(c) the person has acted in such a way as to give reasonable cause to believe that it is necessary for such an order to be made.

(3) An application under subsection (2) may be made to any magistrates’ court whose commission area includes—
(a) any part of the applicant’s police area, or
(b) any place where it is alleged that the person acted in a way mentioned in subsection (2)(b).

(4) A grooming for criminal behaviour prevention order (GCBPO) that includes one or more requirements must specify the person who is to be responsible for supervising compliance with the requirement who may be an individual or an organisation.

(5) Before including a requirement, the court must receive evidence about its suitability and enforceability from—
(a) the individual to be specified under subsection (1), if an individual is to be specified;
(b) an individual representing the organisation to be specified under subsection (1), if an organisation is to be specified.

(6) Before including two or more requirements, the court must consider their compatibility with each other.

(7) It is the duty of a person specified under subsection (4)—
(a) to make any necessary arrangements in connection with the requirements for which the person has responsibility (the “relevant requirements”);
(b) to promote the compliance of the GCBPO subject with the relevant requirements;
(c) if the person considers that the GCBPO subject—
(i) has complied with all the relevant requirements, or
(ii) has failed to comply with a relevant requirement, to inform the prosecution and the appropriate chief officer of police.

(8) In subsection (7)(c) “the appropriate chief officer of police” means—
(a) the chief officer of police for the police area in which it appears to the person specified under subsection (1) that—
(i) the GCBRO subject lives, or
(ii) one or more persons aged 16 or under as mentioned in subsection (1)(b) lives;
(b) if it appears to a person specified under subsection (4) that the GCBPO subject lives in more than one police area, whichever of the relevant chief officers of police that person thinks it most appropriate to inform.

(9) The subject of a GCBPO, in addition to any specific restrictions and requirements detailed within the order, must—
(a) keep in touch with the person specified under subsection (4) in relation to that requirement, in accordance with any instructions given by that person from time to time; and
(b) notify the person of any change of address.

These obligations have effect as requirements of the order.”

New clause 15—Sentencing guidelines review: children—

“(1) With an year of the day on which this Act is passed the Sentencing Council must conduct a review of sentencing guidelines as they relate to crime against children and crimes where the victim is a child.

(2) The Sentencing Council must publish the findings of its review and lay a copy of that report before Parliament.

(3) In conducting this review the Sentencing Council must consult—
(a) the Secretary of State for Justice,
(b) and any other bodies it thinks relevant.

(4) For the purpose of this section “child” has the same meaning as in section 105 of the Children Act 1989.”

This new clause would require the Sentencing Council to review the sentencing guideline for offences committed against children.

New clause 16—Soliciting via telecommunications order: applications, grounds and effect—

“(1) A chief officer of police may by complaint to a magistrates’ court apply for an order under this section (a “soliciting via telecommunications order”) in respect of a telecommunications service provider if it appears to the chief officer that a phone number (“the relevant phone number”) administered by a telecommunications service provider is being used for the purposes of advertising a person’s services as a prostitute.

(2) The chief officer of police may make an application under subsection (1) only if the relevant phone number has been advertised in the chief officer’s police area.

(3) Such an order requires the telecommunications service provider to take all reasonable steps to prevent calls to the relevant phone number being connected.

(4) It shall be an offence for a telecommunications service provider to fail to comply with terms of an order issued under this section.

(5) An organisation found guilty of an offence under subsection (5) shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine no greater than £50,000.”

This new clause would enable the police to request that a magistrates issues an order to mobile phone providers that they block a number if that number is on cards advertising prostitution and create an offence if they fail to comply with a fine of up to £50,000.

New clause 18—Cruelty to persons under sixteen: penalty—

“(1) The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1(1)(a) leave out the words “ten” and insert “fourteen.”

To increase the maximum tariff for child cruelty from 10 years imprisonment to 14 years.

New clause 33—Police observance of the Victims’ Code: enforcement—

“(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 5(1B) omit paragraph (a) together with the final “or”.

(3) After section 5(1B) insert—

“(1BA) Subsection (1C) of this section applies if a written complaint is made to the Commissioner by a member of the public who claims that—
(a) a police officer
(b) a police service employee other than a police officer
(c) another person determined under section (1BC)
has failed to perform a Code duty owed by him to the member of the public.

(1BB) For the purposes of subsection (1BA) a Code duty is a duty imposed by a code of practice issued under section 32 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (code of practice for victims).

(1BC) The Secretary of State may by regulation amend the categories of person identified in subsection (1BA) as the Secretary of State thinks fit.

(4) In section 5(4A), after “(1A)”, insert “or (1BA)”.

(5) In section 6(3), at the beginning insert “Except as provided in subsection (3A)”.

(6) After section 6(3), insert—

“(3A) Subsection (3) shall apply in relation to a complaint under section 5(1BA) as if for “a member of the House of Commons” there were substituted “the Commissioner”.

(7) In section 7(1A), after “5(1A)”, insert “or 5(1BA)”.

(8) In section 8(1A), after “5(1A)”, insert “or 5(1BA)”.

(9) After section 10(2A), insert—

“(2B) In any case where the Commissioner conducts an investigation pursuant to a complaint under section 5(1BA) of this Act, he shall send a report of the results of the investigation to—

(a) the person to whom the complaint relates,
(b) the principal officer of the department or authority concerned and to any other person who is alleged in the relevant complaint to have taken or authorised the action complained of, and
(c) the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses appointed under section 48 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.”

(10) After section 10(3B) insert—

“(3C) If, after conducting an investigation pursuant to a complaint under section 5(1BA) of this Act, it appears to the Commissioner that—

(a) the person to whom the complaint relates has failed to perform a Code duty owed by him to the person aggrieved, and
(b) the failure has not been, or will not be, remedied, the Commissioner shall lay before each House of Parliament a special report upon the case.

(3D) If the Commissioner lays a special report before each House of Parliament pursuant to subsection (3C) the Commissioner may also send a copy of the report to any person as the Commissioner thinks appropriate.

(3E) For the purposes of subsection (3C) “Code duty” has the meaning given by section 5(1BB) of this Act.

(11) In section 10(5)(d), for “or (2A)” substitute “, (2A) or (2B)”.

(12) In section 12(1), after paragraph (b) of the definition of “person aggrieved”, insert—

“(c) in relation to a complaint under section 5(1BA) of this Act, means the person to whom the duty referred to in section 5(1BA) of this Act is or is alleged to be owed;”.

New clause 34—Police, etc. provision for victims’ entitlement: framework—

“(1) The Victims’ Code (a code of practice issued under section 32 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (code of practice for victims)) shall include, but not be limited to, the entitlement of victims to receive as follows.

(2) A victim of crime shall be entitled to receive—

(a) accurate and timely information from—

(i) the police
(ii) such other agencies of the criminal justice system concerned with the detection and prosecution of the relevant crime and with the support of victims of crime as the Secretary of State deems fit;

(b) The police must ensure provision to victims of adequate notice of all relevant court and other legal proceedings, including information about decisions by and discussions between the police and other agencies of the criminal justice system relating to the person convicted of the crime concerned (“the perpetrator”), including—

(i) information about any prison sentence previously served by the perpetrator,
(ii) information about relevant changes to the perpetrator’s circumstances whilst on parole or in custody,
(iii) information about any crimes committed by the perpetrator outside the UK where the victim of the crime concerned is a British national,
(iv) access, where required, to adequate interpretation and translation services, and
(v) information about the direct contact details of the criminal justice agencies and individuals involved in the court or other legal proceedings concerned.

(3) During criminal justice proceedings, the police and other relevant agencies and authorities of the criminal justice system must ensure that victims of crime—

(a) are not subjected to unnecessary delay by any other party to the proceedings;
(b) are treated with dignity and respect by all parties involved; and
(c) do not experience discriminatory behaviour from any other party to the proceedings.

(4) Children and vulnerable adults must be able to give evidence to a court secure location away from that court or from behind a protective screen.

(5) The investigating police force concerned must ensure the safety and protection of victims of crime during proceedings, including but not restricted to—

(a) a presumption that victims of crime may remain domiciled at their home with adequate police protection if required; and
(b) ensuring that the victim and those accompanying them are provided with access to discreet waiting areas during the relevant court proceedings.

(6) All victims of crime shall have access to an appropriate person to liaise with relevant agencies on their behalf and to inform them about, and explain the progress, outcomes and impact of, their case.

(7) Witnesses under the age of 18 shall have access to a trained communications expert, to be known as a Registered Intermediary, to help them understand as necessary what is happening in the criminal proceedings.

(8) Victims of crime shall have access to transcripts of any relevant legal proceedings at no cost to themselves.

(9) Victims of crime shall have the right to attend and make representations to a pre-court hearing to determine the nature of the court proceedings.

(10) The Secretary of State must take steps to ensure that victims of crime—

(a) have access to financial compensation from public funds for any detriment arising from the criminal case concerned;
(b) are given the right to approve or refuse the payment of any compensation order made by a court against a person convicted of a crime against them;
(c) have reimbursed to them, from public funds, any expenses incurred by them in attending in court and in any related legal process, whether in the UK or overseas;
(d) have available to them legal advice where considered necessary by a judge in court proceedings; and
(e) are not required to disclose personal data in legal proceedings which puts their safety at risk unless specifically ordered to do so by a judge.”
New clause 35—Police etc. training: treatment of victims—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall publish and implement a strategy for providing training on the impact of crime on victims and victims’ rights for staff of the following organisations—

(a) the police
(b) the Crown Prosecution Service, and
(c) any other public agency or authority that the Secretary of State deems appropriate.

(2) The Secretary of State may also by regulation make provision for judges, barristers and solicitors involved in criminal cases involving sexual and domestic violence undertake specialist training.

(3) The Secretary of State shall publish an agreed timetable for the delivery and completion of the training required by this section.”

New clause 36—Establishment and conduct of homicide reviews—

“(1) In this section “homicide review” means a review of the circumstances a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, died as the result of a homicide and—

(a) no one has been charged with the homicide, or
(b) the person(s) charged has been acquitted.

(2) The Secretary of State may in a particular case direct a police force or other specified person or body or a person or body within subsection (5) to establish, or to participate in, a homicide review.

(3) It is the duty of any person or body within subsection (5) establishing or participating in a homicide review (whether or not held pursuant to a direction under subsection (2)) to have regard to any guidance and standards issued by the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses as to the establishment and conduct of such reviews.

(4) Any reference in subsection (2) to the Secretary of State shall, in relation to persons and bodies within subsection (5)(b), be construed as a reference to the PSNI or Department of Justice in Northern Ireland as may be appropriate.

(5) The persons and bodies within this subsection are—

(a) in relation to England and Wales—chief officers of police for police areas in England and Wales; local authorities; local probation boards established under section 4 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (c 43); the National Health Service Commissioning Board; clinical commissioning groups established under section 14D of the National Health Service Act 2006; providers of probation services; Local Health Boards established under section 11 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006; NHS trusts established under section 25 of the National Health Service Act 2006 or section 18 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006;

(b) in relation to Northern Ireland—the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland; the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; Health and Social Services Boards established under Article 16 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 (SI 1972/1265 (NI 14)); Health and Social Services trusts established under Article 10 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (SI 1991/194 (NI 1)).

(6) In subsection (5)(a) “local authority” means—

(a) in relation to England, the council of a district, county or London borough, the Common Council of the City of London and the Council of the Isles of Scilly;

(b) in relation to Wales, the council of a county or county borough.

New clause 37—Statutory duty on elected local policing bodies—

“(1) An elected local policing body must assess—

(a) the needs of victims in each elected local policing body’s police area, and
(b) the adequacy and effectiveness of the available victims’ services in that area.

(2) An elected local policing body must—

(a) prepare and consult upon an Area Victims’ Plan for its police area,
(b) having taken account of any responses to its consultation and any Quality Standard, publish the Plan in such a manner as sets out clearly how the identified victim needs will be met by the available victims’ services, and
(c) submit its Area Victims’ Plan to the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses on an annual basis.

(3) In this section—

“elected local policing body” and “police area” have the same meaning as in Part 1 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, and “Quality Standard” means the standard published under section 49(1)(f) of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.”

New clause 38—Duties of the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses—

“(1) Section 49 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (general functions of Commissioner) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1), after paragraph (c) insert—

“(d) assess the adequacy of each elected local policing body’s Area Victims’ Plans submitted to the Commissioner under section (Statutory duty on elected local policing bodies) of the Policing and Crime Act 2016;

(e) make to elected local policing bodies such recommendations about submitted Area Victims’ Plans as the Commissioner considers necessary and appropriate;

(f) prepare a statement of standards (the “Quality Standard”) in relation to the provision of victims’ services;

(g) publish the Quality Standard in such manner as the Commissioner considers appropriate;

(h) review the Quality Standard at intervals of not more than five years;

(i) in preparing or reviewing a Quality Standard, consult the public, and for that purpose may publish drafts of the standard;

(j) assess the steps taken to support victims and witnesses in giving evidence;

(k) make such recommendations in relation to that assessment as the Commissioner considers necessary and appropriate;

(l) issue guidance and standards for the establishment and conduct of homicide reviews under section (Establishment and conduct of homicide reviews) of the Policing and Crime Act 2016.”

New clause 39—National anti-doping provisions—

“(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply to—

(a) all athletes participating in sport in the UK who are members of a governing body of sport or an affiliate organisation or licensee of a governing body of sport (including any clubs, teams, associations or leagues);

(b) all athletes participating in such capacity in sporting events, competitions or other activities in the UK organised, convened, authorised or recognised by a governing body of sport or any of its member or affiliate organisations or licensees (including any clubs, teams, associations or leagues), wherever held;

(c) any other athlete participating in sport in the UK who, by virtue of a contractual arrangement or otherwise, is subject to the jurisdiction of a governing body of sport for purposes of anti-doping; and
(d) any person belonging to the entourage of an athlete, whether or not such person is a citizen of, or resident in, the United Kingdom.

(2) An athlete is guilty of an offence if he or she knowingly takes a prohibited substance with the intention, or one of the intentions, of enhancing his or her performance.

(3) A person belonging to the entourage of an athlete is guilty of an offence if he or she encourages or assists or hides awareness of the relevant athlete taking a prohibited substance with the intention, or one of the intentions, of enhancing such athlete’s performance.

(4) A medical professional commits an offence if they prescribe a prohibited substance to an athlete and believe, or ought reasonably to believe, that the substance will be used by the athlete to enhance their performance.

(5) For the purposes of this section a “prohibited substance” is as defined by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

(6) Any person guilty of an offence under subsection (2), (3) or (4) shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or to both; or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to both.

(7) UK Anti-Doping shall discuss the following issues with the World Anti-Doping Agency annually—

(a) the effectiveness of section 11 of the International Standard for Testing (athlete whereabouts requirements) and its harmonisation with EU privacy and working time rules and the European Convention on Human Rights;

(b) the effectiveness of the international work of the World Anti-Doping Agency; and

(c) progress on the development of a universal rollout of athlete biological passports.

(8) UK Anti-Doping shall submit the results of the annual discussions referred to in subsection (7) to the Secretary of State, who shall in turn—

(a) lay before both Houses of Parliament an annual report documenting—

(i) whether the athlete whereabouts requirements are effective in combating the abuse of drug-taking and in compliance with EU privacy and working time rules and the European Convention on Human Rights, and

(ii) the performance of the World Anti-Doping Agency in general; and

(b) determine whether the Government should remain a member and continue to support the World Anti-Doping Agency.”

New clause 41—Local Safeguarding Children Board: prevention of child sexual exploitation—

“(1) The Children Act 2004 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 14 after “children”, insert “and preventing child sexual exploitation, child abuse and child neglect.”

New clause 44—Modern technology: specialist digital unit (child abuse)—

“(1) The chief officer of each police force in Wales and England must ensure that within their force there is a unit that specialises in analysing and investigating allegations of online offences against children and young people.

(2) The chief officer must ensure that such a unit has access to sufficient digital forensic science resource to enable it to perform this function effectively and efficiently.”

New clause 46—Anonymity for victims who have private sexual photographs and films disclosed without their consent with intent to cause distress—

“(1) Section 2 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992 is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1), after paragraph (b) insert—

(c) an offence under section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015.”

New clause 47—Compensation for victims who have private sexual photographs and films disclosed without their consent with intent to cause distress—

“(1) Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (9), insert—

“(9A) The court may order a person guilty of an offence under this section to pay compensation to the victim of the offence, under sections 130 to 132 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000.

(9B) Compensation under subsection (9A) may be awarded for (among other things) any anxiety caused by the offence and any financial loss resulting from the offence.”

New clause 60—Duty to report on Child Abduction Warning Notices—

“(1) Each police force in England and Wales must report to the Secretary of State each year on—

(a) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices issued;

(b) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices breached; and

(c) the number of Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders issued following the breach of a Child Abduction Warning Notice.

(2) The Secretary of State must prepare and publish a report each year on—

(a) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices issued in each police force in England and Wales;

(b) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices breached in each police force in England and Wales; and

(c) the number of Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders issued following the breach of a Child Abduction Warning Notice in each police force in England and Wales and must lay a copy of the report before Parliament.”

New clause 61—Disclosure of private sexual photographs and films without consent and with the intent to cause distress, fear or alarm, or recklessness as to distress, fear or alarm being caused—

“(1) Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1) after “disclose” insert “or threaten to disclose”.

(3) In subsection (1)(b) after “distress” insert “fear or alarm or recklessness as to distress, fear or alarm being caused”.

(4) After subsection (1) insert—

“(1A) It is also an offence to knowingly promote, solicit or profit from private photographs and films that are reasonably believed to have been disclosed without consent and with the intent to cause distress, fear or alarm, or recklessness as to distress, fear or alarm being caused”.

(5) Leave out subsection (8).”

This new clause clarifies and expands the definition of the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films without consent and with the intent to cause distress, also known as revenge pornography, so that it includes reckless intent. This new clause also makes it an offence to knowingly promote, solicit or profit from private photographs and films that are reasonably believed to have been disclosed without consent.

New clause 62—Meaning of “private” and “sexual”—
“(1) Section 35 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 is amended as follows.
(2) In subsection (3)(a) after “exposed genitals” insert “breasts, buttocks.”
(3) Leave out subsection 4.
(4) Leave out subsection 5.”

This new clause expands the definition of “sexual” and ensures the disclosure of pornographic photoshopped images, posed with the intent to cause distress, fear or alarm or recklessness as to distress, fear or alarm being caused, are covered by the law.

**New clause 67—Misconduct in public office—**

“(1) A person commits an offence if—
(a) the person is a public officer,
(b) the person wilfully neglects to perform their duty or wilfully misconducts themselves in the performance of their public duty to such a degree as to amount to an abuse of the public’s trust in the office holder, and
(c) the person acts without reasonable excuse or justification.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable—
(a) in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or, in relation to offences committed, to a fine, or to both;
(b) in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
(c) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to a fine, or to both.

(3) For the purposes of this section, a public officer is an officer who discharges any duty in the discharge of which the public are interested and includes, but is not limited to—
(a) executive or ministerial officers,
(b) police officer, including a police officer in a period of suspension and a former police officer doing part-time police work,
(c) constable,
(d) special constable,
(e) community support officer,
(f) employee of a police force with responsibility for the computer system of that police force,
(g) prison officer,
(h) Independent Monitoring Board member,
(i) nurse working within a prison,
(j) coroner,
(k) army officer,
(l) accountant in the office of the Paymaster General,
(m) Justice of the Peace
(n) magistrate,
(o) district judge,
(p) clergy of the Church of England,
(q) mayor,
(r) local councillor,
(s) employee of a local authority, and
(t) civil servant or other employee of a public body.”

This new clause seeks to codify the common law offence of misconduct in public office and prescribes a list of public officers to which this offence shall apply.

**Government amendments 107, 108, 111 to 116 and 119 to 122.**

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I intend to speak to new clauses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 44, and I intend to press new clause 2 to a Division. The other new clauses are intended to test discussions that took place in Committee.

I note what the Minister said earlier in support of localism, but would cautiously remind him if he were still in the Chamber that although Wales is one of the four nations of the United Kingdom, it is the only one that has no responsibility for its police forces. The Governments of both Scotland and Northern Ireland are able to acknowledge the specific needs of their communities and direct their police forces to work effectively in response to those needs, but Wales must follow the policing priorities of England.

The four police forces of Wales are unique in the United Kingdom in that they are non-devolved bodies operating within a largely devolved public services landscape. They are thus required to respond to the agendas of two Governments, and to serve a nation whose people have the right to use either the English or the Welsh language. It should be noted that the Assembly’s budget already funds 500 extra police community support officers.

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** Does my hon. Friend, like me, find it peculiar that other services that are vital to Welsh communities, such as social services, education, economic and health—including mental health—are all devolved? Would it not greatly aid the coherence of public policy in Wales if this particular service were also devolved?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I understand that the very fact of having to work to, and be answerable to, two agendas is the reason our colleagues in the Assembly, and the four police and crime commissioners in Wales, are calling for the devolution of policing.

What I am describing contrasts starkly with the situation in Wales. Power over policing is due to be devolved to English city regions: Manchester and Liverpool, for example. The present approach to devolution has been criticised in a House of Lords Constitutional Committee report, published last month, which described it as piecemeal and lacking a coherent vision. I would strongly argue that the devolution of policing to Wales would benefit the people of Wales, and that they are ill served by the antiquated England and Wales arrangement, which, inevitably, is designed with the priorities of English cities in mind.

Our demographics are different in Wales. The need to maintain effective services in rural areas with scattered populations cries out for better consideration. The impact of tourism—populations rocket at bank holidays and in summer months—stretches resources to the limit. Aberdyfi, in my constituency, has 1,000 year-round residents, yet North Wales police have to deal with an influx of 20,000 visitors in the summer season. I went on patrol with officers last August, and saw that drunken behaviour meant that police officers had to focus attention on that one community, travelling for hours back and forth along country roads to the nearest custody cells 30 miles away. The current arrangement of policing in England and Wales is dominated by English metropolitan concerns, and fails to provide for Wales’s needs.

**Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC):** My hon. Friend is making very strong points. Only recently, the UK Government introduced centralised helicopter services for the police in England and Wales. That did not affect Scotland and Northern Ireland, because their police forces were decentralised.
They kept their helicopters, but we lost ours in Dyfed-Powys. Ministers should not smirk; this affects lives in my constituency. The police force in Dyfed-Powys called out the helicopter on more than 40 occasions, and it was sent out on only a handful of them.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. This is not like you, Mr Edwards. If you want to speak, you are allowed to speak, but you cannot make a speech and get carried away and start pointing at the Minister. Let us try to keep it calm. If you want to raise any points, there will certainly be time for you to do so. We will not miss you out.

Liz Saville Roberts: But the question of resources and how those priorities direct them does indeed highlight again the fact that Wales has different needs, and those resources from central Government do get directed to those priorities which best serve England.

When devolution of policing to Wales was discussed in Committee, the Minister present referred to the Silk commission on devolution in Wales, which was established by his party in 2011 with cross-party membership. Part 2 was published in 2014 and recommended devolution. He made much at the time of the fact that there was no consensus on this recommendation as a result of the St David’s day process and “Powers for a purpose”.

Those involved in that process have told me it was little more than a tick-box exercise: if all party representatives liked it, the power was in the bag; if not, chuck it out, regardless of the implications for the governance and needs and, indeed, people of Wales. I note that in Committee Labour indicated a grudging support for devolving policing, albeit in the distant future: 10 years away. It seems pressure from Plaid is driving the accelerator.

This opportunity is before the House here and now. The contents of future legislation and future amendments lack this certainty. If this House votes for devolution today, policing will be devolved to Wales, and the Government will then have to amend the Wales Bill accordingly at the very start of its journey. Indeed, surely, the Wales Bill deals first and foremost with the devolution of policing today.

New clauses 3, 4 and 5 relate to aspects of digital crime. I would note that these and new clause 44 are probing amendments. The Government state that resources are already provided to counter digital crime in the form of the National Cyber Crime Unit. I would respond that the National Cyber Crime Unit is relatively small, not the national cyber security programme concentrates primarily on the security of businesses and infrastructure. Action Fraud addresses crime in relation to online fraud. The priorities are business, financial and serious crime, and do not cover the safeguarding of victims of abuse crimes such as domestic violence, stalking, harassment or hate crime.

The first of the new clauses proposes a review of legislation relating to digital crime and to consolidate the numerous Acts into a single statute. There are now over 30 statutes that cover online crime. Criminal justice professionals, including the police and CPS, believe this to be confusing at best and overwhelming at worst. Victims’ complaints are sometimes subject to delay, and there are times when officers are uncertain whether specific activities are criminal or not. The law has developed incrementally as technology advances, and there is an urgent need to codify and clarify the current situation. Consolidation will save police time and money. It will avoid duplication of officers on cases. Swifter action on victims’ complaints will reduce distress and anxiety.

As regards new clause 4, surveillance and monitoring highlights further issues against which there is currently no redress. The identification of these actions as offences will enable the police to counter activities that are evidently related to surveillance with intention to cause distress, and the law should respond appropriately.

New clause 5 addresses the need for training that is fit for purpose. Even in large police areas, fewer than 5% of officers and staff, including call and first response personnel, are trained in cyber-crime. Victims report being advised to go offline and not to use social media by officers. This defies modern communication media. It is equivalent to telling victims of harassment not to venture outside their own homes. The Home Office believes that training is a matter for individual forces, but in the absence of strong central leadership, this can only perpetuate present inconsistencies and variations from force to force. National training would help to raise the status of victims.

Finally, I turn to new clause 44, which calls for the establishment of a specialist digital unit to investigate online offences against children and young people. As I mentioned earlier, there is a real risk intrinsic in dependency on central units, although I acknowledge the work done by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. But, once again, children’s charities report to us that the scale of abuse of children online in terms of offenders, devices and images is leaving police swamped. There are delays in forensic analysis of devices—delays in some cases of up to 12 months. These delays pose risks to the safeguarding of children.

In Committee, the Minister mentioned the child abuse image database, and praised the accuracy of imagery interpretation and how it aids identification. It is of course to be commended that this database will take some of the load from individual forces. I would argue, none the less, that there is precedent for digital units on a similar model to domestic violence units as a means to ensure that all forces direct proper resources to this serious issue.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for tabling these amendments. Importantly, she talked about the idea of a specialist digital unit within each police force. Does she agree that, if that were to happen, it would be imperative that this would feed back to some central database to ensure the work that was done in each of those individual units had read-across across the country?

7.45 pm

Liz Saville Roberts: Of course, what we need is the expertise of a central unit alongside the work on the ground that individual forces can do, and to ensure that
we avoid the risk that the presence of a central unit results in a tendency to treat certain crimes as another agency's problem. There is also—this is important at individual force-level—a need for specialist approaches to support child victims and their families.

Those are the amendments that I have chosen to discuss, and I reiterated that they are probing amendments, but in closing I repeat my intention to press a Division on new clause 2.

Mrs Miller: I rise to speak particularly on new clauses 3, 5, 44, 46 and 47, and note the advisement of the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) that her amendments are set out as probing amendments. Those five amendments tabled by both Liberal Democrat Members and Plaid Cymru Members all have a common theme: to call for reform in connection with the internet and the digital online world.

We all need to get our Government and Governments around the world to wake up to the extent to which crime and criminal activity has now moved online. Our laws are not giving victims the protection they need and our police forces face a revolution if they are to tackle the crime that they face now effectively in the future.

There has been a significant shift in the way people experience harm in this world. New clause 44, as the hon. Lady has set out, calls for the police to have special digital units to deal particularly with child abuse images. Many police forces in this country, including my own in Hampshire, have gone a long way to building up this sort of specialist expertise, but the new clause is an interesting piece of advice on which I will be interested to hear the Minister's response, as well as the response on police training.

There are serious questions to ask as to whether the providers of online space are doing what they need to do to keep their communities safe. They have not only a corporate social responsibility to do that, but I also think an economic imperative, because it is their brand names that are tarnished, and rightly so, when their products are used for illegal purposes.

Another aspect is not particularly brought up in the amendments today, but I will mention it: the importance of the international implications of all these things. If we are to get a solution to the sorts of crimes that are being committed online in this new digital world that does not respect country boundaries, we need to have some buy-in from international Governments, too. I myself have met companies in the US, but we need to go further than that and see whether we can actually get the sort of action that we need on an international basis by perhaps looking to the United Nations, or indeed the youth part of the UN, to explore how we can get more effective laws in the future that are not constricted by international boundaries.

Our law is struggling to cope. These amendments recognise that. The real need to recognise that online crime is different is a battle that was won when this Government put in place the revenge pornography law a year or so ago. We have already seen 1,000 reports to the police and thousands more people using the revenge pornography helpline, yet two-thirds of those cases that have been reported to the police have seen no action because of problems of the evidence that victims have been able to give or indeed because the victims have withdrawn it. Again, the new clauses are picking up those issues and calling on the Government to consider again. New clause 46 calls for anonymity of victims. That was considered at the time the law was put in place, but the advice then was to wait to see how things progressed. The statistics suggest that now is a time to think again, as new clause 41, which also deals with compensation, also seeks to do.

The myriad amendments before us today show the level of complexity involved and the level of concern among hon. Members from at least three parties represented in the Chamber tonight—I am sure Labour Front Benchers would share in this, too—but I worry that they offer a piecemeal set of solutions. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd picked up on that. Surely what is needed is a wholesale review of the law, police training and the development of international support for digital providers to take seriously the importance of keeping their communities safe online. I support the spirit of these amendments, but I am struck by the need for a more comprehensive review, perhaps in the form of the digital economy Bill, which Her Gracious Majesty announced in the Gracious Speech only last month.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My right hon. Friend is articulating a very serious problem, with which many of us have been involved for some time. Does she acknowledge that with some 70,000 cases of historical child abuse likely to be investigated by the police this year alone and with up to half of cases coming to the courts involving sexual exploitation, many of them historical, the police are overwhelmed in their capacity to be able to deal with this new wave of digital crime against some of the most vulnerable children? Her suggestion for a more holistic overview of this is therefore essential.

Mrs Miller: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He of course has an impeccable record of campaigning in this area. Perhaps the very scale of this problem is an indication that our regulatory framework within which these organisations work is not quite as good as it needs to be for the future. We cannot expect our police force simply to put down the work it is doing in every other area to focus solely on online crime, but at the moment he is right to say that the scale of what is being seen is, in the words of some police chiefs, “frightening”. We do not yet seem to be seeing a response to that. I hope that the digital economy Bill will provide the Ministers sitting on the Front Bench today, and perhaps their colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, with the opportunity to look carefully at this. It is no longer something that we can simply say is the by-product of a new industry that will settle down over time. Those Ministers will have heard a good deal of evidence this evening to suggest that more action needs to be taken, and I ask them to do what one of them, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), agreed to do today in departmental questions: sit down with me and other hon. Members who might be interested to set out how the digital economy Bill can be used as a vehicle to achieve the objective of making our internet safer, both at home and abroad.

Ann Coffey: I wish to say a few words about new clauses 13 and 14, which stand in my name. New clause 13 would make it an offence for adults to groom
children and young people for criminal behaviour, and new clause 14 would introduce a new grooming for criminal behaviour prevention order, which I would call a “Fagin order”. The new Fagin orders would ban criminal adults from contacting a child. Just as with children groomed for child sexual exploitation, we must recognise that young people drawn into criminality and drug dealing have, in the first instance, often been groomed and manipulated.

Currently, we have numerous prevention orders available to the police to combat grooming for child sexual exploitation, including sexual risk orders, sexual harm prevention orders and child abduction warning notices. I would like to see the creation of a similar order to be used where children are being groomed by organised crime to act as drug runners. That would be a practical way of disrupting activities including the phenomenon of “county lines”, whereby criminals groom and coerce children and young people into selling class A drugs many miles from home, often in quiet towns. Organised crime is aggressively creating new markets for drugs, in every seaside town and every small country village across the country. Criminals used to do their own drug running, but now they are actively identifying groups of vulnerable children to use, including those living in children’s homes and pupil referral units, to minimise the risk to themselves. As I said in a previous debate, county lines is the next big grooming scandal on the horizon. It takes many forms, but its basis is using vulnerable children and adults to develop new markets for drugs.

One example I saw involved a 15-year-old girl who was offered £500 to go “up country” to sell drugs. She had the class A drugs plugged inside her but was then set up by the original gang and assaulted on the train, and had the drugs forcibly removed from her. She was told she must pay back £3,000 to the group for the stolen drugs, and had to continue to sell drugs and provide sexual favours. The threat of child sexual exploitation for girls in gangs is known, but the added factor of being trafficked to remote locations compounds their vulnerability. These young people are at risk of physical violence, sexual exploitation, and emotional and physical abuse. That model of grooming arguably involves both trafficking and modern slavery. Children from Greater Manchester are being groomed by criminal gangs and have been found selling drugs in places as far away as Devon. These gang members are rather like modern-day Fagins or Bill Sikes: hard men who groom youngsters and get them to do their dirty work. They need to be stopped in their tracks.

The recent Home Office report “Ending gang violence and exploitation” said that young girls are often groomed for involvement in criminal behaviour and harmful sexual behaviour as part of gang culture. Indeed, the most recent Rotherham trial showed the connection between organised crime and drugs and child sexual exploitation. I have read the recent Home Office report and also the National Crime Agency report on county lines from August 2015, and I think this development is not fully understood or recognised. Someone, somewhere needs to take ownership of a strategy to disrupt this aggressive organised network, and that strategy needs to put the safeguarding children first. I am not pretending for one minute that Fagin orders would be a silver bullet, but they would indicate a change in culture and a recognition that the responsibility lies with the adults who groom the children. We really cannot afford to make the same mistakes as we did with child sexual exploitation, where we let terrible things happen to children because we blamed them for bringing about their own exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation and drug running and involvement with criminal activities are often intertwined, which is why we need a two-pronged approach. Just as we have prevention orders for child sexual exploitation, we should have similar prevention orders for adults grooming children for criminal behaviour. We need a response to county lines that ensures that children are found, safeguarded and supported out of gangs, and that adults are stopped as early as possible from grooming and manipulating children, and are punished to the full extent of the law. Until then, it will continue to be the young victims who are exploited, blamed and then punished as their abusers and puppet masters continue with a trade that nets organised crime millions of pounds a year.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I speak in support of new clauses 15, 16 and 18, which stand in my name and those of others. First, however, I wish to add my voice to those of the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—my neighbour. It is clear from the amendments in this legislation and elsewhere that the law is struggling with protecting children online; it is old and ineffective, and it really does not appreciate the dangers that are out there for children on the internet. I sincerely hope that my right hon. Friend is right and that the digital economy Bill is used to increase the protection for children online, not least because part of the reason for not tackling this problem in the way we should is that there is big money to be made here. This is a commercial enterprise: pumping this stuff out on to people’s screens and computers across the country, if not the world. There is therefore a certain sloth, an idleness, in the digital community in dealing with it. The truth is that, technically, we could switch off this stuff tonight if we wanted to. We have no problem stopping children getting into our bank accounts and buying things on Amazon or wherever it might be, and yet children can easily access pornography every day, 24 hours a day, without any protection whatsoever unless their parents intervene. That really is a disgraceful state of affairs.

We should use the digital economy Bill to create the offence of living off immoral earnings for these internet providers, because, by turning a blind eye and not interrogating the data that are coming through their pipes, that is effectively what they are doing. They should turn off such material so that eyes below the age of 18 cannot see it. They are living off immoral earnings and they are not living up to their duty to society and to our children. We need to find some way to make them face up to their obligations.

I have three children, two of whom are very small. I feel as if I am in a daily fight for them with the media—whether it is TV, online or whatever it might be. We carefully ration what they get and what they can see. I hope to God that, as they grow and become teenagers, I can protect them from the worst excesses, but I need
some help. I need help from the Government. I also need help from those who control the data and our access to the internet. They can do it in any number of ways and they should be forced to do it on pain of significant financial penalties. It is only when the pound is there and their profits are threatened that they will finally focus and come up with the technical solutions that we need.

8 pm

Tim Loughton: I would have liked to have added my name to my hon. Friend’s amendment if I had got my act together in time. I was out with a group of people working for a tobacco company recently. We went on stings to local newsgagents and other such places buying illegal, counterfeit and discounted cigarettes. In many cases, those cigarettes were advertised by a phone number, which we then rang up. Very clearly, it could only have resulted in criminal activity. Just as my hon. Friend is very much making the point about prostitution, which clearly is only going to lead to illegal activity, it is so easy for us to be able to use those phone numbers, and those telephone companies should be taking a greater responsibility.

Kit Malthouse: Exactly right. My hon. Friend brings me neatly on to new clause 16, which deals with that matter.

I know that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, have been an aficionado of my political career, so you will know that, 15 years ago I was charged with getting rid of prostitutes’ cards in telephone boxes. It was costing Westminster council about a quarter of a million pounds a year to remove these things, and so I was given the job of getting rid of them. We tried clearing them out and putting up false cards so that people were misdirected. We tried all sorts of things. In the end, the only solution that we came up with that we and BT felt would work was barring the numbers. I visited all the mobile companies and, as people had landlines in those days, all the landline companies as well—NTL, BT and all the rest. I said to them, “When we notify you of this number, we would like you to bar it.” They said, “We will not do that, but we will if you manage to make placing the cards an offence.” They thought that I would give up at that stage, as there would be too much of a mountain to climb. None the less, we decided to have a go, and so ensued a two-year campaign to get that offence on the statute book.

During those two years, I learned the truth about prostitutes’ cards and, indeed, the advertising of prostitution generally. Effectively, being allowed to advertise for free and in an unrestricted way on our streets, in the back of our newspapers and online is organised crime. When someone gets one of these numbers, they are ringing not a prostitute who is a victim, but a switchboard. When they ring the number and say what they want, they will get a menu of women—mostly it is women—trafficked or otherwise, of all ages, creeds and races. They can pick from the menu. Those numbers then gather a bit of value. Once someone is a punter and they have used the number and got what they wanted, they will use it again and again and again.

I started to learn that understanding the economics behind these telephone numbers is key to how we can eradicate them. Once we realise that these numbers carry a value and that there is a stream of income attached to them, it becomes even more pressuring that we should bar them. When we add to that the fact that the printing of the cards, the advertising, and the websites cost money—hundreds of thousands to make them incredibly cheap—we can see why making it dangerous to advertise a telephone number could become an extremely effective deterrent. If they advertise a number that is gathering income, and it is barred within 24 hours, they lose all of that income. Hitting them in the pocket is the most effective way to do it.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Just for clarity, behind every one of those numbers is a woman who very, very often might have been abused as a child or trafficked into the country. They might have an incredibly violent pimp who is working her. Is the hon. Gentleman looking to prosecute the woman who, in my experience, is usually the victim and not the belle de jour that is often presented, or is he going after the pimps, the manipulators and the gang leaders that are behind it all?

Kit Malthouse: I am absolutely not targeting the women at all. This is about the organised crime that is creating the number, printing the card, placing the card, and victimising the woman. It is about cutting off their access to cash, and therefore restricting their ability to build a business off the back of this free advertising.

Eventually, after a two-year campaign, we got the offence made illegal. I was helped by friends in the House of Lords. The night that it was enacted by Her Majesty the Queen, we arrested the first carder—an Italian law student. I remember it well. He was bailed and disappeared back to Italy. The very next week, I had a meeting with the mobile phone companies and they completely welched on the deal. They did not realise that we would get it done, and that by campaigning for two years and by having a bit of gumption, we would manage to achieve our goal.

Jonathan Edwards: The use of the term “welching” in that context is deeply disrespectful to the people of my country, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his comment.

Kit Malthouse: I do unreservedly withdraw it. It was an unfortunate use of the word. I think that the spelling is different, but the hon. Gentleman is quite right. Let me say that the phone companies reneged on the deal—I ask him to forgive me. It is a word in common parlance, but I should not have used it.

The phone companies completely reneged on the deal. As a result, I have been waiting for the opportunity to try to put to the Government the idea that there is this solution to the problem. I present here a simple solution, which is, effectively, if the chief officer of police finds a number being advertised in their area for the purposes of prostitution, they can apply to a magistrate to have the number barred. That means that both the police officer and the magistrate have to judge whether that is a measured thing to do; it is not automatic. It is for the police to decide. I would advise the police officers to warn the owner of the number that this is about to happen before they do it. It is a relatively simple solution, and I guarantee that it will result in the disappearance of these cards from Liverpool, Manchester, the west end or wherever they may be.
My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is right that the scheme could be extended. There could be numbers used for dealing drugs and for selling cigarettes. Numbers for prostitution and drugs could be on the internet. People can access such numbers quite freely at the moment. We need to cut the numbers. If we do it swiftly, we will certainly go a huge way towards suppressing the activity and making it difficult for criminal and customer to connect. I do not intend to press my amendment to a vote, but I ask the Government to look at it—the Minister has promised to do so—and hopefully it will come back in the Lords.

I have tabled another two new clauses. You will have noticed, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have had a theme during my time in this House, which is the protection of children. It has alarmed me for some time that the legislation protecting children is elderly, out of date and very patchy. The offence of child cruelty, which I am seeking to raise the tariff for tonight, dates back to the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. It still includes things such as allowing a child to be burned, which used to arise when we sent them up chimneys. The legislation is very elderly and is really not fit for purpose. The last time the sentence for child cruelty was looked at was in 1988. We have not looked at it for nearly 30 years, and yet the number of offences is rising quite significantly. Clearly, the deterrent effect is not working. I am given to understand that the Sentencing Council will review child cruelty over the coming summer. If it does so, we are duty bound to try to give it a bit of headroom and move the tariff up from 10 years to 14 years for the most severe offences.

New clause 15 is about reviewing all child offences. We have been very good in the House in seeking to protect vulnerable groups by legislation generally. If someone commits a crime against someone who is gay because they are gay, they will get an aggravated sentence. Similarly, if they commit a crime against someone who is black because they are black, they will get an aggravated sentence. If they commit an offence against someone on the grounds of their religion, they will get an aggravated sentence. Yet if they commit an offence against a child because they are a child, they will not necessarily get an aggravated sentence.

Children are not a protected group in law, unlike other minority and vulnerable groups, and they should be. I am grateful to Public Bill Office for helping me try to draft an amendment that would allow me to do that. The best way that we could find to do it was to require the Sentencing Council to review all offences for children within 12 months, to allow us all to have our say about aggravating the sentences when offences are committed against children.

I have attempted to insert this principle in previous Bills—principally, in the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. Sadly, the Government would not accept my amendment, which would have ensured that anyone who sold a psychoactive substance to a child would get a stiffer sentence than if they sold it to a 55-year-old man. It seems crazy to me that that would not happen, but the Government would not accept the amendment, so this is my attempt to do something similar.

All my amendments are probing. I am willing to give the Government time, in consultation, to look at them again. I hope that they will come back in the Lords, but if they do not, I gather that, pleasingly, we get a policing and crime Bill along in the House once every six months, so I will get another chance. On that basis, I hope that my hon. Friends will look at the amendments at least and give them a thumbs-up for future consideration.

Sarah Champion: I rise to speak predominantly to new clauses 6, 10, 41 and 60, which have been tabled by Opposition Front Benchers. The intention behind the new clauses is to provide stronger safeguards against the sexual exploitation and abuse of children and to disrupt the perpetrators of those heinous crimes before they have the opportunity to destroy a child’s life.

I start with new clause 6, which relates to the extension of child abduction warning notices, known as CAWNs, which are a vital tool for the police in the prevention of the abuse and exploitation of children. CAWNs are issued by the police at the request of a parent or legal guardian. They disrupt contact between a child and an adult believed to be in the process of grooming that child for sex. Currently, the police can issue a CAWN in relation to any child under the age of 16, but only a tiny minority of 16 and 17-year-olds, including children who have been taken into care under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, those who are subject to an emergency protection order and those in police protection. All other 16 and 17-year-olds are left unprotected.

By definition, children in care are vulnerable. The last available annual statistics show that 4,320 16 and 17-year-olds who became looked after by the local authority would not be eligible for the protection of a child abduction warning notice. The Minister has previously expressed some scepticism about the proposals to extend the use of those notices to all children in care. I recognise the sensitivities about the law in this area, given that 16 and 17-year-olds are legally able to marry and consent to sexual activity, but that group of children—yes, they are legally children—are living unstable and risky lives. They face a significantly greater risk of sexual exploitation than others and are targeted by adults who exploit their vulnerability, yet the police are denied access to a critical intervention tool that would help to keep them safe.

I agree with the Minister that CAWNs are an imperfect tool, but we agree that children of any age, including those who are 16 and 17, must be able to rely on the state for protection. For three years, I have been pushing successive Ministers to find a solution. The way to deal with complex issues is not to avoid them altogether. We need to persevere and collaborate so that we can find the best possible solutions. It is vital that we get legislation to protect all children up to the age of 18 from abuse, and it is important that we get that legislation right. I know that the Minister is not minded to support new clause 6, so what assurances can she give us that the Government plan to ensure that children up to the age of 18 are protected from the early stages of sexual grooming?

Next, I turn my attention to new clause 60, which, unlike new clause 6, relates to the existing use of child abduction warning notices by the police. CAWNs are not legally enforceable. Breaching a notice is not a criminal offence but does form an evidence base for future action. That further action, according to Government guidance, is meant to take the form of a sexual harm
prevention order or a sexual risk order, both of which require a higher threshold to use. They are legally enforceable and punishable with criminal sanctions.

In theory, that is a good system. It allows the police to intervene formally to prevent harm at the earliest possible stage when concerns have been expressed about an adult’s behaviour towards a child. Even when demonstrable evidence is sparse, the police have the ability to take further action, using the breach of a CAWN as evidence. The police currently have the tools to escalate their response to keep, and continue to keep, a child safe. The problem is that police forces in England and Wales are failing to record the breach of a child abduction warning notice. Indeed, they are failing to record the issuing of a notice in the first place and the actions that follow from that breach.

8.15 pm

To be clear, if a CAWN is issued because the police suspect that a child is at risk of grooming—the House does not need reminding of the horrifying results of that crime—it is vital that a breach is recorded and acted upon, to keep that child safe from sexual abuse and exploitation. At a national level, the Secretary of State’s Department must have oversight of whether the range of orders involved is working well, yet individual police forces have no idea about their effectiveness in tackling the early stages of grooming, because they simply do not record the data. As a result, the Government are ignorant to the reality of the risk that children face from predatory paedophiles and abusers.

As the tactics of perpetrators change, so must our approach. That involves constant vigilance on how perpetrators operate and constant monitoring of the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to record the effectiveness of the current system is unforgivable. If the Minister is unable to assess whether the regime works, how can she assess the safety of the children we are supposed to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect?

New clause 60 would deal with the issue directly by requiring police forces to collect annually the number of child abduction warning notices issued or breached and the number of sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders issued following such a breach. It would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on those data. We need to get the legislation right: every Member must take responsibility for the effectiveness of our response. In that light, failing to address the safety of the children we have a duty to protect? 
Sarah Champion: Once again, my hon. Friend is right. That is why there needs to be a national licensing scheme for which the Government have responsibility.

The Government have been good at making promises about tackling child sexual exploitation, but not so good at following them up with action. Will the Minister make some commitments on taxi licensing? I would appreciate a steer on the contents of the guidance, although I realise that they will be subject of consultation. The Minister may want to write to me on that point.

Councillors continue to report a lack of intelligence sharing by the police on issues crucial to deciding the suitability of applicants for taxi licences. Although the new common-law disclosure policy should allow for information sharing, the interpretation varies and many police forces do not share data. Guidance to councils alone will not resolve the problem. Will the Home Office take steps to ensure that the police co-operate fully with councils so that applicants for taxi licences can be screened effectively?

Finally, will the Minister confirm the status of the guidance? Government new clause 56 states that licensing authorities “must have regard” to it. I hope the Minister will clarify that the guidance must be followed, not just looked at and put in a drawer. If the Minister can provide confirmation on those questions, we are minded to withdraw our new clause and support the Government’s.

New clause 41 would make it explicit in the law that local safeguarding children boards have an obligation to prevent child sexual exploitation and other forms of child abuse. Such boards should bring together professionals in education, law enforcement, social care and the voluntary sector to help protect children. They are collaborative bodies, established by the Labour Government, which have the potential to ensure that the focus of every organisation on the board is the protection and welfare of children. Local safeguarding children boards have the potential to act as the canary to child sexual exploitation and abuse, bringing together professionals who can develop a full picture of the harm being perpetrated against a child. But far more emphasis must be given to the prevention of child sexual exploitation and child abuse.

Chief Constable Simon Bailey has said that in 2015 more than £1 billion was spent on investigating child abuse allegations. Sadly, by the time the police are involved, it is likely that children have already been harmed and will be living with the trauma for the rest of their lives. The Prime Minister has given child sexual exploitation the status of a “national threat” in the strategic policing requirement. I therefore hope that the Minister will support our new clause to explicitly broaden the objectives of local safeguarding children boards to include a focus on the prevention of sexual exploitation.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady is making some good points, but it was my understanding when I was responsible for the child sexual exploitation action plan introduced nationally in 2011 that each local safeguarding children board was responsible for developing its own localised version of that CSE plan. The problem is not so much the plan as the unwillingness of some partners within an LSCB to pull their weight. Does the hon. Lady agree that the recent review undertaken for the Department for Education may need to lead to the introduction of some statutory duties on those partners to do their bit, in partnership with everybody else?

Sarah Champion: As ever, the hon. Gentleman is superb on this subject, and he is ahead of me by a line of my speech. I completely agree. The problem with the safeguarding boards as they stand at present is that they are very dependent on the skill, determination and bloody-mindedness of the chair. The hon. Gentleman is right. I do not want things to come down to the luck of whether there is a good chair who can implement a good plan. What I want is for every child across the country to be safe and safeguarded in the same way, so I look to the Government to move on that.

I support new clauses 13 and 14. I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey), who works tirelessly for the protection of children in her constituency and across the country. She has been a role model and a mentor to me, and I want to put on record my gratitude to her for all the help she has given to me and to all the children in this country. She has been tireless, and I am very grateful for that.

My hon. Friend’s new clauses, which deal with the grooming of children for criminal behaviour, raise an important issue that the House must tackle. Children are not just at risk of grooming for sex. They face exploitation by criminals for terrorism, trafficking and drug-related offences, for instance—we have heard other examples. The Government must take the issue seriously and offer a holistic approach to tackling child grooming and exploitation. Will the Minister work closely with my hon. Friend to turn her new clauses 13 and 14 into legislation?

New clauses 46, 47, 61 and 62 were tabled by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). Through my campaigning work to prevent violence, exploitation and harm against children, I have seen the most dramatic and shocking increase in the proliferation of sexual images, often taken and shared by children. The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the current legislation has been in effect for only a year. I hope he will support my call on the Government to conduct a thorough review of the effectiveness of the legislation, the number of prosecutions and convictions, and the suitability of the sentences given.

I welcome Government new clause 55, which will create lifetime anonymity for victims of forced marriage. The crime of forced marriage is another form of domestic violence. The victims, mostly women, suffer violence, threats of violence, coercion, manipulation, psychological trauma and economic control. As with every other form of domestic violence, victims have their right to determine their own lives forcibly removed from them by their abusers. Anonymity will encourage victims to come forward and seek help from the police. It will give a survivor of this form of domestic violence a chance to regain control and rebuild their life. Now that the Government recognise the benefit of anonymity for victims of forced marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual abuse, I hope they will consider extending anonymity to victims of other forms of domestic and sexual violence and do more to raise awareness of these awful crimes.

I would like briefly to comment on a number of the provisions tabled by the shadow Home Office team, led by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn
and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). It is unfortunate but true that our criminal justice system does not always place support for the victim at its core. I know from my work with victims of domestic and sexual violence that they often feel totally unsupported when reporting a crime or after a prosecution. Many victims face the most horrendous ordeal in court, where they are forced to relive their trauma over and over again. Yet there is no statutory framework in the criminal justice system for the provision of services for victims—there is no legal regime promoting and protecting victims’ rights from the beginning to the end of their engagement with the criminal justice system. Similarly, the role of the Victim’s Commissioner has great potential, but the position is under-resourced and exists without significant powers. Victims’ rights will be taken seriously only if and when they are enshrined in law. I hope the Government will hear our calls today and make that a reality.

I wish to end by commenting on new clause 2, which would devolve responsibility for policing to the Welsh Assembly. I have had the pleasure of working with the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) on other clauses in the Bill relating to child protection, so I have no doubt that the convictions she has expressed in this new clause are heartfelt and sincere and need to be taken seriously. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) has outlined, Labour believes that the people of Wales should have a greater say over the policing of Wales, and that should be pursued through the Wales Bill.

8.30 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I wish to speak to new clauses 46, 47, 61 and 62, which stand in my name. Perhaps I can pick up where the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) left off, on new clause 2. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) would normally speak for the Liberal Democrat party on such matters, but he is, unfortunately, absent from the House today through illness. However, the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) indicated that she intends to push the new clause to a vote, and I should indicate that, in the event that she does, my party will support her and her colleagues. To devolve substantial portions of the criminal law in relation to Wales without devolving control of the police force that would then enforce that law seems at the very least to be a little illogical, so I wish the hon. Lady and her colleagues well.

I am grateful for the indications of support for my new clauses that I have had from members of different parties, including those not represented in the House. In particular, members of the Women’s Equality party are assiduous and effective campaigners on the issue of revenge pornography; indeed, they were the authors of new clauses 61 and 62.

The hon. Member for Rotherham, who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, rightly said that it was only last year that we undertook the criminalisation of revenge pornography. That was a quite remarkable step, and none of us should underestimate its importance. However, to pick up a point that she made, the statistics already demonstrate that this is a stubborn problem which will require more action if we are to bring about the changes in attitude that will ultimately see this behaviour reduced and, hopefully, eliminated.

Mrs Miller: I commend the right hon. Gentleman for bringing these provisions to the House. He reflected on the importance of the law the Government brought in on revenge pornography. At the time, we talked about the importance of recognising that the impact of online crimes is very different from that of offline crimes. Will he join me in saying that, although it can be easy to say that what is illegal offline is illegal online, that misses the point, because the impact online can be so much greater and so much more devastating to the people involved?

Mr Carmichael: Indeed. I will come to the distress that is caused by this conduct in my remarks on new clause 62. The right hon. Lady is absolutely right that, in relation to these offences, we should focus on the outcomes and effects endured by those who suffer the abuse—and when I say “abuse”, I use the term advisedly.

From April to December last year, 1,160 cases were reported, which is quite remarkable, given the period we are dealing with—indeed, those figures are from England and Wales alone. Only 11% of the cases that have been reported have led to charge, with 82 prosecutions and 74 cautions resulting from those charges. That suggests that with regard to the need to see a change in attitude and behaviour, we first need to see it among some of the criminal justice professionals dealing with this—the police officers, prosecutors, and judges.

This takes me back to my early career, when as a trainee and then a qualified solicitor, I worked for the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in Edinburgh, where one of my first bosses—she was then a senior legal assistant—was Elish Angiolini, who became the first female Lord Advocate, and the first solicitor Lord Advocate, in Scotland. At that time, along with other colleagues, she did tremendous amounts to drive forward improvements in how the victims of sexual abuse in general, but child sexual abuse in particular, were treated by the court system. A lot of it seems very rudimentary and basic stuff now, but in the early and mid-1990s, when we were arranging for court visits ahead of trials so that victims of these sorts of offences could give their evidence from behind a screen or by live link, it seemed pretty revolutionary, and it met with substantial resistance from the police—not so much the police, in fairness, but certainly many within the legal profession. We were right to drive those changes, as has been demonstrated by the way in which the law and procedure in that area has developed ever since. A similar attitude and a similar drive is now required in relation to the offence of revenge pornography.

New clause 46 goes right to the heart of this by seeking to extend the protection of anonymity to victims of revenge pornography. That would mean that we would not necessarily have to wait for a review to look further at where cases and procedures will develop in this area. As we have heard, the principle of anonymity is accepted by the Government in relation to victims of forced marriage. I welcome new clause 55, which extends that protection. However, it surely strikes at the heart of the offence that we introduced last year that we should seek to protect those women—they are nearly all women—who are, in essence, subject to an invasion of privacy. No really meaningful remedy is available to them if making complaints seeking to reinforce the criminal sanctions that come as a result of that invasion of privacy only makes them vulnerable to further invasions.
of privacy. That is why it is important that at some point, by whatever means—I will listen very carefully to the Minister’s response—we should look at extending the protection of anonymity to these victims.

New clause 47 would allow the court to make compensation orders to victims of revenge pornography. Many campaigning in this field would like a full civil remedy to be available, although that would have taken us somewhat beyond the scope of this Bill. However, we ought to be taking advantage of the quite remarkable degree of consensus that we have seen across the Chamber tonight. I hope the Government will recognise that and take full advantage of it, because that sort of consensus is rare enough, and when we see it we ought to make the most of it.

New clause 61 would extend the test from an intent to cause alarm, as in section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, to include recklessness. This strikes at what is required evidentially to provide mens rea in relation to the commission of the offence. It would bring people in England and Wales into line with the protections that are already afforded to people in Scotland through the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016.

The offence would also be extended from one that required disclosure of the material to one that required a threat to disclose it. Research indicates that no fewer than one in 10 ex-partners make that threat. If the outcome is to provide meaningful protection, it would make sense to extend the ambit of the offence to include a threat to disclose. That is being pursued by the #CtrlAltDel campaign, which is being led by the Women’s Equality party and which I commend to the House.

The final new clause standing in my name is new clause 62, which brings me to the point made by the Equality party and which I commend to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman turns to his next new clause, I am not suggesting for a moment that he has spoken for too long, because he has not—he has been quite brief—but this debate is time-limited. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) has indicated that he wishes to speak and I trust that he will be brief, because I am sure that the House would be disappointed if the Minister did not have time to answer the many points that have been made to her this evening.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for saying that I have not spoken for long, because I have actually spoken for longer than I had intended.

I do not have a great deal to say about new clause 62, but it might assist the House if I explain that, by seeking to extend the definition of the offence, we are striking at the stress caused by, and the actual outcome of, the behaviour suffered by victims of this abuse. At the moment, the definition is drawn tightly, for reasons that I think are understood by all. Those experienced in the field, however, say that the harm and distress caused is the same for those who have suffered this wider disclosure and that it would make sense to ensure that they are equally covered by the criminal law.

Jonathan Edwards: I was not going to make a speech, but I thought I had better use this opportunity to explain further my earlier intervention. Before I do so, I would like to apologise to Mr Deputy Speaker and the Minister. I do not usually make it a rule to get worked up in this place, not least because my mother watches BBC Parliament, but I do get very passionate about the issue of the old Dyfed-Powys police helicopter. I am delighted that the Policing Minister is in his place, because we have debated the issue on several occasions and he was kind enough to meet me during the course of those deliberations.

We lost our helicopter in Dyfed-Powys because policing is not devolved to Wales. Northern Ireland and Scotland have kept their helicopter services, yet Wales has been put in a centralised service called the National Police Air Service, which means that our helicopter has been pooled from Dyfed-Powys. The only figures available from the month of January—the first operational month for NPAS as far as Dyfed-Powys is concerned—show that 86% of requests by police officers in Dyfed-Powys were not honoured by NPAS.

This is not just about police officers not having the service and support that they deserve; the residents of Dyfed-Powys are also clearly being let down. Let us remember that we are now hitting high season, during which the population of Dyfed-Powys will swell considerably, not least with people who will enjoy our fantastic coastline, so use of the helicopter will become far more important.

Devolving policing is not just about securing equality for Wales. It is devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland, and it will be devolved to cities in England, but why is it not being devolved to Wales?

I am very disappointed that the Labour party is abstaining on this issue, but I am delighted that we have the support of the Lib Dems. Where are the Welsh MPs? Not a single Tory MP who represents a Welsh constituency is here to debate a vital policy issue for my country. Only two Labour MPs from Wales have been in the Chamber—the hon. Members for Swansea East (Carolyyn Harris) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones)—and I am delighted that the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) is here as well. These debates will be recorded by the people of Wales and they will be reported by the press, I hope. The people of Wales will draw their own conclusions from the lack of action by the Unionist parties.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): This has been a wide-ranging debate. Before I respond to the many Opposition and Back-Bench amendments in this group, I hope hon. Members will forgive me if I touch briefly on the key Government amendments and new clauses.

8.45 pm

New clause 55 confers lifelong anonymity on victims of forced marriage. I am sure we all agree that forced marriage is an abhorrent practice, and the Government are determined to do everything we can to tackle it. That is why we introduced a specific offence of forced marriage via the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and it is why we are amending this Bill to introduce lifelong anonymity for victims. We are encouraged by the first conviction for the new offence, which was
I cannot go into great detail now because of the lack of Rotherham. I will write to her on some of the specifics; who seek to abuse their position of trust.

exploitation by the very small number of cab drivers reduce the risk to children and young people of sexual on the matter. We strongly agree that continued work amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Swansea of taxis and private hire vehicles. It is similar to the authorities discharge their licensing functions in respect with the need to spread good practice in how local Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). It deals that of new clause 10, which was tabled by the hon.

make it a criminal offence intentionally to obstruct or and seize invalid travel documents, both British passports will enable a constable to enter premises to search for 57 of them. To make the new power effective, the new clause was cancelled after the person holding it entered the port. New clause 54 will fill that gap.

will not be tolerated in the UK. It will send a clear message that this abhorrent practice will not be tolerated in the UK.

I turn to Government new clause 54 and amendment 112. The cancellation of travel documents is an important tool in the fight against terrorism and, in particular, in disrupting travel to conflict zones to fight or receive terrorist training. At present, there is a gap in the powers of law enforcement to seize cancelled or invalid travel documents. Both Border Force and the police have the power to seize a cancelled foreign travel document if they encounter it at a port, while the police can seize a cancelled British passport away from a port, but there is no power to seize a foreign travel document away from a port. New clause 54 will fill that gap.

We do not expect the new powers to be used often, because only a minority of those whose documents have been cancelled are likely to seek to travel to the UK, and we expect many of their documents to be picked up at the border. However, the powers will enable us, for example, to seize a travel document that was cancelled after the person holding it entered the UK. To make the new power effective, the new clause will enable a constable to enter premises to search for and seize invalid travel documents, both British passports and foreign travel documents. The new clause will also make it a criminal offence intentionally to obstruct or frustrate a search for a cancelled travel document, as is already the case in respect of a search for a cancelled British passport.

Government new clause 56 covers similar ground to that of new clause 10, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). It deals with the need to spread good practice in how local authorities discharge their licensing functions in respect of taxis and private hire vehicles. It is similar to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) in Committee. As I said at that stage, the Government are committed to taking action on the matter. We strongly agree that continued work with the taxi and private hire vehicles sector is needed to reduce the risk to children and young people of sexual exploitation by the very small number of cab drivers who seek to abuse their position of trust.

I turn to the points raised by the hon. Member for Rotherham. I will write to her on some of the specifics; I cannot go into great detail now because of the lack of time. I assure her that we intend to bring forward statutory guidance in respect of taxis and private hire vehicle licensing. Government new clause 56, in common with other legislation relating to guidance, uses the word “may”, but our intention is clear. A duty to have regard to the guidance sets a high bar, and a public authority will not be able to set aside the guidance without good reason. I will write to the hon. Lady about all other matters covered by the statutory guidance and our timetable for implementation. I hope that on that basis she will be happy not to press new clause 10 to a vote.

New clause 15, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), proposes a sentencing guidelines review. I have met him to discuss the new clause and his other amendments, and he also knows from his discussions with the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is responsible for sentencing, and the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims that the Ministry of Justice is looking at the matter of sentencing overall with a view to introducing proposals in a Bill that was announced in the recent Gracious Speech. On that basis, I hope that he will agree that it would be right to look at all these matters in the round, rather than looking at them in isolation.

Turning to new clause 16, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire, whose work on soliciting has involved a 20-year campaign. He deserves great credit for all his achievements on tackling soliciting through the use of cards in telephone boxes and through other means. I think we can all agree that telephone boxes across the country—those that are left—are much cleaner and more pleasant as a result of his work. He has indicated that his main focus is on tackling the organised crime groups that profit from the exploitation of vulnerable people. That is a laudable aim that I share, but I hope he will agree that it would be premature to legislate before we fully understand the most effective ways of disrupting a criminal gang’s ability to raise income through prostitution as well as through other means such as drugs and firearms. We need to know more about the extent to which organised criminals derive profits in this way.

We also need properly to consider whether there are existing powers that could be used to disrupt organised crime gangs operating in this way. I am concerned that, without that information, we would simply be providing the police with a power whose application would be onerous—a court order would be required—and whose use could be ineffective if gangs simply chose to change their numbers and print new cards. He explained the business case for those cards very effectively. I have asked my officials to work with the National Crime Agency to develop our understanding of the link between organised crime and prostitution, and I undertake to keep my hon. Friend informed of our progress and intentions.

New clause 67 deals with misconduct in a public office. In the last Parliament, we legislated for a new police corruption offence that supplements the common offence of misconduct in public office and carries a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment. It has been in force since April 2015. New clause 2 covers the devolution of policing, which was raised by the hon.
Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). I hope she will forgive my pronunciation of the name of her constituency. Was that close enough? As we discussed in Committee, my pronunciation is poor but I will keep trying. She argued powerfully for the devolution of policing in Wales, but the Government have been clear that in the absence of consensus on the Silk commission’s proposals on this matter, policing should not be devolved to the Welsh Government and National Assembly until such consensus can be reached.

Jonathan Edwards: Does the Minister not understand that the Silk commission was in fact a cross-party commission set up by the UK Government and that it included her party?

Karen Bradley: I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about this. I also accept his apology from earlier; I can promise him that I was not smirking at anything he was saying. The Policing Minister is here and he will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman again to discuss the specific issue of the helicopter.

The current England and Wales-wide arrangements for policing work well, and the proponents of devolution have failed adequately to address the significant risks that would arise if those arrangements were disrupted. I disagree with the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd when she says that policing in England and Wales is set up for urban areas in England. I represent a rural constituency in England, and the way in which policing operates by devolving power to the police and crime commissioners to ensure that we have the right policing for each area is certainly right for my constituency. However, we are debating the Wales Bill tomorrow, and it will be important to debate these matters fully then, as the hon. Member for Rotherham has also suggested.

I am conscious of the time, and I want to try to get through as much of my speech as possible, so I will turn to digital crime issues. We debated in Committee many of the points that have been raised. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) made very important and powerful points about the law on digital crime. However, I do not accept the premise that the criminal law is defective in this area. It is important to acknowledge that the crimes are the same; the fact that they are committed online does not change anything. I would not wish to create a whole new suite of offences that may confuse the courts and make it more difficult to get convictions.

Mrs Miller: Will the Minister take a moment to explain why the police are finding it so difficult to secure convictions, particularly in relation to revenge pornography, if the law in this and other areas of online crimes is so clear?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend will understand that conviction is not just about the offence in legislation or the precedent in case law; it is about the evidence that can be gathered and presenting that evidence to a jury. I am not in any way saying that we are perfect in this regard, and we could have many debates about how best to get convictions. As I said earlier, I would very much like to meet her; together with my noble Friend Baroness Shields, who has responsibility for the digital Bill in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, because I want to make sure that we are covering these issues and that we make it as easy as possible for the courts to get convictions. I do not accept that the answer is simply to create a whole new suite of offences that may confuse the law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. I want to discuss this with her and others to make sure we address these points.

New clause 44—I realise that I am darting about, but I am doing my best to get through my speech—is about a specialist digital unit. Again, we discussed this in Committee. The way operational policing decisions are taken is a matter for chief officers; it is not something on which the Home Office should legislate to say that every force should operate in such a way. That is down to chief officers locally and, of course, police and crime commissioners.

I want to take new clause 6 and all the points about child protection together. We have had many debates about the issue of vulnerable young people and children, how best we can protect them and how to stop their going missing. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey), who, as her Front-Bench colleague said, has been such a pioneer in this area. When she talks, I know that she is talking common sense. The hon. Member for Rotherham and other Members will know that I am determined to tackle this issue, but I think we need to do it in the right way. That is why I have convened the round table in a couple of weeks’ time to look at the overall issue of child abduction warning notices. I am not convinced that a warning notice from the police in relation to a child abduction offence is necessarily the right way to make sure we protect such vulnerable young people. I want to consider all issues relating to child abduction warning notices—I think the hon. Member for Stockport has been invited to the round table, but if not, I now extend an invitation to her—and to look at everything we are doing in this area and at ensuring we have the right tools in the armoury for the law enforcement agencies, because it is so important that the police are able to use those tools and to protect young people with the right tools for those young people.

I am extremely conscious of the time and that I need to leave a moment before 9 o’clock, so I will now sit down. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will agree the Government new clauses and amendments, and that they will not press their own.

Liz Saville Roberts: Just to close the debate, I must first ask why, given that we have had devolution in Wales for 17 years, Wales is being treated differently in terms of policing from the other nations of the United Kingdom and, indeed, from the English cities? Secondly, the policing needs of Wales are different. Our experience of centralising and sharing specialised services, such as the police helicopter, has shown that such services are drawn inevitably eastwards and away from the rural areas where we most need them. Finally, I would strongly argue that the absence of consensus is now a historical issue. There is consensus in Wales for Wales policing—for policing to be devolved to Wales. There was consensus on Silk, then not on “Powers for a Purpose”, but there is consensus in the Welsh Assembly and among all four police and crime commissioners.

Question put. That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 12, Noes 262.

Karen Bradley:
### Division No. 18

#### [8.59 pm]

**AYES**

- Pugh, John
- Ritchie, Ms Margaret
- Saville Roberts, Liz
- Williams, Hywel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
- Marion Fellows
- Owen Thompson

**NOES**

- Drummond, Mrs Fick
- Duncan, rh Sir Alan
- Dunne, rh Sir Alan
- Ellis, Michael
- Eiphicke, Charlie
- Eustice, George
- Evans, Graham
- Evans, rh Sir Alan
- Evennett, rh Sir David
- Fallon, rh Sir Michael
- Fernandes, Suella
- Field, rh Mark
- Foster, Kevin
- Fox, rh Dr Liam
- Frazer, Lucy
- Freeman, George
- Freer, Mike
- Fuller, Richard
- Fysh, Marcus
- Garnier, rh Sir Edward
- Garnier, Mark
- Ghan, Nusrat
- Gibb, Mr Nick
- Glen, John
- Goldsmith, Zac
- Goodwill, rh Sir Andrew
- Green, Chris
- Green, rh Sir Edward
- Greening, rh Justine
- Griffiths, Andrew
- Gummer, Ben
- Gyimah, Mr Sam
- Halfon, rh Robert
- Hall, Luke
- Hammond, Stephen
- Hancock, rh Matthew
- Hands, rh Greg
- Harper, rh Mr Mark
- Harrington, Richard
- Harris, Rebecca
- Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
- Heald, Sir Oliver
- Heappey, James
- Heathon-Harris, Chris
- Heathon-Jones, Peter
- Henderson, Gordon
- Hermon, Lady
- Hinds, Damian
- Hoare, Simon
- Hollinrake, Kevin
- Hollobone, Mr Philip
- Hopkins, Kris
- Howlett, Ben
- Huddleston, Nigel
- Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
- Hurd, Mr Nick

**Jackson, Mr Stewart**

**Jawarydena, Mr Ranil**

**Jenkin, Mr Bernard**

**Jenkyns, Andrea**

**Jenrick, Robert**

**Johnson, Boris**

**Johnson, Joseph**

**Jones, Andrew**

**Jones, rh Mr David**

**Jones, Mr Marcus**

**Kennedy, Seema**

**Kirby, Simon**

**Knight, rh Sir Greg**

**Knight, Julian**

**Kwarteng, Kwasi**

**Lancaster, Mark**

**Leadsom, Andrea**

**Lee, Dr Philip**

**Lefroy, Jeremy**

**Leigh, Sir Edward**

**Leslie, Charlotte**

**Letwin, rh Mr Oliver**

**Lewis, Brandon**

**Lewis, rh Dr Julian**

**Liddell-Grange, Mr Ian**

**Liddle, rh Mr David**

**Lilley, rh Mr Peter**

**Lopresti, Jack**

**Lord, Jonathan**

**Loughton, Tim**

**Lumley, Karen**

**Mackinlay, Craig**

**Mackintosh, David**

**Mak, Mr Alan**

**Malthouse, Kit**

**Mann, Scott**

**Mathias, Dr Tania**

**May, rh Mrs Theresa**

**Maynard, Paul**

**McCartney, Jason**

**McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick**

**McPartland, Stephen**

**Menzies, Mark**

**Mercer, Johnny**

**Merriman, Huw**

**Metcalfe, Stephen**

**Miller, rh Mrs Maria**

**Milling, Amanda**

**Milns, Nigel**

**Milton, rh Anne**

**Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew**

**Mordaunt, Penny**

**Morris, Anne Marie**

**Morris, David**

**Morris, James**

**Morton, Wendy**

**Mowat, David**

**Murray, Mrs Sherryl**

**Murrison, Dr Andrew**

**Neill, Robert**

**Newton, Sarah**

**Nokes, Caroline**

**Offord, Dr Matthew**

**Opperman, Guy**

**Parish, Neil**

**Patel, rh Priti**

**Paterson, rh Mr Owen**

**Pawsey, Mark**

**Penning, rh Mike**

**Penrose, John**

**Percy, Andrew**

**Perry, Claire**

**Phillips, Stephen**

**Philp, Chris**

**Pickles, rh Sir Eric**

**Pincher, Christopher**

**Poulter, Dr Daniel**

**Prentis, Victoria**

**Prisk, Mr Mark**

**Pursglove, Tom**

**Quin, Jeremy**

**Quince, Will**

**Raab, Mr Dominic**

**Redwood, rh John**

**Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob**

**Robertson, Mr Laurence**

**Robinson, Gavin**

**Robinson, Mary**

**Rudd, rh Amber**

**Rutley, David**

**Sandbach, Antoinette**

**Scully, Paul**

**Selous, Andrew**

**Shannon, Jim**

**Shapps, rh Grant**

**Simpson, rh Mr Keith**

**Skidmore, Chris**

**Smith, Chloe**

**Smith, Henry**

**Smith, Rhosyon**

**Soames, rh Sir Nicholas**

**Solloway, Amanda**

**Souby, rh Anna**

**Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline**

**Spencer, Mark**

**Stevenson, John**

**Stewart, Bob**

**Stewart, Rory**

**Streeter, Mr Gary**

**Stride, Mel**

**Stuart, Graham**

**Sturdy, Julian**

**Sunak, Rishi**

**Swayne, rh Sir Desmond**

**Symms, Mr Robert**

**Thomas, Derek**

**Throup, Maggie**

**Timpson, Edward**

**Toffler, Kelly**

**Tomlinson, Justin**

**Tomlinson, Michael**

**Tracey, Craig**

**Tredinnick, David**

**Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie**

**Truss, rh Elizabeth**

**Tugendhat, Tom**

**Turner, Mr Andrew**

**Vara, Mr Shailesh**

**Vickers, Martin**

**Walker, Mr Charles**

**Walker, Mr Robin**

**Warburton, David**

**Warman, Matt**

**Wharton, James**

**Whately, Helen**

**White, Chris**

**Whittaker, Craig**

**Whittingdale, rh Mr John**

**Wiggin, Bill**

**Williamson, rh Gavin**

**Wilson, Mr Rob**

**Wollaston, Dr Sarah**

**Wood, Mike**
Wragg, William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:  
Margot James  
George Hollingbery

Question accordingly negatived.

9.12 pm
Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 26 April)
The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 54

POWERS TO SEIZE INVALID TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

“(1) Schedule 8 to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 is amended as follows.

(2) For the italic heading before paragraph 3 substitute “Powers of search and seizure etc: places other than ports”.

(3) In paragraph 3, for sub-paragraph (1) substitute—

“(1) An examining officer who is a constable or a person appointed as an immigration officer under paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 may exercise any of the powers under this paragraph, at a place that is not a port, if the examining officer reasonably believes that a person is in possession of a cancelled UK passport or an invalid non-UK travel document.”

(4) In that paragraph, in sub-paragraph (2)—

(a) for “This paragraph applies to a passport” substitute “A passport is “a cancelled UK passport”;

(b) at the end of paragraph (a) insert “and”;

(c) omit the “and” at the end of paragraph (b);

(d) omit paragraph (c).

(5) After sub-paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) An invalid travel document is “an invalid non-UK travel document” if it is, or appears to be, a passport or other document which has been issued by or for the government of a state other than the United Kingdom.”

(6) In that paragraph—

(a) in sub-paragraph (3)—

(i) in paragraph (a), for “the constable” substitute “the examining officer”;  

(ii) in paragraph (b), for “the constable” substitute “the examining officer”; 

(iii) in paragraph (d), for “the constable believes” substitute “the examining officer reasonably believes”;

(b) in sub-paragraph (4)—

(i) in paragraph (c), for “the constable believes” substitute “the examining officer reasonably believes”;

(ii) in paragraph (d), for “the constable” substitute “the examining officer”;  

(c) in sub-paragraph (5)—

(i) in the opening words, for “A constable” substitute “An examining officer”;

(ii) in sub-paragraph (b), for “the constable’s behalf” substitute “the examining officer’s behalf”.

(7) After paragraph 3 insert—

“Powers of entry, search and seizure etc: constables

3A (1) A constable may exercise any of the powers under this paragraph in relation to any premises, other than premises forming part of a port, if the constable reasonably believes that a cancelled UK passport or an invalid non-UK travel document is on the premises (whether or not in the possession of a person who is also on the premises).

“A cancelled UK passport” and “an invalid non-UK travel document” have the same meaning in this paragraph as they have in paragraph 3 (see paragraph 3(2) and 2A)).

(2) The powers are—

(a) to enter the premises;

(b) to search the premises for travel documents and to take possession of any that the constable finds;

(c) to inspect any travel document taken and to retain it while its validity is checked;

(d) (subject to paragraph 4) to retain any travel document taken that the constable reasonably believes to be invalid.

(3) A constable—

(a) may if necessary use reasonable force for the purpose of exercising a power under this paragraph;

(b) may authorise a person to carry out on the constable’s behalf a search under this paragraph.

(4) This paragraph does not affect any power of a constable under paragraph 3(3), 4(a) to (c) or (5) in relation to a person on any premises entered under sub-paragraph 2(a).”

(5) In paragraph 4 (retention or return of documents seized)—

(a) in sub-paragraph (1), for “2(2)(c) or 3(3)(c)” substitute “2(2)(g), 3(3)(c) or 3A(2)(g)”;

(b) after sub-paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) If it is established that a travel document taken from any premises under paragraph 3A—

(a) is valid, or

(b) is invalid only because it has expired, it must be returned to the person to whom it was issued straight away;”;

(c) after sub-paragraph (3) insert—

“(3A) A travel document taken from premises under paragraph 3A must be returned to the person to whom it was issued before the end of the period of 7 days beginning with the day on which it was taken, unless during that period it is established that the document is invalid for some reason other than expiry;”;

(d) in sub-paragraph (4), for “(2)(b) or (3)” substitute “(2)(b), (2A), (3) or (3A)”;

(e) in that sub-paragraph, after “from whom he or she took the document” insert “or (as the case may be) to whom it was issued”;

(f) in sub-paragraph (5), for “(2) or (3)” substitute “(2), (2A), (3) or (3A)”.

(9) In paragraph 5 (offences), in sub-paragraph (2), for “a search under paragraph 2 or 3” substitute “the exercise of a power of search under paragraph 2, 3 or 3A, or the exercise of a power of entry under paragraph 3A.”.

(10) In paragraph 6 (power of arrest), for “2” substitute “2 or 3”.

This new clause amends Schedule 8 to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 in three main ways. First, it extends the existing powers of search and seizure under paragraph 3 of that Schedule so that they are exercisable by immigration officers as well as constables. Second, those powers are further extended so as to be exercisable on the basis of a reasonable belief that a person is in possession of an invalid non-UK travel document. (Currently, those powers are exercisable only on the basis of a reasonable belief that a person is in possession of a cancelled UK passport as defined in paragraph 3(2) of the Schedule.) Third, it inserts a new paragraph 3A that allows constables to enter and search premises where they reasonably believe that a cancelled UK passport or an invalid non-UK travel document is on the premises.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 55

ANONYMITY OF VICTIMS OF FORCED MARRIAGE

“(1) In Part 10 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (forced marriage), after section 122 insert—

“122A Anonymity of victims of forced marriage
Schedule 6A (anonymity of victims of forced marriage) has effect.

(2) Insert, as Schedule 6A to that Act, the following Schedule—

**“SCHEDULE 6A**

**ANONYMITY OF VICTIMS OF FORCED MARRIAGE**

**Prohibition on the identification of victims in publications**

1 (1) This paragraph applies where an allegation has been made that an offence of forced marriage has been committed against a person.

(2) No matter likely to lead members of the public to identify the person, as the person against whom the offence is alleged to have been committed, may be included in any publication during the person's lifetime.

(3) In any criminal proceedings before a court, the court may direct that the restriction imposed by sub-paragraph (2) is not to apply (whether at all or to the extent specified in the direction) if the court is satisfied that either of the following conditions is met.

(4) The first condition is that the conduct of a person's defence at a trial of an offence of forced marriage would be substantially prejudiced if the direction were not given.

(5) The second condition is that—

(a) the effect of sub-paragraph (2) is to impose a substantial and unreasonable restriction on the reporting of the proceedings, and

(b) it is in the public interest to remove or relax the restriction.

(6) A direction under sub-paragraph (3) does not affect the operation of sub-paragraph (2) at any time before the direction is given.

(7) In this paragraph, “the court” means a magistrates' court or the Crown court.

**Penalty for breaching prohibition imposed by paragraph 1(2)**

2 (1) If anything is included in a publication in contravention of the prohibition imposed by paragraph 1(2), each of the persons responsible for the publication is guilty of an offence.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under this paragraph is liable, on summary conviction, to a fine. The persons responsible for the publication is guilty of an offence.

(3) In any criminal proceedings before a court, the court may direct that the restriction imposed by sub-paragraph (2) is not to apply (whether at all or to the extent specified in the direction) if the court is satisfied that one of the following conditions is met.

(4) The first condition is that the conduct of a person's defence at a trial of an offence of forced marriage would be substantially prejudiced if the direction were not given.

(5) The second condition is that—

(a) the effect of sub-paragraph (2) is to impose a substantial and unreasonable restriction on the reporting of the proceedings, and

(b) it is in the public interest to remove or relax the restriction.

(6) A direction under sub-paragraph (3) does not affect the operation of sub-paragraph (2) at any time before the direction is given.

(7) In this paragraph, “the court” means a magistrates' court or the Crown court.

**Special rules for providers of information society services**

4 (1) Paragraph 2 applies to a domestic service provider who, in the course of providing information society services, publishes prohibited matter in an EEA state other than the United Kingdom (as well as to a person, of any description, who publishes prohibited matter in England and Wales).

(2) Proceedings for an offence under paragraph 2, as it applies to a domestic service provider by virtue of sub-paragraph (1), may be taken at any place in England and Wales.

(3) Nothing in this paragraph affects the operation of any of paragraphs 6 to 8.

5 (1) Proceedings for an offence under paragraph 2 may not be taken against a non-UK service provider in respect of anything done in the course of the provision of information society services unless the derogation condition is met.

(2) The derogation condition is that taking proceedings—

(a) is necessary for the purposes of the public interest objective,

(b) relates to an information society service that prejudices that objective or presents a serious and grave risk of prejudice to that objective, and

(c) is proportionate to that objective.

(3) “The public interest objective” means the pursuit of public policy.

6 (1) A service provider does not commit an offence under paragraph 2 by providing access to a communication network or by transmitting, in a communication network, information provided by a recipient of the service, if the service provider does not—

(a) initiate the transmission,

(b) select the recipient of the transmission, or

(c) select or modify the information contained in the transmission.

(2) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) providing access to a communication network, and

(b) transmitting information in a communication network, include the automatic, intermediate and transient storage of the information transmitted so far as the storage is solely for the purpose of carrying out the transmission in the network.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of publication</th>
<th>Persons responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper or other periodical</td>
<td>Any person who is a proprietor, editor or publisher of the newspaper or periodical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Relevant programme | Any person who—

(a) is a body corporate engaged in providing the programme service in which the programme is included, or

(b) has functions in relation to the programme corresponding to those of an editor of a newspaper. |

| Any other kind of publication | Any person who publishes the publication. |

(4) If an offence under this paragraph is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or to be attributable to any neglect on the part of—

(a) a senior officer of a body corporate, or

(b) a person purporting to act in such a capacity, the senior officer or person (as well as the body corporate) is guilty of the offence and liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

(5) “Senior officer”, in relation to a body corporate, means a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body corporate: and for this purpose “director”, in relation to a body corporate whose affairs are managed by its members, means a member of the body corporate.
3) Sub-paragraph (2) does not apply if the information is stored for longer than is reasonably necessary for the transmission.

7 (1) A service provider does not commit an offence under paragraph 2 by storing information provided by a recipient of the service for transmission in a communication network if the first and second conditions are met.

(2) The first condition is that the storage of the information—
(a) is automatic, intermediate and temporary, and
(b) is solely for the purpose of making more efficient the onward transmission of the information to other recipients of the service at their request.

(3) The second condition is that the service provider—
(a) does not modify the information,
(b) complies with any conditions attached to having access to the information, and
(c) if sub-paragraph (4) applies, promptly removes the information or disables access to it.

(4) This sub-paragraph applies if the service provider obtains actual knowledge that—
(a) the information at the initial source of the transmission has been removed from the network,
(b) access to it has been disabled, or
(c) a court or administrative authority has ordered the removal from the network of, or the disablement of access to, the information.

8 (1) A service provider does not commit an offence under paragraph 2 by storing information provided by a recipient of the service if—
(a) the service provider has no actual knowledge when the information was provided that it was, or contained, a prohibited publication, or
(b) on obtaining actual knowledge that the information was, or contained, a prohibited publication, the service provider promptly removed the information or disabled access to it.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply if the recipient of the service is acting under the authority or control of the service provider.

Interpretation

9 (1) In this Schedule—
“domestic service provider” means a service provider established in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland;
“forced marriage offence” means an offence under section 121 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014;
“information society services”—
(a) has the meaning given in Article 2(a) of the E-Commerce Directive (which refers to Article 1(2) of Directive 98/34/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 June 1998 laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations), and
(b) is summarised in recital 17 of the E-Commerce Directive as covering “any service normally provided for remuneration, at a distance, by means of electronic equipment for the processing (including digital compression) and storage of data, and at the individual request of a recipient of a service”;
“non-UK service provider” means a service provider established in an EEA state other than the United Kingdom;
“programme service” has the same meaning as in the Broadcasting Act 1990 (see section 201(1) of that Act);
“prohibited material” means any material the publication of which contravenes paragraph 1(2);
“publication” includes any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication (in whatever form) which is addressed to, or is accessible by, the public at large or any section of the public;
“recipient”, in relation to a service, means a person who, for professional ends or otherwise, uses an information society service, in particular for the purposes of seeking information or making it accessible;
“relevant programme” means a programme included in a programme service;
“service provider” means a person providing an information society service.

(2) For the purposes of the definition of “publication” in sub-paragraph (1)—
(a) an indictment or other document prepared for use in particular legal proceedings is not to be taken as coming within the definition;
(b) every relevant programme is to be taken as addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public.

(3) For the purposes of the definitions of “domestic service provider” and “non-UK service provider” in sub-paragraph (1)—
(a) a service provider is established in a particular part of the United Kingdom, or in a particular EEA state, if the service provider—
(i) effectively pursues an economic activity using a fixed establishment in that part of the United Kingdom, or that EEA state, for an indefinite period, and
(ii) is a national of an EEA state or a company or firm mentioned in Article 54 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
(b) the presence or use in a particular place of equipment or other technical means of providing an information society service does not, of itself, constitute the establishment of a service provider;
(c) where it cannot be determined from which of a number of establishments a given information society service is provided, that service is to be regarded as provided from the establishment at the centre of the service provider’s activities relating to that service.”—
(Karen Bradley.)

This new clause makes provision to protect the anonymity of victims of the offence of forced marriage under section 121 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. It is modelled on provision made by Schedule 1 to the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 to protect the anonymity of victims of female genital mutilation offences.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 56

LICENSING FUNCTIONS UNDER TAXI AND PHV LEGISLATION: PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

“(1) The Secretary of State may issue guidance to public authorities as to how their licensing functions under taxi and private hire vehicle legislation may be exercised so as to protect children, and vulnerable individuals who are 18 or over, from harm.

(2) The Secretary of State may revise any guidance issued under this section.
(3) The Secretary of State must arrange for any guidance issued under this section, and any revision of it, to be published.

(4) Any public authority which has licensing functions under taxi and private hire vehicle legislation must have regard to any guidance issued under this section.

(5) Before issuing guidance under this section, the Secretary of State must consult—

(a) the National Police Chiefs’ Council,

(b) persons who appear to the Secretary of State to represent the interests of public authorities who are required to have regard to the guidance,

(c) persons who appear to the Secretary of State to represent the interests of those whose livelihood is affected by the exercise of the licensing functions to which the guidance relates, and

(d) such other persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(6) In this section, “taxi and private hire vehicle legislation” means—

(a) the London Hackney Carriages Act 1843;

(b) sections 37 to 68 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847;

(c) the Metropolitan Public Carriage Act 1869;


(e) the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998;

(f) the Plymouth City Council Act 1975 (c.xx).”—[Karen Bradley.] This new clause provides for the Secretary of State to issue guidance to public authorities which have licensing functions under taxi and private hire vehicle legislation about how those functions may be exercised so as to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm. It also imposes a duty on those public authorities to have regard to the guidance.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 57

POWERS OF LITTER AUTHORITIES IN SCOTLAND

“(1) In Part 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (litter etc), after section 91 insert—

“92 Summary proceedings by litter authorities

(1) Where a principal litter authority in Scotland other than a joint board is satisfied as respects—

(a) any relevant Crown land,

(b) any relevant land of a designated statutory undertaker,

(c) any relevant land of a designated educational institution, or

(d) any relevant land within a litter control area of a local authority,

that it is defaced by litter or refuse or that defacement of it by litter or refuse is likely to recur, the authority shall serve a notice (a “litter abatement notice”) imposing either the requirement or prohibition specified in subsection (2).

(2) The requirement and prohibition referred to in subsection (1) are as follows, namely—

(a) a requirement that the litter or refuse be cleared within a time specified in the notice;

(b) a prohibition on permitting the land to become defaced by litter or refuse.

(3) The litter abatement notice shall be served—

(a) as respects relevant Crown land, on the appropriate Crown authority;

(b) as respects relevant land of a designated statutory undertaker, on the undertaker;

(c) as respects relevant land of a designated educational institution, on the governing body of the institution or on the education authority responsible for the management of the institution;

(d) in any other case, on the occupier of the land or, if it is unoccupied, on the owner of the land.

(4) The person served with the notice may appeal against the notice to the sheriff by way of application within the period of 21 days beginning with the date on which the notice was served.

(5) If, on any appeal under subsection (4), the appellant proves that, as respects the land in question, he has complied with his duty under section 89(1), the court shall allow the appeal.

(6) If a person on whom a litter abatement notice is served, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with or contravenes the requirement or prohibition imposed by the notice, he shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale together with a further fine of an amount equal to one-twentieth of that level for each day on which the offence continues after the conviction.

(7) In any proceedings for an offence under subsection (6), it shall be a defence for the person charged to prove that he has complied, as respects the land in question, with his duty under section 89(1).

(8) A direction under section 89(6A) or a code of practice under section 89(7) shall be admissible in evidence in any proceedings under this section and, if any provision of such a direction or code appears to the court to be relevant to any question in the proceedings, it shall be taken into account in determining that question.

(9) If a person on whom a litter abatement notice is served fails to comply with the requirement imposed by the notice in respect of any land, the authority may, subject to subsection (10)—

(a) enter on the land and clear the litter or refuse, and

(b) recover from that person the expenditure attributable to their having done so, except such of the expenditure as that person shows was unnecessary in the circumstances.

(10) Subsection (9) does not apply in relation to relevant Crown land or relevant land of statutory undertakers.

“93 Street litter control notices

(1) A principal litter authority in Scotland other than a joint board may, with a view to the prevention of accumulations of litter or refuse in and around any street or open land adjacent to any street, issue notices (“street litter control notices”) imposing requirements on occupiers of premises in relation to such litter or refuse, in accordance with this section and section 94.

(2) If the authority is satisfied, in respect of any premises which are of a description prescribed under section 94(1)(a) and have a frontage on a street in their area, that—

(a) there is recurrent defacement by litter or refuse of any land, being part of the street or open land adjacent to the street, which is in the vicinity of the premises,

(b) the condition of any part of the premises which is open land in the vicinity of the frontage is, and if no notice is served is likely to continue to be, detrimental to the amenities of the locality by reason of the presence of litter or refuse, or

(c) there is produced, as a result of the activities carried on on the premises, quantities of litter or refuse of such nature and in such amounts as are likely to cause the defacement of any part of the street, or of open land adjacent to the street, which is in the vicinity of the premises,

the authority may serve a street litter control notice on the occupier or, if the premises are unoccupied, on the owner of the premises.

(3) A notice shall, subject to section 94(2), (3) and (4)—

(a) identify the premises and state the grounds for subsection (2) on which it is issued;

(b) specify an area of open land which adjoins or is in the vicinity of the frontage of the premises on the street;

(c) specify, in relation to that area or any part of it, such reasonable requirements as the authority considers appropriate in the circumstances;
and, for the purposes of paragraph (b), an area which includes land on both sides of the frontage of the premises shall be treated as an area adjoining that frontage.

(4) In this section and section 94—

“notice” means a street litter control notice;

“open land” means land in the open air;

“the premises”, in relation to a notice, means the premises in respect of which the notice is issued;

“specified area” means the area specified in a notice under subsection (3)(b); and

“street” means a relevant highway, a relevant road or any other highway or road over which there is a right of way on foot.

“94 Street litter: supplementary provisions

(1) The Scottish Ministers may by order prescribe—

(a) the descriptions of commercial or retail premises in respect of which a street litter control notice may be issued;

(b) the descriptions of land which may be included in a specified area; and

(c) the maximum area of land which may be included in a specified area;

and different descriptions or maximum dimensions may be prescribed under paragraph (b) or (c) for different cases or circumstances.

An order under this subsection is subject to the negative procedure.

(2) The power to describe premises or land under subsection (1)(a) or (b) includes power to describe the premises or land by reference to occupation or ownership or to the activities carried on there.

(3) The land comprised in a specified area—

(a) shall include only land of one or more of the descriptions prescribed under subsection (1)(b);

(b) shall not include any land which is not—

(i) part of the premises,

(ii) part of a street,

(iii) relevant land of a principal litter authority, or

(iv) land under the direct control of any other local authority; and

(c) shall not exceed any applicable maximum area prescribed under subsection (1)(c);

but a specified area shall not include any part of the premises which is or is part of a litter control area.

(4) The requirements which may be imposed by a notice shall relate to the clearing of litter or refuse from the specified area and may in particular require—

(a) the provision or emptying of receptacles for litter or refuse;

(b) the doing within a period specified in the notice of any such thing as may be so specified (including the standards to which any such thing must be done); or

(c) the doing (while the notice remains in force) at such times or intervals, or within such period, of any such thing as may be so specified;

but a notice may not require the clearing of litter or refuse from any carriageway, except at a time when the carriageway is closed to all vehicular traffic.

(5) In relation to so much of the specified area as is not part of the premises the authority shall take account, in determining what requirements to impose, of their own duties under this Part or otherwise, and of any similar duties of any other local authority, in relation to that land.

(6) An authority proposing to serve a notice shall—

(a) inform the person on whom the notice is to be served;

(b) give him the opportunity to make representations about the notice within the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which he is so informed; and

(c) take any representations so made into account in making their decision.

(7) A person on whom a notice is served may appeal against the notice to the sheriff by way of application; and the court may quash the notice or may quash, vary or add to any requirement imposed by the notice.

(8) If it appears to the authority that a person has failed or is failing to comply with any requirement imposed by a notice, the authority may apply to the sheriff by way of application for an order requiring the person to comply with the requirement within such time as may be specified in the order.

(9) A person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with an order under subsection (8) is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.”

(2) Any order under section 94(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which had effect immediately before the coming into force of paragraph 21 of Schedule 11 to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014—

(a) is (so far as extending to Scotland) revived on the coming into force of this section, and

(b) has effect on its revival as if made under section 94(1) of that Act as re-enacted with modifications by this section.”—(Karen Bradley.)

This new clause re-enacts, with minor changes, sections 92, 93 and 94 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The sections will form part of the law of Scotland only: The need for the new clause arises because the repeal of those sections by paragraph 21 of Schedule 11 to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 was extended to Scotland by mistake.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 60

DUTY TO REPORT ON CHILD ABDUCTION WARNING NOTICES

“(1) Each police force in England and Wales must report to the Secretary of State each year on—

(a) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices issued;

(b) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices breached; and

(c) the number of Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders issued following the breach of a Child Abduction Warning Notice.

(2) The Secretary of State must prepare and publish a report each year on—

(a) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices issued in each police force in England and Wales;

(b) the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices breached in each police force in England and Wales; and

(c) the number of Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders issued following the breach of a Child Abduction Warning Notice in each police force in England and Wales and must lay a copy of the report before Parliament.”—(Sarah Champion.)

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 157, Noes 257.

Division No. 19] [9.13 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane

Ali, Rushanara

Allen, Mr Graham

Anderson, Mr David

Bailey, Mr Adrian

Barron, rh Kevin
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kinahan, Danny
Kinnock, Stephen
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mackagart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonell, John
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Pewsey, Lucy
Pughe, John
Rayner, Angela
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Starmer, Keir
Tami, Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Phil

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Arger, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brookshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Drummond, Mrs Fick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip

Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sue Hayman and
Jeff Smith

NOES
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evnett, rh Mr David
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fulcher, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gymmah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hassellhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holloboone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, rh Mr Stewart
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jennick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 131

POWERS OF NCA OFFICERS IN RELATION TO CUSTOMS MATTERS

Amendment made: 107, page 137, line 16, at end insert—

'( ) In paragraph 26 of that Schedule (modification of references), after paragraph (c) insert—

(ca) a power of a general customs official is exercisable by any NCA officer, a reference to a general customs official in any enactment which relates to that power is to be taken to be, or to include, a reference to any NCA officer by whom that power is exercisable;”.

( ) In paragraph 27 of that Schedule (power to make further provision), in sub-paragraph (2), after paragraph (d)(ii) insert—

(i) one or more grades of, or pay scales applicable to, general customs officials;”.

( ) In paragraph 28 of that Schedule (functions of third parties relating to constables etc: extension to NCA), in sub-paragraph (2), after paragraph (c) insert—

(ca) a general customs official,”.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment is consequential on clause 131, which enables the Director General of the National Crime Agency, and other designated NCA officers, to exercise the powers of general customs officials.

Clause 132

REQUIREMENT TO STATE NATIONALITY

Amendment made: 108, page 138, leave out lines 13 to 16.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment would remove from clause 132 a provision relating to Scotland. This amendment is related to amendments 111 and 113, which would mean that clause 132 would not extend to Scotland.

Clause 138

EXTENT

Amendments made: 111, page 143, line 4, leave out “132 and”.

See Member’s explanatory statement for amendment 108.

Amendment 112, page 143, line 4, at end insert—

“(i) section (Powers to seize invalid travel documents);”.

This amendment provides for the new clause inserted by new clause 54 to form part of the law of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 113, page 143, line 31, at end insert—

“(c) section132.”.

See Member’s explanatory statement for amendment 108.

Amendment 114, page 143, line 34, at end insert—

“(c) section (Powers of litter authorities in Scotland).”.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment provides for the new clause inserted by new clause 57 to come into force on the date on which the Bill is passed.

Clause 139

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 115, page 143, line 43, at end insert—

“( ) section (Powers of litter authorities in Scotland);”.

This amendment provides for new clause 57 to come into force on the date on which the Bill is passed.
Amendment 116, page 144, line 7, at end insert—
“( ) section (Anonymity of victims of forced marriage);”.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment provides for new clause 55 to come into force 2 months after the Bill is passed.

Title

Amendments made: 119, line 26 after “information;” insert “to make provision about the seizure etc of invalid travel documents;”. This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clause 54.

Amendment 120, line 26 after “information;” insert “to make provision to protect the anonymity of victims of forced marriage;”. This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clause 55.

Amendment 121, line 27 after “children” insert “and to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm;”. This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clause 56.

Amendment 122, line 27 after “children,” insert “to make provision about the powers of litter authorities in Scotland;”.—(Mike Penning.)

This amendment to the long title is consequential on new clause 57.

Mr Speaker: Consideration completed. I will now suspend the House for about five minutes in order to make a decision about certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes.

Following my certification, the Government will table the appropriate consent motions, copies of which will be available shortly in the Vote Office and will be distributed by Doorkeepers.

9.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

9.28 pm

On resuming—

Mr Speaker: I can now inform the House that I have completed certification of the Bill, as required by the Standing Order, and that I have made no change to the provisional certificate issued last week. Copies of my final certificate will be made available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, consent motions are therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Copies of the motions are available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website, and have been made available to Members in the Chamber. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motions?

Mike Penning indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: Under Standing Order No. 83M(4), the House must forthwith resolve itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales), and thereafter into the Legislative Grand Committee (England).

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83 M).

[MRs ELEANOR LAING in the Chair]

9.29 pm

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mrs Eleanor Laing): There will now be a joint debate on the consent motion for England and Wales and the consent motion for England. I remind hon. Members that, although all Members may speak in the debate, if there are Divisions, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion for England and Wales, and only Members representing constituencies in England may vote on the consent motion for England.

Resolved

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses and schedules of the Policing and Crime Bill and a certified amendment made by the House to the Bill:

Clauses and schedules certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 7, 11 to 16, 18, 20 to 26, 28, 30 to 32, 37 to 39, 41, 43, 45, 46, 48 to 64, 67 to 70, 72 to 77, 101 to 103, 110 to 112, 115 and 135 of the Bill as carried over into this Session (Bill 3) (including the amendments made on Report);

Schedules 3 to 5, 7, 8, 12 and 13 to the Bill as carried over into this Session (Bill 3) (including the amendments made on Report);

New clauses NC30, NC49, NC55 and NC56 on Report.

Amendment certified under Standing Order No. 83L(4) as relating exclusively to England and Wales

Amendment 145 made in the Public Bill Committee to clause 22 (now clause 27).—(Mike Penning.)

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England) (Standing Order No. 83M(4)(d)).

The First Deputy Chairman: I remind hon. Members that no further debate on the consent motion for England is permitted, and that if there is a Division on that motion, only Members representing constituencies in England may vote. This extends to expressing an opinion by calling out Aye or No when the Question is put.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83 M(4)(d)),—That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses and schedules of the Policing and Crime Bill:

Clauses and schedules certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 1 to 6 and 8 to 10 of the Bill as carried over into this Session (Bill 3);

Schedules 1 and 2 to the Bill as carried over into this Session (Bill 3).—(Mike Penning.)

Question agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decisions of the Committees (Standing Order No. 83 M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decisions reported.

Third Reading

Queen's consent signified.

9.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Since becoming Home Secretary in 2010, I have put in place the most radical programme of police reform in a generation. Today, that programme is changing policing for the better, making it more transparent, more accountable and more efficient. But the task of reform is not yet finished. If we are to continue ensuring that the police can protect the most vulnerable in our society, if we are to continue helping the police build trust between themselves and the public, and if we are to continue ensuring that the police and other emergency services deliver for the taxpayer, we must go further and faster.
The Policing and Crime Bill will allow us to do that: it will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our emergency services by placing an overarching duty on them to collaborate where it makes sense to do so: it will enable police and crime commissioners to take on the governance of fire and rescue authorities where a local case has been made; it will make changes to pre-charge bail to prevent the injustice of people spending months, or even years, on bail only for no charges to be brought; it will ensure that those experiencing a mental health crisis receive the help they need rather than prolonged detention in a police cell; and it will radically reform the complaints and disciplinary systems to help strengthen public confidence and trust in policing, an outcome that I know will be welcomed by the Hillsborough families, who have campaigned tirelessly for effective accountability in policing when things go badly wrong.

Throughout its passage in this House the Bill has been subject to many lively and constructive debates. I welcome the broad measure of cross-party support for many of its provisions. I commend the work of my right hon. and hon. Friends, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) who is responsible for preventing abuse, exploitation and crime, all the members of the Public Bill Committee and the officials who have supported their work.

There have been a small number of areas of disagreement, most notably on the role of police and crime commissioners in relation to the governance of fire and rescue authorities, the role of volunteers within police forces and the cut-off for taking disciplinary action against former police officers—although on the last of those issues, I am pleased that we have been able to make some progress. I am sure that all these issues will continue to be examined carefully as the Bill makes its way through the Upper House, but the process of scrutiny that the Bill has already been subject to in this House has greatly strengthened and improved it.

Among the important measures added to the Bill in Committee and on Report are those to reform the governance of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, strengthen inspection powers in relation to fire and rescue services, enhance the powers of the police to retain the DNA and fingerprints of persons previously convicted of an offence outside England and Wales, provide for a new offence of breach of pre-charge bail conditions relating to travel, strengthen cross-border powers of arrest and police powers to seize cancelled travel documents, confer lifelong anonymity on the victims of forced marriage and strengthen the safeguarding of vulnerable people through the introduction of statutory guidance in respect of the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles. Those additional measures, alongside those contained in the Bill on its introduction, will support the vital work of our police forces. They will put in place provisions to ensure the greater efficiency and effectiveness of our emergency services. They will introduce changes to protect the rights of the public when they come into contact with the criminal justice system and they will provide important powers to help the police cut crime and keep our communities safe.

This Bill will ensure that the police can continue to meet the challenges they face day in and day out, and it will ensure that we can get on with the important job of police reform. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.37 pm

Andy Burnham: The fairest thing that we can say about this Bill is that it is a decidedly mixed bag. On the one hand it makes improvements to police accountability, but on the other it undermines the independence of the fire service and the police service by allowing volunteers to replace front-line staff.

None the less, the Bill leaves this House in a better state than it came to us in. I pay tribute to my shadow ministerial team, my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for West Ham (Lyn Brown), all of whom have played an important part in improving the Bill. I thank the Home Secretary and her ministerial team for the constructive way in which they have continued to debate these matters with us. I also thank all members of the Bill Committee and the Chairmen, the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth).

The Bill makes some real improvements, but we still have some concerns. The issues broadly fall into four categories: measures we support; measures we have helped to improve; measures we oppose; and the missed opportunities in the Bill. I will go briefly through each.

On the measures we support, the super-complaints system is a genuine step forward, and we congratulate the Home Secretary on bringing it to the House. We also support the strengthening of the IPCC and of the regulation of the police in general. The ban on the use of police cells for people in mental health crisis is a crucial step forward, but it needs to be matched with a commissioning strategy in the NHS that ensures alternative places of safety for people who will no longer be held in police cells.

On the measures that we have helped to improve, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham for the work that she has done to strengthen the measures in the Bill on child sexual exploitation, and particularly on the licensing regime for private hire vehicles. There are further improvements to come on child abduction warning notices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington, the shadow Policing Minister, pushed the issue of police bail in Committee, based on the case of Siddhartha Dhar, the individual who waltzed out of the country while on bail. I am pleased that the Government have responded, although Mark Rowley said in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee that there should be the very tightest of regimes, whereby people have to surrender passports while they are still in police custody at police stations. I believe that the Bill could still be tightened on that point.

We have had a good exchange today on police misconduct. We welcome the fact that the Government have been prepared to extend the 12-month limit for exceptional instances of misconduct. We will work with the Home Secretary and the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims on getting that right, but that, too, appears to be a genuine step forward.
There are two main measures that we oppose. First, we believe that the greater use of volunteers in the police service is dangerous in the context of the further cuts being made to police budgets, contrary to what the Government promised in the spending review. Police services in England and Wales are facing real-terms cuts to their budgets this year, which will not be backfilled by the local precept. We believe that it is dangerous to impose those cuts without setting out a vision for policing and saying precisely what the boundaries are for what volunteers can and cannot do, and the Government need to think again before going down that road.

On the fire service, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham made a powerful case that we should not just merge the two services and, in effect, make the fire service the junior partner of the police service. The Bill will allow a hostile takeover of a fire service, authorised by the Home Secretary but over the heads of local people and without their consent. We do not believe that that will strengthen the fire service, which has an important role as a separate statutory service. All the pros and cons of the single employer model have not been fully debated, and we feel that this is a road down which the Government should not go because they have failed to make the case for it.

I will finish with the missed opportunities. I conclude my speech on Third Reading with a sense that Parliament has missed a moment to make some real changes on the back of the historic Hillsborough verdict. Today, we have debated two issues. First, there should be a principle of equality in legal funding for bereaved families at inquests where police are represented. Secondly, we have debated the Prime Minister’s promise to the victims of press abuse and intrusion that there would be a second-stage inquiry into the relationship between the police and the press. On both fronts, we have not made any progress tonight. It was disappointing that the Government chose to oppose the measures that we in the Opposition proposed.

Representatives of the Hillsborough Family Support Group—the chair, Margaret Aspinall, and Sue Roberts—were here today, and I can tell the House that they have gone home disappointed and feeling that Parliament is already forgetting what their fight was all about. It was a monumental miscarriage of justice that now requires a commensurate response from the House. Changes must be made to stop any family in future going through what they have been through, but sadly, families can still go through it. Many families continue to go into inquests raw with grief, face aggressive questioning by Queen’s Counsel hired at great public expense and find the whole experience deeply unsatisfactory.

It is disappointing that the Government were not even able to accept the principle that we should have equal funding. It would have been a step forward if they had been able to do so. I understand that they are asking Bishop James Jones to look at these matters, but of course, this issue goes much broader than Hillsborough. It is about fairness in our criminal justice system, and I believe that the Government are missing an opportunity by not acting on it quickly. Quite frankly, it is obscene for police forces to continue to spend large amounts of money on hiring aggressive lawyers to challenge families in the way that they do at inquests. This scandal should not be allowed to continue, and we in the Opposition will continue to fight against it until there is real change.

In conclusion, the Bill was an opportunity to make this country fairer, to even up the scales and even to tip them in favour of ordinary families and away from the establishment. I fear that we have failed to do that, and it will now be up to the other place to see whether it can make progress. Who can vote against the principle of equal funding for bereaved families at inquests? I cannot believe that anyone would actually vote against it. There is a debate about how to achieve it, but I find it very strange indeed that people can really vote against that principle. How can Members go through the Lobby tonight voting against the Prime Minister’s commitment to the victims of hacking, press intrusion and abuse? The Government have weakened their position tonight. They said before that there would be an inquiry. Now they say that there might be an inquiry once outstanding legal matters are concluded. That is not fair to the families who were given a firm promise by the Prime Minister.

This is my direct appeal to the other place: vote for equality of legal funding for families, and vote for the honouring of the promise to the victims of press intrusion. In doing so, make Hillsborough a moment of real change in this country.

9.45 pm

Keith Vaz: It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). He was generous with his praise for those involved in the Hillsborough campaign, but the House should recognise his part in that campaign and the incredible work that he has done. He spoke with great passion on the subject even today, and he should be commended for what he has done.

It is not often that the Home Affairs Committee praises the Government, but they have done quite well in the Bill in picking up a number of the recommendations that we made about detention in police cells, which is to be stopped, and in particular about the seizure of the travel documents of those who have committed or are suspected of committing criminal offences. We would have liked the Home Secretary to go a little further and accept Mark Rowley’s evidence, but she has gone a long way towards dealing with the issues that we were concerned about, and I am glad that that provision is in the Bill.

The third recommendation that the Home Secretary has accepted, for which we are grateful, concerned the time that people spend continuously on bail. We listened to the evidence of Paul Gambaccini and others who came before the Committee, who could not understand why bail kept being renewed month after month with nobody telling them what was going to happen. Reputations have been ruined as a result. Of all the provisions in the Bill, the one relating to that situation will stand out. It does not mean that the police will not be able to do their job; it just means that citizens will not be continuously in limbo, not knowing what is going to happen. We welcome the fact that the Home Secretary has accepted all three of those measures that we put forward.

I want to thank the Policing Minister, who is one of the rare Ministers who write to the Committee and say, “We have decided to take up your recommendations.” That does not happen often, and the fact that he did it shows his courtesy and his willingness to take on suggestions, obviously with the support of the Home Secretary.
I strongly agree with what the shadow Home Secretary says about Leveson 2. I cannot understand the Government’s reluctance to accept that we will have to have a second inquiry. We need that inquiry. It was promised to me and to the then Chairs of the Justice Committee and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by the Prime Minister in his private office behind the Speaker’s Chair after Mr Speaker had granted the urgent question and an emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24, which resulted in the entire debate on hacking. We should try to ensure that we have a timetable that will give comfort to those who have been waiting for that second inquiry.

At Home Office questions, I mentioned that the Home Secretary was now the third longest-serving Home Secretary in the history of our country. We have to look back to 1822 to find Viscount Sidmouth, who served for 10 years as Home Secretary—longer than the present Home Secretary has done. I do not know whether that will be her fate. It is important to remember that there has been a revolution in the policing landscape under this Home Secretary. Everything has been turned upside down. There have been massive changes. When she came to the Dispatch Box, I thought she would say that the reform agenda was finished, but when she said that it was ongoing, that caused us trepidation in the Home Affairs Committee, because we will have to continue our scrutiny.

There are many good things in the Bill. I am sure we will return to the subjects of policing and crime again in this Parliament, and I hope the Government will be able to accept even more of the Home Affairs Committee’s recommendations.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
In particular, the CQC highlighted concerns relating to rating of "requires improvement" to the Kentmere ward. Its report, which was published in March, awarded a comprehensive inspection programme last November. was inspected as part of Care Quality Commission's section.


This is the second time in my time as our Member of Parliament that the ward has faced the threat of closure. Ten years ago, similar proposals sparked a huge outcry from local residents. Thousands of people signed petitions and wrote to health bosses, and about 3,000 of us marched through Kendal town centre in pretty shocking weather to voice our opposition.

The campaign took many, many months, but we won. Our victory in saving the ward was a hugely important moment for our community. Mental health is often a taboo, so the suffering of those living with mental health conditions, and of their families, often happens in silence and in private. In the face of a threat to the services that those with mental health conditions rely on, far too many people would choose to look the other way—but not in South Lakeland. The campaign showed that local people were prepared proudly to stand up in solidarity with those living with mental health conditions and with their families. I am therefore extremely proud of my community. In the face of this latest threat, the character of our community is once again shining through.

Westmorland general hospital is the main hospital serving the Lake district, the western Yorkshire Dales, Kendal and much of the rest of rural southern Cumbria. I have learned over the years that the tendency to overlook the health needs of rural communities such as ours means that I need to be permanently vigilant in my defence and promotion of our hospital. The campaigns we have run to win new cancer services, to prevent the closure of the hospital itself and to increase surgery at Westmorland general are testament to the fact that ours is a special community, which will fight with unique energy and tenacity for mental and physical healthcare that is high quality and accessible. Once again, it appears that we must roll up our sleeves and fight to defend our services.

As I said, the ward provides 12 beds, the majority of which are usually full at any given time. The people occupying these beds are often suffering from the most serious mental health conditions. For much of the time, the majority of patients staying on the ward are under section.

The apparent trigger for the proposed closure came after the Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust was inspected as part of 'Care Quality Commission's comprehensive inspection programme last November. Its report, which was published in March, awarded a rating of "requires improvement" to the Kentmere ward. In particular, the CQC highlighted concerns relating to privacy, access to outdoor areas and the internal physical structure of the ward. Having visited the ward myself, most recently on Saturday, I have to say that the quality of staffing and patient care is absolutely outstanding. In fact, the CQC itself was surprised that the trust’s response to the report was to close the ward, believing that the upgrades needed to meet required standards were perfectly feasible. Let me be clear: this ward is providing excellent care from outstanding staff in a physical setting that requires some improvement. It most definitely does not require closure. Indeed, the CQC has been clear that it did not recommend closure, or anything of the sort.

As I said, the ward is situated in Westmorland general hospital. The partnership trust that is responsible for mental health in Cumbria is a tenant of University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust. The hospital is a fairly modern building, with plenty of car parking and a beautiful setting looking out towards the Lakeland fells and the Howgills. Put bluntly, if you have to go to hospital, I cannot think of anywhere more pleasant you could be, and that is not unimportant when supporting people living with mental health conditions. The hospital building is not full. There is a great deal of space on the site, with ward space that is not used or under-used. There are enormous opportunities, with a little bit of imagination, to seek more spacious, more suitable, better-quality accommodation elsewhere in the hospital.

It is clear, then, that Kentmere ward needs upgrading. It is not ideal that it is on the first floor. There could be more space for the unit as a whole and greater privacy for the patients. There will be projected costs of a completely new building to meet the requirements of an upgrade. The Minister may have seen those projections. They will no doubt be expensive, and the conclusion that he is probably meant to draw from whatever scary numbers he has been given is that the only affordable solution is to close the ward. He is expected to read his brief and fob me off. However, I know him well, rate him highly, and know that he has much better judgment than that.

The reality is that the needs of patients in South Lakeland could be met on the current Westmorland general hospital site. An immediate project should be launched, alongside the hospitals trust, to ensure that there is a larger unit with ground-floor access that has greater levels of gender segregation, greater privacy, greater dignity, and greater safety. If there is a will, then the way is staring us in the face. Whatever the challenges, which we acknowledge, in upgrading this unit, it is obvious from my conversations with patients, their families, staff, the CQC and the trust that there are serious concerns about the incredibly detrimental impact that closure will have on patients’ conditions.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What the hon. Gentleman is saying very much echoes what happened in York when the hospital closed nine months ago. The consequence has been loss of life to my constituents. It seems that primacy in decision making is given not to clinical need, but more to the physical environment, and that has to be wrong, does it not?

Tim Farron: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention and wish to express great solidarity with her in the campaign that she is running in York.
It is of great concern to me that the CQC will make recommendations that will require improvements, and potentially not offer solutions to maintain a plausible and sustainable provision instead. The judgment we have to make is, “Is a good service that is not perfect better than no service?”, and of course the answer is going to be yes.

As I said, the quality of care in Kentmere ward at Westmorland general hospital is excellent, as stated in the report, and the staff are excellent. The ward needs upgrading—that is a given—but its closure would harm the health of some of the most vulnerable people in our community. It is utterly unacceptable that those people will have to be shipped off to Barrow, Whitehaven or Carlisle rather than being treated much closer to home in Kendal. What is more, there is no guarantee that those far distant wards will have the capacity to accommodate them. Already, patients sometimes face the immense journey to Manchester, for example. For many less well-off residents, a round trip to these alternative wards of up to 100 miles, with many hours on the bus or train, will put family and loved ones beyond easy reach. It is the patients who would be harmed if they were cut off from their families and friends and missed out on all-important visits. Instead of the reassurance of familiar faces and surroundings, they would face this dark time alone and in an unknown place.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman know whether any issues have been raised by veterans’ organisations or by veterans themselves? Ex-soldiers and former service personnel are clearly—

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Charlie Elphicke.)

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Gentleman know whether there is a need to address that issue? A lot of veterans in my constituency need help. Does his constituency have the same problems as mine?

Tim Farron: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to an extremely important matter, namely the plight of so many veterans. It seems that we are happy for brave women and men to provide loyal service and to put their lives on the line for us, but they are often dropped when they return from duty. There are incidences of mental health concerns for them and their families in the years after their return, and I am not clear that we as a general community provide the support that we should. That support can sometimes be provided by the community, but sometimes it needs to be provided in a physical setting as well. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

A recent Government report showed that the closure of this ward in South Lakeland would leave our part of the world with among the worst access to mental health services in the entire United Kingdom. Out of the 6,688 open ward stays in adult acute mental health in-patient care in England alone over the past year, only 263 patients—4% of them—received care 30 miles or more away from where they lived. The closure of the Kentmere ward would leave vast numbers of South Lakes residents—including all of Kendal, as well as many other rural areas—even further away from those services, as the closest alternative in-patient ward is in Barrow, 35 miles away from Westmorland general. The most likely alternatives are further away still: Carlisle is a 45-minute drive, at best, and Whitehaven and Manchester are both more than 70 minutes away, if the traffic is kind.

The provision of replacement community support, which has been offered to compensate for the closure of the ward, would be inadequate. More community support would, of course, be welcomed, but that must be in addition to, not instead of, the 12-bed unit. Increasingly, the majority of patients in the unit are under section, and one cannot section people in the community.

By the way, when people are sectioned, there is an immense impact on our local police force. Closure of the unit in Kendal would mean that our local police force, which is already heavily stretched, under-resourced and under pressure, would have to take patients vast distances across Cumbria to far-off mental health units, taking officers off the beat and threatening the safety and security of our rural communities.

The last time I spent a night out on the beat with our local police force, I was stunned by how much of its time was spent dealing with various kinds of mental health issues. Indeed, that was pretty much all it did on that occasion. Anecdotally, police officers locally tell me that up to half of their workload can involve dealing with people living with mental health conditions. Their dedication and compassion in being the first line of support for incredibly vulnerable and often distressed people and their families is overwhelming, and I am proud of them. However, our police are already working beyond their physical capacity; the closure of Kentmere ward would just add to that pressure. It is unacceptable.

Local people recognise the damage that closure of the ward will have on patient welfare and are once again uniting to make their concerns heard as we stand together to fight to put a stop to the proposed closure. There has been an overwhelming response from local people to the campaign, and as of today our petition has reached 5,500 signatures.

Last week, we were encouraged, in the face of such massive public opposition, as we were able to secure a much welcome but temporary victory: the trust announced that a final decision is to be postponed while it looks at whether the ward can be upgraded and improved to meet CQC standards, which means that it will now stay open and continue to admit patients over the summer. The vulnerable patients I met over the weekend continue to get treatment close to home. If we had not achieved this victory, they would already be being carted off to Barrow or Carlisle—far from home, and far from loved ones. News that new admissions will continue to be made throughout the summer is also welcome.

I am grateful to the trust for listening to our concerns and thinking again. I personally thank every single one of the thousands of local people involved in our campaign. Between us, we forced the trust to hold back on closure. I am especially grateful to volunteers from South Lakeland Mind, and to the local media outlets that have shown such strong support to the campaign. This is only a temporary reprieve for Kentmere ward, and our work is far from complete. My message to the people of South Lakeland is that this is the moment to step up our
environmental constraints on the unit. Kentmere is an information from the CQC that highlighted the May its decision to close Kentmere unit following Cumbria Partnership, the provider trust, announced in MP and to the best quality services.

There is no pressure here, then. I thank my Burt):

10.7 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): There is no pressure here, then. I thank my friend, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), for securing this debate and for his vigilance in raising such an important subject, which matters a great deal to his constituents. I put on record my appreciation for the work done by the NHS in Cumbria and I thank the staff for their hard work and commitment to patients. In doing so, I acknowledge what the hon. Gentleman said about the police. As we in the Chamber who know about these matters are aware, the police do a great deal of work in this area. The crisis care concordat, which was piloted by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), has made a considerable contribution to the way in which we look after those with mental health issues at times of crisis, and the police have been intimately involved. I fully accept what the hon. Gentleman has said about the amount of such work that the police in south Lakeland are involved in.

I am fond of South Lakeland. Bury Grammar School had a house at Helsington, near Briggate, which I am sure is in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency. I remember the place extremely well. It is a beautiful area, and its constituents are entitled both to good service from an MP and to the best quality services.

Let me turn immediately to the subject of the debate. Cumbria Partnership, the provider trust, announced in May its decision to close Kentmere unit following information from the CQC that highlighted the environmental constraints on the unit. Kentmere is an old mixed-sex unit with no access to outdoor space. The hon. Gentleman’s concerns and comments about the decision have been widely reported. As he knows, and despite what he said at the conclusion of his remarks, this is a matter for the local NHS. Neither I nor any other Minister have a role in the decisions that are taken. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who spoke forcefully about Bootham Park in York, also knows that well.

However, I understand, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, that the NHS now says that the unit will not close as announced and that decisions will depend on further work. It is, therefore, worth setting out the background and indicating the interest that I have in making sure that the best possible services are provided, while recognising that the old levers of Ministers and the NHS are not quite as they were.

Mental health services for Cumbria are commissioned by the NHS Cumbria clinical commissioning group. Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust is the provider of mental health services for patients in Cumbria. The CCG has been working on a new mental health strategy for Cumbria for some time. It is fair to say that one of the problems that the NHS, in common with other public services, faces in Cumbria is the geography. The largest towns are at the northern and southern ends of a region that covers a large area, and it is difficult to travel between the smaller towns because the roads are often slow. This means that the NHS has to make difficult decisions about where and how to provide services. To put it bluntly, everything cannot be available in every local community. While cost is a real factor, the main problem is maintaining quality. It is not about saving pennies; it is about making sure that the quality of service is high.

Like everyone else, NHS clinicians learn and improve through experience. Skills that are not being used will decline. Facilities seeing only a few patients tend to lack the patient throughput needed to ensure that services remain of high quality. The cost of employing staff is the main factor driving the cost of services, and providing services from a greater number of locations means that more staff are needed. There are only so many staff to go round. The NHS invariably finds that larger units do better in terms of patient outcomes, but the question is where those larger units should be located. Inevitably, decisions taken by the NHS will disappoint those areas not chosen.

NHS services in Cumbria overall—not just mental health services—are facing a range of challenges, and in many cases the reasons are the same. The northern part of the area is part of a success regime aimed at improving all patient services; the issues at the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust in recent years are well known. It is against this background that the NHS is considering what should happen at Kentmere and what is best for the hon. Gentleman’s constituents. Cumbria Partnership announced on 17 May that the Kentmere unit would close from the end of June 2016. At the same time, it was announced that the adjoining health-based place of safety would close at the end of May. The trust said that the decision was a result of quality and safety concerns raised by the Care Quality Commission. The CQC has inspected the unit in November 2015 and its report was published in March. However, the CQC says that the decision to close the ward and the health-based place of safety is not a necessary outcome
of the findings of the CQC inspection, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. In short, while it did identify problems, the CQC report did not recommend the closure of the unit.

The report clearly highlighted concerns about the ward environment, which it said placed service users at risk and did not support good care and treatment. Something does need to be done about those concerns. The unit, which treats men and women, does not meet minimum standards on single-sex accommodation and has poor access to outside space. As I understand it, one issue is that privacy for bathing and sleeping cannot be guaranteed on the mixed ward. That poses an obvious risk to patients.

On 25 May, the trust gave a reassurance that the closure would be temporary and that timescales for the closure would be reviewed. I now understand that, following discussions with the CQC and with commissioners, any decision on closure will be delayed to allow further exploration of what improvements can be made. More needs to be done, and I will say a bit about that later. It says here that the trust accepts it did not consider the needs right on the closure, and I think that hon. Members will probably agree strongly with that. Many hon. Members will be aware of similar experiences in other areas, and I think the NHS needs to think carefully about how it communicates with patients and the public, particularly when the news is not good. The facts need to be clearly set out, and it is important not to rush to announcements prematurely.

These circumstances reminded me of the closure last year of Bootham Park Hospital in York, in the constituency of the hon. Member for York Central. There are differences, in that the CQC recommended the closure of Bootham Park on patient safety grounds, which is not the case here. But the report produced on the closure by NHS England makes a number of observations about how difficult processes such as this need to be handled by the NHS. I have discussed this matter with the hon. Lady, and I would be happy to discuss these matters further with the hon. Gentleman if we get an opportunity to do so. These are difficult decisions to get right—safety considerations really matter and when things are identified as needing to be put right, they must be put right, but the question then becomes how to do it, on what timescale and what the options are. I will come to that in a moment. The difficulty of handling such decisions, and the way in which they have not been handled well at Bootham Park, reminds us of the importance of getting such decisions right. The report on Bootham Park, particularly in relation to owning and communicating decisions, has been made public, and I have placed a copy of the report in the Library.

As I have said, in relation to Kentmere ward, we have moved in the space of a few weeks from a permanent closure to a temporary closure, and then to the unit remaining open while more work is completed. The safety of patients has to be the primary concern, and we would be failing patients if the NHS continued to tolerate the risk to the quality and safety of care that the environment at Kentmere places on local services. Something needs to be done, and it is up to the local NHS to decide what that is, but I do not think it will do so on its own. That is where the hon. Gentleman and his friends come in.

The CCG recognises that mental health services in Cumbria need to improve and it has already involved service users, their families and carers on this project. Much of the work so far has shown, not surprisingly, that patients want better services closer to home in their local community. Later this year, NHS Cumbria CCG will therefore be consulting about the future configuration of adult in-patient mental health beds across Cumbria. That will ensure it has the right beds in the right place, with a sustainable service that the local NHS can staff for the future. The CCG has already said it will not support any permanent service change at Kentmere without full public consultation.

In preparation for this, the CCG is looking at the current configuration of adult in-patient mental health beds, benchmarking how it is managing mental health needs across Cumbria with other mental health providers and advising on areas where the NHS needs to develop services to meet future needs. The CCG also needs to make sure it has the right kind of beds in place—for example, facilities for children and young people, older adults and psychiatric intensive care beds.

Tim Farron: There is not much time left, and I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. I want to point out to him, first, that there is not a single tier 4 adolescent or child mental health bed in the whole of the county of Cumbria, and secondly, that the 12 beds on Kentmere ward are nearly always full and the majority of them are for people under a section, so there is no opportunity for community options. It is not the case that there is a lack of demand.

Alistair Burt: I take the hon. Gentleman’s point. I cannot be as au fait with the situation as him, but I fully understand the point in general. Whereas there is a tremendous move towards improving community services, which is important and vital in its own right, that cannot be a total substitute for the in-patient acute beds that are needed. I understand his point, and that is my view and the Department’s. Getting the right balance is important, but the one is not a cheap substitute for the other. Such services are an important component, because it is important that more is done in the community to keep people away from acute beds and make sure they do not need them, but I entirely take his point.

NHS Cumbria CCG is working with its providers—mainly the foundation trust, as well as clinicians, service users and carers—to help develop the model of care it will need in the future to deliver its vision of improved mental healthcare and sustainable services. I am told that public consultation will be carried out in line with best practice and the latest Government guidance. There will be sessions for stakeholders and the public to share their views, ideas and concerns in communities around the county. I spoke to health service chiefs this afternoon in preparation for this debate, so I know how seriously they take the point about the need for consultation, as well as that they recognise the communication difficulties in relation to how they have got to where they are and that they are open to such a consultation. I therefore urge the hon. Gentleman and his constituents to involve themselves fully in that consultation, which will shape whatever happens to Kentmere in the long term.

Tempting as it is to follow the hon. Gentleman’s suggestion that I should decide on the configuration of services, I am afraid that I cannot do so because that
would be outside my authority. I wish him, the hon. Member for York Central and other Members in the House good night and good luck.

*Question put and agreed to.*
Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Prisons: Population

1. Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the prison population. [905383]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): By making our prisons places of rehabilitation, we hope to reduce reoffending and thus, in due course, reduce the prison population.

Mr Carmichael: I am sure that that is an aspiration with which we can all agree.

The independent review established by the Prison Reform Trust and chaired by Lord Laming found that up to 50% of all young people in custody had been in care at some point in their lives. What plans has the Secretary of State to reduce the number of looked-after children who end up in custody?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman has made a characteristically acute point. A disproportionate number of those who find themselves in contact with the criminal justice system and subsequently in custody are children who have been in care. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is introducing a series of reforms to enhance the quality of social work and ensure that looked-after children are better cared for, but we in the Ministry of Justice also have a responsibility. We will shortly be publishing our conclusions on the review of youth justice by Charlie Taylor, which will say more about how we can help some of our most troubled young people.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): In 2002, there were only 46 Polish people in our prisons; today there are 983. Back then, there were only 50 prisoners from Romania; today there are 635. The same is true of many European Union countries, particularly those in eastern Europe.

If we want to reduce the prison population, would it not be a good idea to stop free movement of people—which has become rather more like free movement of criminals—into the United Kingdom, so that these criminals do not come into the UK in the first place before being sent to prison?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend has made a characteristically robust point. I am speaking from the Government Front Bench, and I must represent Government policy accurately, but I can remind Members that on 23 June people will have an opportunity to cast their votes, and pungent voices like that of my hon. Friend will, I am sure, weigh with them as they decide how to do so.

Mr Speaker: As opposed to shy shrinking violets like the right hon. Gentleman. I presume that that is what he had in mind; I was sort of reading between the lines.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) has a point. The prisoner transfer arrangement with EU countries has been painfully slow—only 95 have been transferred—and at the end of the year Poland’s derogation will cease. Has the Secretary of State begun the process of looking at what will happen after that?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. The Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee is right to remind us that prison transfer agreements have not always worked as they were originally envisaged, but my hon. Friend the prisons Minister has been working closely with the Home Office, and there are 50 Polish prisoners whom we hope to expedite when the derogation expires.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): While putting a figure on it may not be wise, does the Lord Chancellor agree that if his prison reform policy is successful, its ultimate conclusion must be far fewer people in prison and far better life chances?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, in two respects. It would be wrong to set an arbitrary target, but we intend to ensure that all our policies work—not just our policies relating to rehabilitation and prisons, but some of the broader policies that were touched on by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) in respect of young people. If all those policies work and the Government’s broader life chances agenda is implemented in full, we should reduce offending, and also ensure that our society is fairer and more socially just.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that one way of reducing the prison population would be to conduct a serious review of short-term sentencing? It provides no drug rehabilitation or educational programmes for prisoners who are shortly to be released, but simply sends them back into the system over and over again.

Michael Gove: There is evidence that some short sentences do not have the rehabilitative effect that we all want to see. We want to ensure that all those who are sent into custody by the courts—and we respect their right to decide what sentence is appropriate for a crime—receive the support that they need in order not to offend again.

Prisons: Education

2. Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve education in prisons. [905384]
8. Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): What steps is his Department taking to improve education in prisons.

Andrew Selous: Giving control of the education budget to the governors of HMP Garth and HMP Wymott and holding them to account for the outcomes, as well as the introduction of personal learning plans in a consistent digital format that follows the prisoner around the estate, will absolutely drive improvement.

11. Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps is his Department taking to improve education in prisons.

Andrew Selous: What plans are there to enhance the educational programmes at Garth and Wymott prisons in my constituency?

Seema Kennedy: What steps his Department is taking to improve education in prisons.

Andrew Selous: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): We want prisons to be places of rigorous education and high ambition. Dame Sally Coates’s review “Unlocking potential” was published last month, and we have accepted all its recommendations in principle. We will be giving control of education budgets to prison governors, so that they can choose their education providers and hold them to account for the service that they give.

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his answer. Does he agree that since 99% of criminals will eventually be released from prison, we can only cut crime and improve public safety if we better rehabilitate offenders in prison?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically perceptive point, and I think a large part of the answer is to encourage more employers to follow the example of Max Spielmann and Greggs, who have set up academies at HMPS New Hall and Drake Hall. Those academies provide work in prison and ongoing support after release, and if more employers did that with women in mind we would have more success in this area.

Lucy Frazer: The Coates review that the Minister referred to says that the employment prospects for those on short-term sentences are three times worse for women than for men, with only one in 10 women finding a job on release. What plans does he have to improve the prospects of employment for women?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want an unrelenting emphasis on rehabilitation. Reoffending has been too high for too long. That is why we are investing £1.3 billion over the next five years to transform the prison estate and give prisoners the help they need to turn their lives around.

Pauline Latham: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is often those who have struggled or dropped out of school and ended up in the criminal justice system whom we must ensure have the skills they need while in our care and afterwards?

Andrew Selous: Again, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Giving prisoners a second chance to learn to read, become more numerate and get the skills to hold down a job is central to rehabilitation.

Seema Kennedy: What plans are there to enhance the educational programmes at Garth and Wymott prisons in my constituency?
Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his characteristically gracious and thoughtful point. He might have heard me say a moment ago that we were bringing in a personal learning plan—the initials PLP—will mean something to Labour Members. It will be introduced in a consistent digital format that will follow prisoners as they move around the prison estate.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Hewell prison in Redditch would benefit from a Teach First-style scheme for graduates to ensure better prospects on release?

Andrew Selous: Yes, absolutely. That is one of a number of recommendations of the review by Dame Sally Coates. We are looking actively at how we can implement her inspirational vision, which did so much to transform the teaching profession.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will the Minister tell me when he intends to meet the new Minister for Justice in Northern Ireland and when they will have an opportunity to discuss a range of issues including the Open University’s distance learning programme, which is an important rehabilitation and educational tool for prisoners and the wider society in Northern Ireland?

Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I know that she takes an ongoing and serious interest in these issues. The Secretary of State tells me that he has already written to the new Northern Ireland Justice Minister and issued an invitation to her. We will learn from and co-operate as fully as possible with the prison service in Northern Ireland.

EU Membership: Human Rights

3. Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What assessment has he made of the potential effect on the protection of human rights of UK citizens of the UK leaving the EU?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): The Government’s assessment of fundamental rights is set out in their policy paper, “Rights and obligations of European Union membership”, which was published on 14 April.

Gavin Newlands: I thank the Minister for his answer, but his Secretary of State wants to leave the EU and the Home Secretary wants to leave the European convention on human rights, so should we take it that when this Government are finished, the UK will no longer be party to any international human rights treaties? Is that really the message that the UK Government want to send to the rest of the world?

Mr Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, but I think he probably knows by now that, in regard to the plans being worked up for the Bill of Rights, it is not the Government’s policy to withdraw from the convention. We have said that we cannot rule that out for ever and a day, but that is not our proposal now, and it is absolutely not the case that we would withdraw from a whole range of other international human rights treaties if we left the EU.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that if we stay in the European Union the real risk is that, rather than human rights policy being determined by this House and adjudicated on by British courts, it will be decided by the Brussels bureaucrats and the European Court of Justice, and that before we know it, prisoners will be given the right to vote?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend makes his powerful point in an eloquent way. There is a recognition across the House, on whichever side of the wider debate, that some of the laws that have come out of the EU have been damaging to civil liberties, whether involving the European arrest warrant and the injustice inflicted on my constituent Colin Dines, or the right to be forgotten, which has a muzzling effect on free speech. There are certainly areas of concern, on whichever side of the wider debate Members are.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Gender equality is recognised as a fundamental human right by the European Union, and a report from the TUC has identified 20 key areas in which European Union law has enhanced the rights of working women, often in the face of opposition from Tory Governments. How does the Minister propose to ensure that these hard-won employment rights are protected in the event of a Brexit?

Mr Raab: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for that, but I do not think that any of the factual assertions she has made are right. There is absolutely no plan such as that she suggests, and I do not support abolishing paternity rights; in fact, when I was a Back Bencher under the last Government and this point was raised, I was fully in favour of transferable parental leave. She is mistaken in what she says, but what is most striking is that the message she is sending to her constituents and the wider citizens of this country is that they should have no faith in her ability and that of the Scottish National party in this House to protect their rights.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): The convention was agreed in the 1950s. Britain joined the EU in the 70s and the Human Rights Act was agreed in the 90s. Twenty years on, does the Minister...
agree that it is important that we revisit all these papers, because rights were not invented by pieces of paper? Instead we should have a British Bill of Rights.

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend is right and makes an important point about the future direction of human rights laws in this country. We are party to the European convention on human rights, and that is a different and separate issue from the EU. Our regime is based around our membership of the European convention, and considerable legal uncertainty is created if the Luxembourg Court starts to interfere and create risks and wider uncertainty about which rules apply and how.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister may wish this was not the case, but in fact the EU has provided and protected employment and human rights for part-time workers and working parents, with paid holidays, maximum working hours, measures to tackle discrimination at work, and time off to care for sick children. Does he think that those rights are worth protecting? Or does he agree with the billionaire stockbroker who is funding the Brexit campaign, Peter Hargreaves, who thinks we should leave the EU because “we will be insecure again. And insecurity is fantastic”?

Mr Raab: It is thunder and lightning but it does not provide much clarity on the issue: the bottom line is that the hon. Gentleman has little faith in Labour fearsomely defending workers’ rights. Whichever side someone is on in this House or in this debate, they should want to uphold the right of this House to make those finely balanced decisions on employment regulation and make sure that they are tailored to the precise needs of this country, not those of bureaucrats and other vested interests in Brussels.

EU Prisoner Transfer Directive

4. Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): How many non-UK EU nationals (a) the UK has ever returned to prison in their own EU country under the EU prisoner transfer directive and (b) are in a UK prison. [905387]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): One hundred and two prisoners have so far been transferred from England and Wales under the EU prisoner transfer agreement. There were 4,111 EU nationals detained in prisons in England and Wales on 31 March 2016, with 2,967 serving an immediate custodial sentence. The transfer of prisoners from Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved authorities.

Mr Hollobone: I was expecting a low number but the number of EU transferees back to their country of origin is absolutely pathetic. With the number of EU nationals in our prisons approaching 40% of the foreign national prisoner population, is this not just another example of the European Union, through its directives, promising us the earth but, in effect, giving the British people the square root of naff all?

Andrew Selous: The main mechanism by which we get foreign national offenders out of our jails, which we are very keen to do, is the early removal system, which transfers out about 1,800 a year. The European prisoner transfer agreement is therefore in addition to the early release scheme, but it may be helpful to my hon. Friend if I give him the figures. The transfer agreement was implemented only in 2013, and we got 19 out in 2014, 38 out in 2015 and 29 out in 2016, to date, with a roughly similar number awaiting transfer.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Is the identity of prisoners who are returned to their countries of origin registered with UK Visas and Immigration, so that when they attempt re-entry to the UK they can be identified? Even if that were the case, is it right that we could not prevent their re-entry unless we were to leave the EU?

Andrew Selous: If a prisoner is deported, they are not allowed to return to the United Kingdom during the period of their sentence.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Is it not the case, as the former Chancellor and Justice Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), put it, that if we left the European Union we would go back to a system of prisoner transfer where we had absolutely no ability to deport anybody to their country of origin unless we could persuade the Government of that country to accept them? Why would we risk losing that progress?

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady is right in that if this country leaves the European Union, we will lose the compulsory prisoner transfer agreement that we currently have, and that will cause issues when it comes to trying to return the current EU prisoners in our prisons.

Jo Stevens: Does the Minister agree that rather than sniping from the sidelines on these issues, we should be playing our full part in co-ordinated international security frameworks such as the prisoner transfer agreement, the European arrest warrant, Europol—the body that leads judicial co-operation between member states—and the Schengen information system, as all of them ensure that our EU membership continues to help protect us against crime, terrorism and threats to our security—yet more reasons to vote to remain on 23 June? [Laughter.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not know what the source of merriment is among the little troika on the Back Benches—the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr Chope), for Shipley (Philip Davies) and for Bury North (Mr Nuttall), I do not know whether some sort of powder has been applied to them, but they are in a very happy state.

Andrew Selous: This Government want to see as many compulsory prisoner transfer agreements as possible, because it is hard work trying to transfer all foreign nationals, of whatever nationality, out of prisons in England and Wales. Therefore, all compulsory transfer arrangements are useful. Currently, we have them with all members of the European Union, with the exception of Ireland and Bulgaria.

Prison Reform

5. David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): What progress his Department has made on plans for reform prisons. [905388]
The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): In the debate on the Queen’s Speech, the Government announced the creation of six early adopter reform prisons. The governors of those prisons will have unprecedented freedom to run their prisons and find better ways to rehabilitate offenders.

David Mackintosh: Will my right hon. Friend tell me how we can improve the transition for prison leavers to employment and their access to benefits and housing?

Michael Gove: One thing we can do particularly effectively is ensure that prisons, whether reform prisons or others, have close and effective working relationships with the community rehabilitation companies that were instituted by my predecessor and are doing so much to ensure that all prisoners, whatever the length of their sentence, receive support on release.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Given that the Justice Secretary has already announced the six prisons that are to be reform prisons, but he has not yet announced the White Paper or indeed published the prison reform Bill, will he tell the House when he will do the latter, because at the moment he is putting the cart before the horse?

Michael Gove: It is important that we give the governors of these prisons as much freedom as possible. It is also important that they are able now to explore some of the additional freedoms operationally without the need for legislation. In the autumn, we hope to publish a White Paper and the legislation alongside it.

19. [905403] Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the additional funding allocated to reduce violence in prisons will be given to governors to make sure that it is spent on schemes that will have a real impact?

Michael Gove: It absolutely will. The effective team managing the National Offender Management Service under the superb public servant Michael Spurr has found an additional £10 million to help mitigate the effects of prisoner violence and to reduce violence overall. That money will go direct to the front line.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): One area of reform should be to stop pregnant women having to give birth in prison. I know that the Government are committed to that, but can we consider carrying out a pilot study so that women do not have to give birth in front of unnamed guards?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a vital point. We are looking at how female offenders are treated overall. One thing we need to do—I know that this is not a view universally held by all my hon. Friends on the Back Benches—is to think hard about how we can reduce the female population in prison, and treat women who are in custody more sensitively.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that reform prisons are an important part of a broader package of reform of penal and criminal justice policy, so that we not only make better use of the time of those who are in prison, but make sure that we reduce the total number of people going to prison by finding an effective and genuinely successful means of dealing with offending in the community?

Michael Gove: The Chairman of the Select Committee on Justice is absolutely right. In the same way that the creation of NHS foundation trusts was not the only aspect of reform of the national health service, and the creation of academy schools was not the only aspect of reform of the education system, the creation of reform prisons is not a change in isolation. It is part of a broader change to the criminal justice system, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right that part of that is diverting people from custody when appropriate.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): When developing reform prisons, will the Secretary of State take into account the experience of Feltham young offenders unit, which has become the first autism-accredited prison in the country? I led a cross-party visit by the all-party parliamentary group on autism to the prison yesterday, and saw how that was helping to reduce violence and assisting rehabilitation. Will the Secretary of State give me an assurance that each reform prison will work towards accreditation for autism and will eventually be able to achieve that accreditation before it begins to operate?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is a fantastic campaigner for individuals living with autism, and I will absolutely ensure that reform prisons and others learn from Feltham. A disproportionate number of people in custody live with various mental health and other problems, and many of them are on the autistic spectrum.

Mr Speaker: Well done.

Officials: Guidelines

6. Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department’s guidelines for officials of his Department who have moved to work in the private sector. [905389]

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): The Ministry of Justice and other Government Departments have clear rules and governance in place around the standards of conduct for current and former civil servants. All permanent civil servants are covered by the Cabinet Office guidelines on business appointment rules.

Andrew Gwynne: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, but he will know that in March The Mail on Sunday uncovered evidence of former MOJ civil servants boasting of their links to Government while working for private firms to secure multimillion-pound contracts, both in Britain and abroad. What investigations have been made into those allegations, and will the Minister make a commitment to the House to publish in full any findings by the review?

Mike Penning: There was an investigation after those reports in the press, but no impropriety was found. I am more than happy for the hon. Gentleman to meet my
officials in the Department. If I can publish the review, I will—I understand that it was an internal inquiry—and if I cannot do so, I will explain why. If not, meetings will take place.

Glen Parva

7. Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): What plans he has for the future of Her Majesty’s prison and young offenders institution of Glen Parva. [905391]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): From later this month, Her Majesty’s prison and young offender institution Glen Parva will begin to accommodate adult prisoners. This change supports our aim to use the existing estate as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Alberto Costa: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he tell me what the staff ratios are for young adults in Glen Parva, and what they are expected to be once adult prisoners come to the prison? If the answer is not readily available, will he give it to me in a letter by the end of next week?

Andrew Selous: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I do not have that specific information. I will certainly write to him with it.

Mr Speaker: And put it in the Library—well done.

Prisoner Release: Employment

9. Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): What progress his Department has made on ensuring that offenders find employment on release from prison. [905393]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): One part of my job that most inspires me is meeting businesses and trade bodies to talk about the benefits of employing offenders on release. Following the Prime Minister’s announcement of changes to recruitment practices for the civil service, I am keen to encourage other employers to “ban the box” when recruiting too. This fits alongside our work to implement the recommendations of the Coates review and our announcement of six reform prisons.

Mr Mak: I thank the Minister for his answer. The first Hampshire and Isle of Wight community rehabilitation company women’s centre opened in Havant in 2012, and part of its work involves helping to get women offenders into employment. Will the Minister join me in congratulating it on its work and will he support the continued employment of women offenders in the Havant area?

Andrew Selous: Yes, I am very pleased to be able to do exactly that. For that excellent centre to succeed, we need far more employers to step up to the plate and make a commitment to training and hiring ex-offenders.

Andrew Selous: Yes. I can tell the hon. Gentleman, who I know takes a serious interest in these issues, that there is a lot to be encouraged about. I am going around the country talking to employers, often taking them into prisons. I am particularly keen on the academy model, where employers come into prisons and train prisoners there. The prisoners then go out on day release to gain work experience in that business, and as they leave the prison gate they do so with a contract of employment and can go into work. That helps to secure their accommodation and to get their lives back on an even keel.

18. [905402] Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): One problem faced by ex-offenders is not having a secure home to go to once they are released from prison, and as a result they cannot get a job. What further steps can my hon. Friend take to ensure that people leaving prison are leaving for a secure home and can then seek proper employment?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is right to draw the link between accommodation and employment. If more prisoners were able to pay a deposit of perhaps the first month’s rent on leaving prison, that would help. By the same token, if we can get more offers of employment to prisoners as they come out, they will find it easier to secure accommodation.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): Between now and 2020 the European Union is investing over £9 billion in the UK on skills training and support for those at risk of social exclusion. One example is here in London at Brixton prison: the Bad Boys bakery project, which trains inmates to become bakers and find work when they are released. As the Justice Secretary believes in giving inmates a second chance and has talked about the importance of such schemes, will he use his loaf and encourage people to vote remain on 23 June?

Andrew Selous: Like the hon. Lady, I am a huge fan of schemes such as the Bad Boys bakery, which I have visited in Brixton. I can still remember the smell of the delicious lemon cake wafting out of the bakery when I visited it. More seriously, when we see the purpose and engagement of prisoners when they are given a real opportunity to do work in prison that offers the prospect of a job on release, they do engage, and we need to see a lot more of that.

Mr Speaker: Bad Boys bakers no doubt felt very privileged to be visited by the hon. Gentleman.

Human Rights Act


The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): We will bring forward our proposals for a British Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act. We have made good progress on the development of our plans, with input from practitioners, non-governmental organisations, academics and many others right across the UK. Our proposals will be announced in due course and we shall consult fully on them.
Catherine McKinnell: The Minister says that plans will be published in due course, but plans to repeal the Human Rights Act were announced in the Conservative manifestos in both 2010 and 2015 and in the Queen’s Speech in 2015 and 2016. Can he please explain why his Department has so far failed to publish any proposals or begin a consultation on those plans?

Mr Raab: I appreciate that the hon. Lady is eager to engage in a detailed, substantive debate on human rights. Distinguished people in the Opposition, from Lord Irvine through to the current shadow Justice Secretary, have talked about the defects in the Human Rights Act. They have made compelling points and we intend to act on them. I look forward to debating the matter with the hon. Lady in due course.

Lewes Prison

12. Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): What steps are being taken to improve safety and reduce violence at HM Prison Lewes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): Improving safety is a top priority and the governor at Her Majesty’s Prison Lewes has put plans in place to address safety issues, including the provision of additional training for staff to better support vulnerable prisoners. Nationally, a violence reduction taskforce has been created to support and challenge establishments with a high rate of violence. An additional £10 million has been allocated to those prisons facing the greatest safety challenges.

Maria Caulfield: I am sure the Minister has seen the recent independent report which highlights significant security issues not just for inmates, but for prison officers. Will he give his assurance that he will look at the findings in that report and at its recommendations?

Andrew Selous: Yes, I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance, and I believe that she is visiting the prison shortly. We will learn from every report. There is currently a police, coroner, and prisons and probation ombudsman report on a recent incident at HMP Lewes. We will learn from that, and we will continue to make improvements in this important area.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is not just Lewes prison that has problems with violence. I have a constituent in Frankland prison whose mother is in daily fear that she will one day get a phone call to say that her son has been murdered in prison. What will the Minister do to help prisoners who live in daily fear for their lives because of prisoner-on-prisoner violence, with the consequent anguish caused to their families?

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this issue. The Secretary of State has said very clearly that reducing violence in our prisons is our top operational priority, and he has recently allocated an additional £10 million to this. She will know that a lot of the violence is caused by terrible new psychoactive substances such as Spice and Black Mamba coming into prisons. We have now made them illegal, thanks to the work of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims on the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, and that is a help. We will shortly be rolling out world-leading testing, which will also make a difference. I draw a very clear link between the drugs and the violence.

Employment Tribunal Fees

13. Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on the review of the effect of the introduction of employment tribunal fees.

15. Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): When he expects the review of employment tribunal fees to be completed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): The review will report in due course, and it will assess how effective the introduction of employment tribunal fees has been in the achievement of the original objectives.

Dawn Butler: So we still await the official report from the Government, but it is obvious that tribunal fees have affected the number of cases being brought, especially by women. In 2013 there were 18,398; in 2015 there were just 6,423. Will the Minister elaborate on those figures? Will he also elaborate on the multiple cases brought by men? Were those men from the private sector or the public sector? Were they white-collar or blue-collar workers?

Mr Raab: The assessment will look at the impact on protected characteristics, including the ones the hon. Lady mentioned. It is only fair and reasonable that those using tribunals make some contribution to the cost where they are able to. It is not right that the whole bill for employment tribunals, which is about £71 million per year, should be picked up by taxpayers, so we are looking to strike the right balance. There is, of course, a system of fee remissions to protect vulnerable workers, and we have taken steps to raise awareness of that scheme. We have also taken steps to encourage voluntary conciliation, which is a good way of settling disputes away from the tense, stressful and costly environment of a courtroom.

Angela Crawley: I received assurances from the Government that the post-implementation review of tribunal fees would be published last year. We now find ourselves six months beyond that deadline, and we are still waiting. Evidence suggests that tribunal fees do act as a barrier to justice and that they are compounding pregnancy and maternity discrimination. While we wait for the Government to get a move on, women continue to be discriminated against daily. When will the Minister finally publish the post-implementation review and scrap tribunal fees completely?

Mr Raab: The hon. Lady makes some powerful points. We are going to publish the assessment shortly. It is also right to point out, though, that we are seeking to divert people away from costly and often acrimonious tribunal hearings. Fees are a part of that, as is pushing in the direction of conciliation. Although conciliation is not compulsory, I am sure she will be reassured to know that parties agree to participate in it in 75% of cases, and satisfaction levels are very high.
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Does the Minister agree that employment tribunal fees have played an important part in reducing the threat of litigation that hangs over businesses, particularly small businesses? Does he agree that they have also played an important part in the resurgence of our economy and job creation?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend has a lot of experience of this issue, and he is absolutely right to look at its dual impact, particularly on small businesses. However, it is also right to say that this is not a binary, zero-sum game, and we attach huge importance to the fact that early conciliation has been used by more than 80,000 litigants in the first year, with over 80% of those participating reporting that they were satisfied with the outcome.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I have met many constituents who say that they will not pursue their cases to tribunal because of the introduction of fees. Does that not suggest that the existence of the fees acts as a deterrent?

Mr Raab: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but we also have to factor in the proportion of those who have been diverted into conciliation. In resolving disputes like this, alternative dispute settlement will often be the best outcome for resolving the dispute, but also, in particular, for claimants who would otherwise struggle to bear the costs.

Bill of Rights

14. Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): When his Department plans to publish its consultation on a British Bill of Rights. [905398]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): As I have already said, we are giving it very serious consideration. The way to do so is through our proposed reforms, on which there will be a consultation in the not-too-distant future. That will ensure that premiums go down.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his answer. However, last week the Government amended the Investigatory Powers Bill to include a duty on public authorities to have regard to the requirements of the Human Rights Act. Does this mean that the Government’s plans to repeal the Human Rights Act have now been shelved?

Mr Raab: No, we are absolutely resolute about replacing the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights, and we are working on those proposals. The hon. Lady will not have to wait long to be able to engage on the substance rather than some of the scare stories flying around in the media.

Personal Injury Law

16. Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of planned changes to personal injury law and whiplash claims on access to justice. [905400]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shrialesh Vara): The Government remain concerned about the number and cost of whiplash claims, particularly their impact on insurance premiums, and have announced robust new measures to tackle the problem. We will consult on the detail in due course, and the consultation will be accompanied by a thorough impact assessment.

Mary Glindon: How does the Minister respond to my constituents who have genuine concerns about the evidence base for the proposed reforms, and believe that they are unjust and will not deliver the right and proper compensation for people who were injured through negligence?

Mr Vara: The Government’s proposed reforms will ensure that the current cost of 2 billion annually for whiplash claims should be reduced to £1 billion for the insurance industry. They will also ensure that the average person’s insurance premium should go down by up to £50.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): In the UK, 80% of road traffic accidents generate a whiplash claim; in France, 3% of road traffic accidents generate a whiplash claim. In the UK, whiplash claims are increasing as accidents decrease; in France, it is the other way round. Insurance premiums in the UK are 50% higher, meaning that many young people cannot afford insurance. Will the Government act to get this sorted out?

Mr Vara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. He is absolutely right to say that it is important, to benefit all our constituents, that we deal with this. The way to do so is through our proposed reforms, on which there will be a consultation in the not-too-distant future. That will ensure that premiums go down.

Stalking

20. Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What plans he has to review sentencing guidelines related to stalking offences. [905404]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): Sentencing guidelines are issued by the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales. I understand that it has plans to consider the stalking guidelines next year.

Richard Graham: The Minister has read the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and me on the case for extending the maximum sentences for stalking. He will also have heard Lily Allen say last week of her stalker, “You can put him behind bars but he’ll be out soon and waiting there for his victim.” What can be done to assess the case for extending the maximum sentence for a few very dangerous stalkers who severely damage the lives of their victims?

Mr Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, who makes his point in a particularly lyrical way. He knows that we are looking at a range of issues around sentencing. It is important that those are considered in the round to make sure that we better protect the public and improve reoffending levels. I read the excellent report produced by my hon. Friends on sentences for stalking, and we are giving it very serious consideration.
Topical Questions

T1. [905373] Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): A number of distinguished figures were recognised in Her Majesty’s birthday honours list at the weekend, but one of them I took particular pleasure in seeing recognised—Mr Elroy Palmer, who works for the St Giles Trust. He is an ex-offender who now devotes his time to helping young people to avoid crime and make constructive use of their lives. Last year, Elroy spoke at the Conservative party conference, where he received a standing ovation. His testimony, his experience and his example show what can be achieved if an individual in custody decides to change their life. His life has changed immeasurably for the better, and he has changed the lives of others immeasurably for the better as well.

Tom Elliott: I add my congratulations to those recognised in the honours list last week. Is there any requirement on Her Majesty’s Government under article 2 of the European convention on human rights to initiate a new coroner’s inquest if there is any potential state involvement and if a further inquest is requested by the family member of the deceased?

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue; he gave me notice that it was of concern to him and to many people in Northern Ireland. Our legislation provides that there must be an inquest in cases where there may have been state involvement in the death of any individual. In such cases, the coroner investigates not only who died, and where and when, but the broader circumstances of the death. This wider investigation ensures compliance with the European convention on human rights. There may be an inquiry, instead of an inquest, if the coroner’s investigation cannot ascertain all of those matters.

T2. [905374] Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Roughly 20% of prisoners have spent some time in care. I have met some young care leavers in my constituency and prison is often seen as an attractive option because it provides a roof over their heads and a hot meal each day. What measures are this Government taking to ensure that care leavers have better options in life than prison?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that very important issue. The Government have asked Sir Martin Narey to review residential care for looked-after children, and some of his recommendations will touch on the criminal justice system. The care and supervision of young offenders in custody is not good enough, which is why the Government have asked Charlie Taylor, a former chief executive of the National College for Teaching and Leadership, to lead a review of the whole of the youth justice system, and that final report will be out shortly.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): So far today we have asked the Secretary of State about the risks that Brexit poses to workers’ rights and human rights, to the European arrest warrant and the prisoner transfer directive, and even to his cherished prison reform programme, but we have had no answer from him on any of them. Are not the Government and the Opposition right to say that those who want to protect human rights, strengthen national security and make our country safer should vote remain on 23 June?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for speaking from the heart with such passion for the European Union. It is not a view that is universally shared, I have to say, by Labour voters, but I respect the way in which he put his case. I am speaking on behalf of the Government at this Dispatch Box, and the Government’s position is clear: some of us as Ministers have been given leave to depart from that position. I have done so outside this House, but I do not intend to dwell on the issue now.

Andy Slaughter: Let me have one more try. The Justice Secretary is right to recognise that human rights and our membership of the EU are linked; it is just that we think that that is a good thing, and he thinks that it is a bad thing. Is not the choice on Thursday week between working with our closest neighbours to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and his recipe for bleak isolationism, which has him, in the words of Lord Heseltine, marching “to the drum of Farage, Trump and Le Pen”?}

T5. [905378] Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): What support is, or will be, available to people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system?

Andrew Selous: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this extremely serious point. He may know that mental health provision in prisons is provided by NHS England and by local health boards in Wales, and that it is based on locally assessed need. All prisons have procedures in place to identify, manage and support people with such health needs. We are, however, keen to give governors increased freedoms and flexibilities to be able to respond to the needs of their populations, and we are actively talking to Ministers in the Department of Health about this issue.

T3. [905376] Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the prisons Minister simply confirm that, despite his recruitment efforts, there are still 7,000 fewer prison officers in post today than there were in May 2010? Will he simply say yes?
Andrew Selous: I do not deny what the right hon. Gentleman, a distinguished former prisons Minister, says. However, I repeat to the House that since 1 January 2015, we have appointed 2,830 extra prison officers, which is a net increase of 530 since the start of last year. I also point out that the average prison population in 2010 was 84,725, while, as of 3 June, it is 85,291, so it has in fact remained reasonably stable over the past six years.

T6. [905379] Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Hampshire’s new police and crime commissioner, Michael Lane, has put restorative justice at the heart of his agenda. Will the Minister join me in supporting that policy to ensure that victims of crime are never ignored in Havant or across Hampshire?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): As far as employment tribunals are concerned—as the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), said earlier—the review will be published shortly. It was very conscious of the part that restorative justice played in the campaign. Restorative justice is an important component of helping victims, but we must make sure that victims want to be part of it and that it is not forced on them in any way.

T4. [905377] Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): With regard to employment tribunals, does the Minister have any plans to include personal independence payments in the calculations for assessing eligibility?

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): This is the first opportunity that I have had on the Floor of the House to congratulate Michael on his election. There were excellent results in the PCC elections around the country, particularly in relation to turnout. I was very conscious of the part that restorative justice played in the campaign. Restorative justice is an important component of helping victims, but we must make sure that victims want to be part of it and that it is not forced on them in any way.

T8. [905381] Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): At Justice Questions in March, I raised serious concerns about the systematic failure of the Solicitors Regulation Authority in relation to a case in my constituency. From my experience of dealing with this case, it has become clear that the self-governing SRA needs reform both to improve accountability and to restore public confidence. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this issue so that, together, we can bring forward proposals to ensure solicitors are regulated properly and independently?

Mr Vara: My hon. Friend will appreciate that the Solicitors Regulation Authority is an independent body. If she wishes to have a meeting, I am certainly happy to arrange one.

T7. [905380] John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State be good enough to tell us, in the wake of the atrocity in Orlando, what steps he is taking to monitor and address homophobic hate crime against lesbian and gay people in this country?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I think everyone in this House will have been utterly disgusted by the atrocity perpetrated in Orlando. It is clear from the choice of target that the hate in that killer’s heart was a prejudice—a homophobic prejudice—that I think everyone in this House would want to denounce. For that reason, I think he is absolutely right to say that we, too, need to be vigilant.

Let me first pay tribute to everyone who attended the vigil in Old Compton Street last night to show our solidarity with the victims of this atrocity. Let me also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who has been leading work to ensure that we can both anticipate any threats to the LGBTQ community in this country and review not just the operational but the legislative requirements to keep people safe.

It is a critical part of being British that we celebrate the right of people to live and love in different ways. For that reason, I think all of us would want to send our condolences and sympathies to the victims and that all of us would want to say, as a House, that we stand resolutely behind the vital importance of recognising and celebrating difference in our society.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Earlier this month, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor expressed his frustration at our country’s inability to prevent the entry of foreign national criminals and even terror suspects. Can he tell the House how things will change when we leave the European Union?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): I think it is well known that the current test for denial of entry for people coming from the EU is that they must pose a serious, genuine and present threat, which has obviously created difficulties over the years.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Last week the Public Accounts Committee published a report on the criminal justice system. One of our conclusions was:

“The criminal justice system is not good enough at supporting victims and witnesses.”

We also cited the fact that only 55% of witnesses, many of whom are of course victims as well, say that they would go through the process again. Does the Secretary of State agree with our conclusion?

Michael Gove: Yes, I do. It has sometimes been the habit in the past for people to be greeted with a report from the National Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee and attempt to suggest that it is an exercise in—well, there have been criticisms in the past. I certainly do not criticise the PAC or the NAO. The report is a welcome wake-up call. My right hon. Friend the victims Minister will bring forward a Green Paper with details on how we can better help victims and witnesses, but there is much that we need to do to improve the criminal justice system, and our judiciary get it.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I, too, attended the all-party group on autism’s visit to Feltham and was inspired by what the governor and his team are doing. Will the prisons Minister consider using the
forthcoming prisons Bill to improve the life chances of the 5% of the prison population who are estimated to suffer with autism?

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for showing serious interest in the issue. I was pleased that he was able to go to Feltham yesterday. I am not sure that we need to legislate; we need to spread the good practice from Feltham across the prison system, and I hope that the reform prison governors will be in the lead in doing that.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On 19 April, the Secretary of State said in a statement:

“It is hard to overstate the degree to which the EU is a constraint on ministers’ ability to do the things they were elected to do”.

Given that being able to constrain this Tory Government can only be a very good thing for the people of this country, what did he have in mind?

Michael Gove: My view is that any Minister—Conservative, Labour or, who knows, Scottish National party in the future, perhaps as part of a coalition—should be accountable to the people of this country for the decisions that they make. When the European Court of Justice can rule in such a way that there is no recourse or appeal, our democracy is undermined. Our democracy is precious, and the European Court of Justice is no friend of it.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Next week the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will appoint a new British judge to replace Judge Paul Mahoney upon his retirement. Does the Lord Chancellor agree that that makes this an appropriate moment for us to recognise Judge Mahoney and thank him for his work, and to recognise the contribution that British judges and lawyers have made to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights throughout its existence?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Of course, the European convention on human rights was authored in large part by a British lawyer—a former Conservative Lord Chancellor, in fact. Whatever one thinks of the operations of the Court at different times, the rights contained in that convention are precious. I thank Judge Mahoney for his outstanding work, and I know that there are some brilliant lawyers who stand ready to replace him. I am sure that the Council of Europe will give careful thought, as ever, to ensuring that we have the right candidate in place to emulate Judge Mahoney’s outstanding work.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Constituents including the families of Jamie Still and of David and Dorothy Metcalf were dismayed after the report in the Telegraph that there would be an announcement on criminal driving in the Queen’s Speech turned out not to be correct. Will the Secretary of State give a clear assurance that the review will happen quickly and that we will finally get changes to give victims of criminal driving and their families better justice?

Mr Raab: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in this issue. Everything that we do on sentencing is informed by the need to protect the public and drive down reoffending. We will look at a range of proposals in due course with those twin objectives in mind, including the potential for prisoners to earn their release from custody. We are also looking at driving offences and, as with stalking, we will welcome any further ideas along the way.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The former Justice Secretary was warned that cuts in legal aid to domestic violence victims were “grossly unfair” and “harsh”. That is why the Court of Appeal shot them down. In response, the Government decided to do a survey, which had a very limited timeframe for being filled in. Do the Government think that that was a reasonable way to show that they take the situation seriously? Would it not be better to have a full, open, public and transparent consultation?

Mr Vara: I say very gently to the hon. Lady that she is completely misinformed and wrong. Following that court judgment, the Government increased the time period for the production of evidence from two years to five years, and have allowed financial abuse to be taken into account. What is more, having made those immediate changes to the system, we are now engaging with the relevant stakeholders to bring in a better system that will be satisfactory to all concerned.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Home Office has reportedly refused to disclose data on sexual violence towards detainees at Yarl’s Wood immigration removal centre because the information could damage the commercial interests of the company that runs the facility. Is the Minister able to assure the House that Ministry of Justice policy will not put profit before people in prisons?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady is understandably concerned about the fate of detainees. I stress that the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office work closely to ensure that detainees are well looked after. My understanding from the Home Secretary is that press reporting may have inadvertently led the hon. Lady to raise something that is not strictly the case. I will work with the Home Office in order to properly address her concerns.
Football Fan Violence: Euro 2016

12.36 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on the incidents of violence in Marseille over the weekend involving England fans at the Euro 2016 football tournament.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): As I told the House yesterday, the trouble that occurred in Marseille involving England supporters was deeply disturbing. Yesterday I also made it clear that co-ordinated groups of Russian supporters were responsible for instigating a good deal of the worst violence. I note that within the past hour UEFA has announced that Russia is subject to a suspended disqualification from the tournament. This Government’s priority now is to work with the French authorities to ensure that the events of the weekend are not repeated.

This morning I updated Cabinet colleagues on the full range of measures we are taking ahead of the match between England and Wales in Lens on Thursday. It had already been agreed with the French that an additional contingent of UK police spotters would be deployed to help identify troublemakers. The Foreign Office is advising supporters without tickets to avoid travelling to Lens and nearby Lille; it has drawn fans’ attention to the fact that Russia is playing Slovakia in Lille tomorrow afternoon and has said that English and Welsh supporters should be on their guard.

Stadium security is a significant concern following the breakdown of segregation in the Velodrome stadium. We are all acutely conscious of the dangers when crowd management inside a stadium goes wrong. Discussions are going on with the French police about reinforcing the stewarding operation in Lens on Thursday night.

The House will already be aware of the robust operation in place in this country to prevent known troublemakers subject to football banning orders from travelling to France before the start of the tournament, as a result of which almost 1,400 passports have been surrendered. Following the violence in Marseille, nine British nationals were arrested, six of whom have now been given custodial sentences for their involvement in that violence. We expect all to be subject to additional court proceedings on their return to the UK, to examine whether banning orders should be imposed.

I am deeply concerned at the very serious injuries suffered by some England supporters in Marseille. The Foreign Office has additional staff in France and is providing consular assistance to those who have been hurt and to their families.

I am confident that all the measures that we and the French are taking will help, but I conclude by echoing the England captain and manager, who have urged fans to stay out of trouble. As UEFA’s decision relating to the Russian team shows, the penalties for individuals and for the teams they support could be severe if there is more violence in the days ahead.

Andy Burnham: As the dust settles on a terrible weekend in Marseille, attention is turning to security around England’s next game. While England fans were certainly not blameless at the weekend, it is clear that they were the subject of extreme violence meted out by Russian supporters. Whatever the rights and wrongs, we cannot afford to see any repeat of that. I am sure we are all agreed on that, but there are real fears that there could be a repeat.

The chairman of the Football Association has raised serious concerns in a letter to UEFA. He identifies a number of major security lapses in the stadium on Saturday. He says that stewarding was poor and segregation insufficient, and that fireworks and flares were taken in and then let off. That is extraordinary, given the heightened sensitivity around the tournament. Greg Dyke also points to a situation where England and Russian fans may come face to face again tomorrow in Lille. The thousands of people from the three home nations who are out there to enjoy the football will now be worried about their safety. That is why we have brought this urgent question today.

With respect to the Home Secretary, she did not provide a full statement on these matters yesterday. Can she confirm today exactly how many police are being sent to France and what precisely they will be asked to do? She mentions football banning orders. In 2010, 3,174 football banning orders were in place. Now, that number is 2,181. Why has it dropped so significantly? She says that 1,400 passports were seized in advance of the tournament, but there are over 2,000 banning orders. What happened to the other 600 people whose passports have not been taken?

On stadium safety, will the Government today contact UEFA to reinforce the FA’s concerns at a very senior level? Will the Home Secretary ask UEFA to investigate claims that Russian ultras have links to the official Russian delegation?

On policing, it would appear that some tactics were heavy-handed and the indiscriminate use of tear gas added to the general sense of chaos. We accept the sensitivity of policing, but will there be any discussion with the French authorities on policing going forward? Will there be any discussions about managing particular flashpoints in Lille tomorrow and keeping supporters separate?

What is needed now more than anything is honesty and cool heads on all sides. Many England fans were clearly the victims of violent extremists and poor security, but it is not acceptable to march into someone else’s town singing provocative songs about the second world war and launching bottles at police. Ahead of Thursday and the rest of the tournament, all sides now need to take a look at themselves and resolve, from here on in, to make this the festival of football we all want it to be.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman raises a number of issues. I can assure him that we are in touch with a number of people. This morning I spoke to Assistant Chief Constable Roberts, the police lead on these matters. ACC Roberts was in fact in the middle of a meeting with French police and others, so I am not able to give the right hon. Gentleman the full results of that meeting. However, I will be able to speak on some of the measures being taken. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport spoke to the Russian Sports Minister after the events that took place in Marseille at the weekend. As I said yesterday, I have spoken with my French opposite number, Bernard Cazeneuve.
As I said, the police were meeting—I think they are still meeting as we speak—to consider what extra action will be taken around Lille and Lens. My understanding is that there is an expectation that there will be a greater police presence around the stadium, for security both outside and inside the stadium. The right hon. Gentleman asks how many police we have sent to France. We do not talk about numbers for operational reasons, but we are involved in a number of things: police spotters are trained to spot potential troublemakers; we are providing support on post-incident analysis of, for example, CCTV footage; and we are providing some investigative support. Whatever the French have asked for, we have been willing to provide. As I said, that goes for both police and British transport police.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the change in number of the approximately 2,000 people subject to a football banning order here and the nearly 1,400 who have had passports taken away. The answer to his question is that we have taken passports away from those who are passport holders; the others do not hold passports.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Clearly, the disgraceful scenes in France, in particular by Russian thugs, are to be condemned. What has my right hon. Friend done about assessing the position of Russia hosting the next World cup in 2018? The implications for the safety of England supporters, and of supporters from around the world, have to be considered. We all want to see the beautiful game played on the field, not thugs on the terraces ruining it.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our current focus must be on the immediacy of Euro 2016, but he is absolutely right that, following this event, we will need to look carefully at the next championship event, which, as he says, is due to be held in Russia. There will be concerns about that in view of what we have seen with the Russian supporters. As my hon. Friend says, and as I reiterated yesterday, any fans, whoever they support, who get involved in violence during these games are letting down not only themselves, but all the law-abiding fans who want to go and enjoy a good football tournament.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Of course we must take steps to protect fans from all the home nations from violence at the hands of others while they are abroad, but does the Home Secretary agree that we must also address the appalling behaviour of some of the English fans? In the 1970s, we had a serious problem with football hooliganism in Scotland. We managed to address it, and now the tartan army win awards for their good behaviour and their charitable work. Scotland may not have a world-class—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Listen to the hon. and learned Lady.

Joanna Cherry: Scotland may not have a world-class football team—yet—but we have world-class fans who know how to behave themselves, as it appears do the Welsh and the Northern Irish fans. My point is that the problem of recurring football hooliganism is not insoluble.

What is most worrying, however, is the undertow of racism to this football hooliganism, and if it is allowed to continue unchecked, English fans will not be welcome abroad. What is being done to address that? Finally, a senior politician in Marseille has demanded that the United Kingdom pay towards the cost of the clean-up operation after the trouble on the city’s streets. What steps will the Home Secretary take to ensure that these costs fall on the fans responsible and not on the British taxpayer?

Mrs May: I think that tone of the hon. and learned Lady’s remarks was somewhat unfortunate. Yes, as I indicated yesterday at Home Office questions—the hon. and learned Lady was in her place at the time—some England supporters were involved in the violence; and as I indicated just now in response to the urgent question, nine England supporters have been arrested and action is being taken against them by the French criminal justice system. Those people will be considered for banning orders when they return to the United Kingdom. Football hooliganism can erupt anywhere with any group of fans. We have experience here in the UK of dealing with football hooliganism in the past. Arrangements, including banning orders, are in place, and they do work well, but we are, of course, ever-vigilant and will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the law-abiding fans who wish to enjoy football are able to do so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): English football hooligans who take part in such violence bring shame on our country. It would appear in this case that the bulk of the responsibility lies with some really nasty Russian football hooligans. Anyone who takes part in violence needs to take responsibility for it. Frankly, the French have enough to worry about with the terrorist threat to this football tournament, and this is the very worst time to have to get involved in other issues. Will my right hon. Friend redouble her efforts to make sure that the French have all the intelligence they need to weed out the few troublemakers who are catching the headlines?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are working with the French authorities to ensure that they have as much information as possible about the individuals who might be troublemakers. Given our expertise with police spotters, greater numbers of them will be in France for the match on Thursday, so that they can provide exactly that support to the French authorities.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I see in his place the record-setting, long-serving Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. I call Mr Keith Vaz.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is ludicrous to believe that politicians, Ministers or shadow Ministers can control what supporters do at a football match. However, it is a worry, given that more matches are to be played, that flares and other weapons were being taken into stadiums at a time when France is on such a high state of alert. Interpol is 200 miles away from Marseille. What action is being taken to flag up
the names and the photographs of those involved with Interpol so that we can ensure that these people cannot travel across borders in the future?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman mentions stadium security and flares being taken in, and we are discussing with the French police what further steps they can take on security both at and inside the stadium on Thursday. The UK police are working with the French, and with the Russian and Slovakian police—the match on Wednesday will be Russia versus Slovakia in Lille—to ensure that every action is taken to identify and act against troublemakers. Action has been taken against England fans, and there are also some reports about the French authorities taking action against some Russian fans.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The French authorities, police and armed forces have had to face the horrors of the Charlie Hebdou and Paris attacks in recent months, so does the Home Secretary agree that no matter what the provocation from Russian thugs, it is behoven on English football fans to show restraint and respect to the French authorities?

Mrs May: Yes, and we should give that clear message to the England fans. As I said, the England captain and manager have urged and encouraged fans to go and enjoy the football, to show respect for the authorities, and not to get involved in violence or hooliganism.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I was at the match on Saturday in Marseille, and the scenes that we saw in the stadium were of a sort that we thought we had left behind 30 years ago. It was an appalling, co-ordinated and violent assault on England fans by the Russian fans, and it was very worrying. It is clear that the French police were entirely focused on preventing terrorism, and they had no real strategy for preventing hooliganism. By taking responsibility for running the tournament at this time, the police have a responsibility to keep fans safe. How will the Home Secretary ensure that the French police—who were non-existent three minutes after the attacks had started—police all aspects of the tournament, including hooliganism and violence, and are not just looking at terrorism?

Mrs May: UEFA’s rules about police presence in the stadium are different from the rules that we tend to operate in the United Kingdom, where we do have a police presence in the stadium, but those sorts of discussions are currently taking place at an operational level. I have spoken to Assistant Chief Constable Roberts, who is leading UK policing involvement. The police are sitting down and discussing with the various authorities how much policing can be put into the stadium, and what action can be taken for security outside the stadium for those who are entering it, as well as those inside.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will join me in commending the Wales fans whose conduct at Bordeaux was widely praised in the French press. She has mentioned the measures that she is putting in place, together with her French colleagues, in anticipation of the match at Lens. Given that that will be the first encounter between two British teams, does she share my concern that it may prove to be a possible target for an external terrorist threat, and are the security services bearing that in mind?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend will be reassured to know that the Secretary of State for Wales spoke to the Football Association of Wales yesterday about those matters, and we are working with authorities from all the home nations involved in this tournament. The security and terrorist threat for France remains critical, as it has been for some time, but I assure my right hon. Friend and the House that law enforcement and security services in the UK are working closely with their French counterparts on the terrorist threat that we all face.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary share the conviction that football—the beautiful game—can often be a force for good, and that most football fans, both here and abroad, are there to enjoy the game? What will she do in the coming days and months to spread that message, and what conversations will she have with the FA, and others, to ensure that those who come in peace outnumber and out-voice those who come to do violence?

Mrs May: I share the hon. Lady’s comments about football, and as president of the Wargrave Girls football club I see the effect of football on young people, and the excitement, interest and benefits that it can give. On a more serious note, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will be in touch with football authorities in the United Kingdom, and we must make it clear that people should be enjoying this sport. People should not feel fear when they go to a game; they should know that they are going to enjoy it, and come away having done so and feeling better for it.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Banning orders have been effective in the past, but they have tended to be imposed for domestic incidents, rather than those that have taken place abroad. Will the Home Secretary assure the House that every effort will be made to identify troublemakers abroad so that, whether or not they have been arrested, banning orders can be imposed and we will not have problems from those people in the future?

Mrs May: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. When people are identified, consideration will be given to taking action through banning orders. It is possible to give banning orders for violence that has occurred outside the UK.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The appalling violence must be condemned, whoever perpetrates it and wherever it comes from. I am sure that the Home Secretary will agree that fans from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and indeed the Irish Republic who have behaved in an exemplary way deserve praise, and that they are the vast bulk of fans. Our thoughts are with the family of a fan from Northern Ireland, Darren Rodgers, who was killed in an accident in Nice, and I am sure that the good wishes of the whole House go to his family at this sad time. Will the Home Secretary impress on the French authorities and UEFA the lessons that they need to learn about the events of last week?
Mrs May: I echo the right hon. Gentleman’s comments, and the House sends its condolences to the family of Darren Rodgers. That was a terrible accident to happen in any circumstances, but for someone who was going there to enjoy watching the football, it is an appalling tragedy for his family.

We are speaking to the French authorities about how matches can be policed, but the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that the vast majority of fans are law-abiding and go to enjoy the game and have a good time. We should praise them when they do so, and I encourage all fans from England, Wales and Northern Ireland to carry on doing that and to ensure that we have a tournament of which everybody is proud.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Following the great success of last year’s rugby world cup, will my right hon. Friend commission a study into what is causing the distinction in behaviour between some who support association football and those who support rugby football?

Mrs May: A lot of work has been done on football hooliganism over the years, and our UK police are very good at managing football matches so that people of all ages are able to go and enjoy them.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): On Thursday we will see the historic fixture between England and Wales at Euro 2016, featuring the best player in the tournament, Cardiff’s own Gareth Bale. Does the Home Secretary agree that the best antidote to what happened last weekend would be a brilliant game on Thursday, and a peaceful crowd throughout the game?

Mrs May: I will not comment on individual players, but I entirely echo what the hon. Lady says about the best antidote to what happened last Saturday being a peaceful and excellent game that everybody can enjoy.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I understand the sanctions that UEFA is levelling against the Russians—a suspended disqualification and a fine—apply only to incidents that happened within the ground, because that is the extent of its jurisdiction. Does the Home Secretary agree that the best antidote to what happened last weekend would be a brilliant game on Thursday, and a peaceful crowd throughout the game?

Mrs May: I think that the hon. Lady’s understanding of the situation is correct. These are, of course, UEFA rules, and it is not a matter for the Government to set those rules, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has heard her question.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) asked a very relevant question about the next World cup, which will take place in Russia. Will the Home Secretary ask UEFA and FIFA to investigate the alleged links between the Russian football authorities and extreme groups? Will she also ask FIFA to investigate the ability and willingness of the football and political authorities in Russia to offer a safe and secure environment to law-abiding fans who want to travel to the World cup, especially in view of the amount of racism and homophobia that exists in sections of that country?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman raises a number of concerns relating to the tournament in Russia. As I said earlier, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has been in touch with the sport Ministers in Russia. I think that our immediate focus must be on the tournament in France, but I am sure that when that tournament is over, people looking ahead to the tournament in Russia will want to raise many issues, some of which will be for Governments and others for the football authorities.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): Before our friends from Scotland get too carried away, may I gently remind them that there was a riot at the end of the Scottish football final on 21 May?

I want to make a serious point about how we can prevent racism and do the necessary work on the ground. For the past two decades, groups such as Show Racism the Red Card have played a tremendous part in that anti-racist work, going into schools and encouraging young people to get involved in it. Sadly, however, as a result of Government decisions, funding for such groups has been cut both by local authorities and the Department for Communities and Local Government. May I encourage the Home Secretary and other Ministers who are here today to consider restoring that support? Getting to our children first is what will end this curse.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the significant work that has been done over the years to stop racism in football. Sadly, the job is not complete; the work must continue, and the Government and football authorities take that seriously. However, the issue is wider than racism. Before the Olympics I was involved in discussions with a number of sports authorities, including the Football Association, about homophobia at sporting events. We should all take those issues seriously and work at every level to try to cut all that out.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Any football fan who goes to a match intending to commit or initiate violence is clearly criminal and must be subject to the full force of the law. However, what we witnessed in the stadium were innocent people suffering unprovoked assaults, having to flee for their lives and risking serious injury. Will the Home Secretary ensure that the fact that those fans were wearing football shirts will not prevent them from receiving the Government’s full support so that they can seek justice against their perpetrators like people in any other walk of life?

Mrs May: Obviously the investigation of any incidents that have taken place will be primarily a matter for the French authorities. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that consular support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is available to all those people.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I was lucky enough to be part of the 25,000-strong sea of red in Bordeaux at the weekend who witnessed Wales’s victory over Slovakia, which leaves us top of the group—[Interruption]—ahead of England. However, there is...
I have indicated that there are issues to be addressed in behave. I think that it was an utterly appalling statement. by Russian fans against England fans, or to express any expect anyone to support the violence that was perpetrated that we would expect to hear from anyone. I would not remarks, which were utterly irresponsible and not remarks

Mrs May: You will have noticed, Mr Speaker, that I am trying to avoid commenting on any results of matches that have taken place.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we are paying attention to the policing of all the matches that involve home nations. Police from Wales, England and Northern Ireland are in France, and Assistant Chief Constable Roberts is working with all the police and the French authorities on behalf of every home nation.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Following the Home Secretary’s answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), may I ask her whether she has read the remarks of Mr Igor Lebedev, a Member of the Russian Parliament who is also a member of the executive of the Football Union of Russia? He has actually said, “Well done, lads—keep it up,” to those thugs and hooligans. Given that he is a member of the so-called—apologies—Liberal Democratic party, which is a fascist party in Russia, does that not indicate that there is a wider political problem that calls into question whether Russia should host the World cup?

Mrs May: I have seen a newspaper report of those remarks, which were utterly irresponsible and not remarks that we would expect to hear from anyone. I would not expect anyone to support the violence that was perpetrated by Russian fans against England fans, or to express any belief that that was in any respect the right way to behave. I think that it was an utterly appalling statement. I have indicated that there are issues to be addressed in the future in relation to football in Russia, given everything that has been seen.

Mr Speaker: He sounds a very bigoted fellow indeed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Russian fans were high on body-building medication, covered in tattoos and spoiling for a fight, encouraged—as we heard from the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes)—by some Russian Members of Parliament. What will be done to protect British fans—indeed, all fans—from these Russian thugs?

Mrs May: Every effort is being made to work with the French authorities to ensure that if any extra action is necessary to protect fans from any of the home nations against the thugs who have been perpetrating this violence, that action is taken.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I was in Bordeaux over the weekend. I hope that the Home Secretary will join me in congratulating the Welsh fans on their fantastic behaviour, which she did not do earlier. However, as a seasoned supporter, I am, like the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), genuinely concerned about what will happen in the next 48 hours, when Welsh fans find themselves in a toxic cocktail consisting of a small minority of Russian and English football hooligans. The Welsh FA has advised fans not to travel to Lens without a ticket and not to stay in Lille, as have the UK Government. Will the Home Secretary call on the English FA to make a similar statement and to start taking responsibility for the actions of a small minority of its supporters?

Mrs May: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) and others in praising those Welsh fans who behaved perfectly properly at the opening match in which Wales was involved. I am also happy to praise the English and Northern Irish fans who behaved perfectly properly at their matches. Unfortunately, as we know, a number of Russian supporters instigated and were involved in violence, along with—sadly—a small number of English supporters. I think that we should send the clear message that has already been sent by the England captain and manager: we want fans—all fans—to behave properly, and not to become involved in any violence whatsoever.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Like hundreds of thousands of other people, my family and I have just renewed our season tickets for our hometown clubs, but none of us fancy the prospect of sitting next to anyone who was tried and convicted of violence in France during the next season. Does the Home Secretary agree that clubs themselves should revoke, without recompense, the season tickets of any fans who are found to have been tried and convicted?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman tempts me down a route for which neither I nor any other Minister has responsibility. It is up to football clubs themselves to choose what action to take. What is important is that where we, as a Government, can take action in relation to the banning orders, that action is taken, as it has been and will continue to be.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It has not been lost on us that, as the police deal with the mammoth task of securing the Euros, there was an IS-claimed terror attack yesterday in Paris, resulting in the loss of two lives. As we send our police from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, from England and from Wales, we reduce the burden on the French authorities and, indeed, keep our fans safe. Can the Home Secretary tell us whether the Russian authorities have been as positive, proactive and productive in continuing to check on their fans as we have?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is right: an attack did take place, which has been claimed as Daesh-related, and I understand the French Interior Minister and indeed President have described it as such. Obviously, the full details of that attack are yet to emerge, but it is important that we allow the French authorities to undertake the work that they need to do to keep fans safe, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that from the conversation I have had with ACC Roberts, it is clear the Russian police who are present in France are also working with the French authorities and the UK police on this matter.
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But it is not just Russian Members of Parliament who are acting irresponsibly; so, too, are sections of the Russian media. Is the Home Secretary aware that the Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid says that Russia is now the clear favourite to win the “alternative Euros” and has published a glossary of hooligan terms for the uninitiated? Is that not reprehensible? What discussions is she having with the Russian authorities to condemn those actions, and what conversations are the Government having with FIFA in respect of Russia hosting the next World cup?

Mrs May: I made it a rule fairly early on in my life never to read Pravda.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I would like to add my condolences to the family of Darren Rodgers, the Northern Ireland supporter who died, tragically, in France. I also pay tribute to those fans who have gone from the United Kingdom, whether England, Wales or Northern Ireland—and, indeed, fans from the Republic of Ireland—and have behaved well.

Have the Home Secretary, or the forces and authorities, identified any short-term measures that could be put in place over this next week and 10 days to try to address and reduce the violence taking place in France?

Mrs May: Work is being done with the French authorities to look at the policing of future matches, with a particular focus, obviously, on the match in Lille and, from our point of view, the England-Wales game in Lens on Thursday. The authorities and police here will also be taking every action necessary. If there are fans who return to the UK who have been involved in violence and could be subject to banning orders, the police will take action against them.

Wales Bill

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 2015-16, on Pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Wales Bill, HC 449, and the Government response, HC 280.]

Second Reading

1.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

We are here today to debate the Wales Bill—legislation of fundamental importance to the future governance of Wales and its role within the United Kingdom. It will empower the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government to deliver the things that really matter: the economy, the environment and essential public services. I want to thank stakeholders, including the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), and the Assembly’s Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, for their work on the draft Bill, and those, including the Welsh Government, for the way they have responded to the publication of the Bill. I am committed to continue working with all those stakeholders and others as the Bill progresses through Parliament.

I would first like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) and for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) who each worked tirelessly to put Welsh devolution on a stable footing for the long term, and who have all played a major part in the development of this Bill. Following the resounding yes vote in the March 2011 referendum on full lawmaking powers for the National Assembly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West then took forward the Wales Act 2014 to implement recommendations in that report, devolving tax-varying powers to the Assembly for the first time, and establishing an important principle.

The Silk commission published its second report, on the Assembly’s legislative powers, in March 2014, from which my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire established the St David’s day process seeking political consensus on what could be taken forward. This culminated in the St David’s day agreement published in February 2015, which forms the blueprint for the Bill before us today.

I have also considered the Smith commission’s proposals, and in turn the Scotland Act 2016, to include the elements that work for Wales.

In preparing this Bill I have been guided by two underpinning principles: clarity and accountability.
Kevin Brennan  (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of clarity, will the Secretary of State make it absolutely clear to the House whether the Bill as it now stands would permit the Assembly to introduce compulsory voting in Welsh Assembly elections?

Alun Cairns: I am happy to give that clarification. Matters of elections, which I will come to in further detail, will be devolved, subject to a two-thirds majority. That includes the franchise for the Assembly elections and the constituencies and a whole range of other areas.

[Interuption. ] I will happily respond to those points when I get to that part in my speech a little later.

I was guided by the principle of clarity because the new reserved powers model of devolution draws a well-defined boundary between what is reserved and what is devolved, clarifying who is responsible for what. It is also a major step in extending powers. It will end the squabbles over powers between Cardiff Bay and Westminster, enabling the Welsh Government to get on with the job of improving the economy, securing jobs and improving devolved public services.

The second principle is accountability. The Bill paves the way to introduce Welsh rates of income tax. It will make the Welsh Government accountable to people in Wales for raising more of the money they spend. This, again, is a major step in the Assembly’s maturity.

Hywel Williams  (Arfon) (PC): Will the Secretary of State concede that a third possible point of principle would be proper subsidiarity, and if so, does he believe this Bill meets that requirement?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I hope we can cover some of those points later in the debate, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, much will depend on what you determine and interpret as subsidiarity.

Mr David Hanson  (Delyn) (Lab): The Secretary of State just mentioned Welsh income tax rates. What guarantees is he going to give the House with regard to the Welsh block grant to the National Assembly for Wales over the duration of this Parliament, which is all he can speak for? My worry is that he will cut the block grant and expect the people of Wales to make up the difference from higher income tax rates.

Alun Cairns: The right hon. Gentleman will recognise the funding floor introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which was a clear commitment and promise delivered by the Government. Of course, the Barnett adjustments need to be considered, and discussions between the Welsh Government and the Treasury and my officials are ongoing. We would like to see progress on those matters as the Bill is scrutinised throughout the parliamentary process. Both Administrations are determined to find a transparent way that will rightly serve the people of Wales and the Welsh and UK taxpayer.

Jonathan Edwards  (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I wish to draw the Secretary of State’s attention to the comments of his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland on the Scotland Act:

“This is a truly significant day for Scotland. If this Bill completes its parliamentary progress, it will add to the already extensive responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament a range of important new powers. It provides even greater opportunities for the Scottish Government to tailor and deliver Scottish solutions to Scottish issues.”—[Official Report, 23 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 1683. ]

Was the Secretary of State for Scotland right, and if so, why has the Secretary of State for Wales brought forward a Bill that pales into insignificance when compared with the Bill given to the people of Scotland?

Alun Cairns: I am somewhat disappointed by the tone the hon. Gentleman is taking. We have developed the Bill through consensus. We have responded to the comments that were made following the publication of the draft Bill, and before that we had the St David’s day agreement, in which his party was an active participant. We have sought to develop political consensus, but ultimately we do not have a uniform approach to devolution. What is right for Scotland is not necessarily right for Northern Ireland or for Wales. Clearly we have different circumstances and needs, and we should respond to those needs by developing appropriate Bills. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will actively participate and seek to improve the Bill through the parliamentary process; I am determined to achieve a Bill that all Members of the House will be at best satisfied with.

Carolyn Harris  (Swansea East) (Lab): In February, the Secretary of State’s predecessor said:

“A lot of the criticism of the draft Bill has been ill-informed or just plain wrong.”

Given that the Government have accepted most of the criticism and amended the Bill, does the Secretary of State agree that his predecessor was wrong?

Alun Cairns: It is right to say that part of the criticism was certainly ill informed and will have been wrong, but that does not necessarily mean that all the other elements of the scrutiny were wrong. One of the purposes of publishing a draft Bill was to encourage active scrutiny by the Welsh Affairs Committee, of which the hon. Lady is an active member. We are grateful for her input and that of the Committee.

We have made a commitment to put in place a clearer, stronger and fairer devolution settlement for Wales, and that is exactly what the Bill does. The St David’s day process established “Powers for a Purpose”—that is, powers that can make a real, practical difference to the lives of the people in Wales. Among the many powers devolved in the Bill are those that will enable the Assembly to decide the speed limits on Welsh roads; how taxis and buses in Wales should be regulated; whether fracking should take place and, if so, how it should be regulated; and how planning consent is given for all but the most strategic energy projects.

Paul Flynn  (Newport West) (Lab): The Bill contains welcome new powers for the Assembly on energy projects, but they are limited to projects that are smaller than 350 MW, and there are very few of those. Why can the powers not be extended to much larger projects?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his long-standing interest in these matters. I would point out that 350 MW is quite a significant capacity. I would also remind him that the basis for this proposal was a recommendation from the Silk commission.

Mr David Jones  (Clwyd West) (Con): Further to that point, though, does my right hon. Friend agree that in respect of wind generation, the Assembly’s powers will now be unlimited?
Alun Cairns: The powers in the Bill will be limited to a capacity of 350 MW, as I have stated. There can be no doubt as to the extent to which the Assembly has matured over the 17 years since it was established. That maturity is reflected in the development of the institution into a confident law-making legislature. In recognition of this, the Bill enshrines the Assembly and the Welsh Government as permanent parts of the United Kingdom’s constitutional fabric for the first time. It also makes a commitment that Parliament will not normally legislate on devolved matters without the Assembly’s consent.

Hywel Williams: The Secretary of State referred a moment ago to some of the new powers, but of course some powers are not going to be devolved. Could he explain the principle behind choosing which powers to devolve and which to retain? For example, why is water to be retained here while sewerage goes down to Cardiff?

Alun Cairns: I will talk about the devolution of powers relating to water a bit later on. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that an intergovernmental working group has been established and that it is considering the implications of the in-principle decision that has been taken on devolved water. I will happily comment in further detail when I reach that part of my speech.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend mentioned what will effectively be the incorporation of the Sewel convention in statute, for the first time so far as Wales is concerned. Clause 2 of the Bill states: “it is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Assembly.”

If the United Kingdom Parliament were to legislate for such matters and there were to be a challenge from the Welsh Government as to whether that was “normal”, how would that matter be adjudicated?

Alun Cairns: The basis of this clause has been drawn from the Scotland Act. It would be a matter for the courts to judge in such a situation, but this underlines the principle that Parliament is sovereign in these matters, although we will absolutely respect the rights of the Assembly. That is why we have included a clause stating that we will not “normally” legislate on devolved areas.

The debate on the draft Bill, which was published for pre-legislative scrutiny last autumn, was dominated by justice issues. In particular, it focused on something that was labelled the necessity test, and the inclusion of the test led to calls for a separate jurisdiction. I have listened to those concerns, and this Bill has moved a long way from the draft version and is by general consensus more suitable. The necessity test was believed to set too high a hurdle for devolved purposes. As a consequence, many of the arguments for a separate legal jurisdiction for Wales should have fallen away.

However, I recognise the validity of some of the points raised during pre-legislative scrutiny about the existence of Welsh law. The Bill formally recognises for the first time that a body of Welsh law made by the Assembly and Welsh Ministers forms part of the law of England and Wales within the England and Wales jurisdiction. The recognition of Welsh law needs distinct arrangements. As a result, I have been working with my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary to establish an officials-led working group to look at how those administrative arrangements should be improved. The group includes representatives from the Judicial Office and the Welsh Government, and it will take forward its work in parallel with the progress of the Bill through this House and the other place.

The single jurisdiction can readily accommodate a growing body of Welsh law without the need for separation. There are many reasons why a separate jurisdiction would be to the detriment of Wales. As well as the unnecessary upheaval and cost of such a change, the economic and commercial interdependence of the legal profession on both sides of the border means that separation would undermine the success of one of Wales’s fastest growing sectors—the legal profession.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the working group be looking at the justice impact assessments mentioned in the Bill, and will it present its report before we have our final vote on the Bill on Third Reading?

Alun Cairns: The terms of reference for the working group have been published, and I would expect it to report in the autumn. The justice impact assessment is a matter for the Assembly and for scrutiny by Assembly Members. The principle of having a justice impact assessment is fundamental to proper scrutiny of any mature legislature. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, we might be able to debate that when I get to that element—as I am about to do now.

Some Members, such as the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), have asked me about the requirement in the Bill for justice impact assessments to accompany Assembly Bills, and I would like to take this opportunity to clarify its purpose a little further. It is only natural for a mature legislature to consider the consequences of its own legislation. The impacts of Assembly Bills are assessed against a range of matters, including, quite rightly, the Welsh language and equalities, but no formal assessment is made of their potential impacts on the justice system, which is vital for its laws to be enforced properly. It is simply common sense that any such matters are considered and such an assessment is made, to help with the efficient delivery of justice services.

The Government committed in the St David’s day agreement to implementing—

Jonathan Edwards: This is the key point in relation to these new impacts. Who is going to be making the assessments? I take it that the Minister’s view is that that is a matter for the Welsh Government, but would those assessments at any point lead to a trigger whereby the Ministry of Justice could object to Welsh legislation?

Alun Cairns: It is a matter for Assembly Members, and the requirement is that the Standing Orders include a request for a justice impact assessment. No, there will be no veto arising out of the justice impact assessment. Let me give the hon. Gentleman a practical example.

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 has supporting documents in excess of 30 pages, with 15 lines talking about the justice implications or the consequence thereafter.
The principle we are requesting is that full, proper consideration be given to the justice consequences that arise thereafter. That is mature scrutiny, and I pay tribute to the way in which the First Minister responded to the question on the Floor of the Assembly some weeks ago. Rather than a general accommodation with the Standing Orders, we are talking about a specific request for a justice impact assessment.

The Government committed in the St David’s day agreement to implement a clear devolution boundary for Wales. The reserved powers model at the heart of the Bill will make the Welsh devolution settlement clearer by drawing a well-defined boundary between what is reserved and what is devolved. Anything not specifically reserved is devolved to the Assembly and the Welsh Ministers—it does not get clearer than that! The Bill’s pre-legislative scrutiny prompted a wide-ranging discussion on what the future shape and structure of Welsh devolution should be. The list of reservations included in the draft Bill was criticised as being too long. We have listened, and the list in the Bill now contains fewer reservations and I have made the descriptions more precise. More importantly, there is a clear rationale for reservations that are included. The list of reservations will never be as short as some would like, but clarity requires specificity. The list included in the Bill will be subject to further fine tuning, but I believe that, broadly, we have struck the right balance.

The Bill also clarifies the devolution boundary by defining which public authorities are Wales public authorities—devolved bodies—with all other public authorities being reserved authorities. To add further clarity, the Bill lists those bodies that are currently Wales public authorities, a list we have compiled in consultation with the Welsh Government and the Assembly Commission. Naturally, the consent of the UK Government will be needed if an Assembly Bill seeks to impose or modify the functions of a reserved body. That follows the well-established principle that the Assembly approves and, subject to further fine tuning, but I believe that, broadly, we have struck the right balance.

The final key element of a clear settlement is the change we are making to the functions of Welsh Ministers. It is hard to believe that Welsh Ministers have not been able to exercise common-law powers up to now, unlike Ministers of the Crown and Scottish Ministers; the Bill puts the misjudgment of the Government of Wales Act 2006 right. Similarly, the Bill also removes the current restriction on the Assembly being able to modify Minister of the Crown functions in devolved areas. It lists those functions that Ministers of the Crown and Welsh Ministers exercise concurrently or jointly, and the small number of Minister of the Crown functions in devolved areas the Assembly could modify, with the consent of UK Ministers. All remaining Minister of the Crown functions in devolved areas will be transferred by order to the Welsh Ministers.

Taken together, these provisions deliver a settlement that will make it clear whom people in Wales should hold to account—the UK Government or the Welsh Government—for the decisions that affect their daily lives. I would like to inform the House that some minor clarifications have been made to the explanatory notes relating to some of these clauses, and revised copies of the notes are available for Members.
The Bill devolves a significant number of further powers, and I shall not go into detail on each this afternoon. The purpose of Second Reading is to consider the broad principles of the Bill before we move forward to the Committee stage. As I mentioned at the outset, the Bill devolves further powers that stem from the Smith commission. These include powers over equalities, the design of renewable incentives and the scrutiny of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. We are also giving the Assembly and Welsh Ministers a greater say in how the interests of Wales are represented within Ofcom. This is a strong package of further powers that moves Welsh devolution forward substantially and can be used to improve the lives of people in Wales if exercised thoughtfully by the Assembly and the Welsh Government.

I spoke about the Assembly coming of age, and the package of further powers for the Assembly truly gives form to that vision. Through this Bill, the Assembly will take control of its own affairs, including deciding arrangements for its own elections. It will be able to determine how its Members are elected, the number of Members, the constituencies and regions used in those elections and who is eligible to vote. As we promised in the St David's day agreement, the Bill gives the Assembly full responsibility for deciding how it conducts its own affairs and regulates its own proceedings.

Kevin Brennan: The Secretary of State said that he would get to this point, but he has not answered my question, which is not about who will be able to vote, but whether the Bill will give powers to enable the Assembly to introduce compulsory voting if it chooses to do so. For clarity's sake, it is very important that we know whether the answer to that question is yes or no.

Alun Cairns: I am happy to clarify that matter. The Bill gives provision for who votes rather than for compulsory voting.

The Assembly is a fully fledged legislature, trusted with passing laws that affect the lives of millions of people in Wales. It is right that the legislative framework in which it operates reflects that, and enables the Assembly to decide how it conducts its business.

The Bill also repeals the unnecessary and outdated right of the Secretary of State for Wales to participate in Assembly proceedings. Subject to the Bill's progress, I hope that my attendance at the Assembly in a few weeks' time will be the last by a Secretary of State for Wales. I am sure that Members of all parties, both here and in Cardiff Bay, will welcome that—probably for many different reasons. I am sure that it will go down well in all parts of the House. A key feature of a mature legislature is that it raises, through taxation, at least some of the money it spends. With power comes responsibility. The Assembly must become more accountable to those who elect it. It must take responsibility for raising more of the money that it spends. The devolution of stamp duty, land tax and landfill tax, and the full devolution of business rates in April last year, are the first steps towards that, and it is only right that a portion of income tax is devolved too.

In the autumn statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced that we will legislate to remove the need for a referendum to introduce Welsh rates of
income tax, which means that the Welsh Government can take on more responsibility for how they raise money, and the Welsh Government want that to happen.

There are practical issues—the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) raised some of these—to agree with the Welsh Government, particularly how the Welsh block grant is adjusted to take account of tax devolution. Those discussions are already taking place, and I expect them to progress as the Bill passes through both Houses.

Mr Hanson: Will the Secretary of State clarify—I should possibly know the answer to this—on what the tax is based? Is it on residence in Wales or work in Wales?

Alun Cairns: It is residence in Wales. There will be further technical issues that we will want to clarify in discussions between the Treasury, the Welsh Government and the Wales Office. Those elements will be considered in further detail as the Bill progresses, and as the adjustments are agreed between all parties involved. The base is focused on residency rather than on where people work.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Personally, I am very disappointed that, in this clause, we have broken a manifesto commitment. Is the Minister, who stood on the same manifesto, equally disappointed about that?

Alun Cairns: I have two points to make in response. First, it was the Wales Act 2014 that devolved tax-varying powers to the Assembly. This Bill will go one step further by removing the requirement for a referendum. Secondly, devolution has moved forward since that time. We can either seek to have the hollow argument about rowing back, or we can make the Welsh Government more accountable and more responsible for the money that they raise. Under current legislation and current arrangements, the Welsh Government already have responsibility for raising £2.5 billion of their own income, through council tax, business rates and other taxes such as stamp duty, land tax, aggregate tax and landfill tax. According to the forecast of the Office for Budget Responsibility, the devolution of income tax will transfer something in the region of £2 billion to the Welsh Government, which is a smaller sum than the one for which they already have responsibility.

Mr David Jones: To develop the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies), is it not the case that just over 12 months ago the Conservative party fought on a manifesto that they already have responsibility.

Alun Cairns: My right hon. Friend played a significant part in the development of legislation relating to Wales when he was Secretary of State. He will recognise how quickly the devolution make-up of the UK has developed and matured in that time. This is the next logical step in making the Assembly more mature and responsible, and ultimately more accountable to the people of Wales, because it will have to consider how money is raised as well as how it is spent.

Paul Flynn: I am greatly enjoying the right hon. Gentleman’s speech, but his enthusiasm for referendums being diluted by recent experience, particularly the alternative vote referendum and the current referendum, which is a choice between whose lies people believe? Finally, was his faith in public opinion shaken by the large number of people who voted to name a boat Boaty McBoatface?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. It is fair to say that many of us might have referendum—or referendums—fatigue. The principle of devolving taxes was granted and supported in the Wales Act 2014, which transferred responsibilities in those areas without a referendum. The principle has been established, and we are taking it further through the devolution of income tax, removing the requirement for a referendum in the Bill.

I am conscious of time and the fact that many Members want to make a contribution, so I will conclude. The Bill delivers clarity to the Welsh devolution settlement and accountability to devolved government in Wales. It draws a clear line between what is devolved and what is reserved, so that people in Wales know whether to hold the UK Parliament or the Assembly accountable for the services on which they rely. It includes an historic transfer of powers to the Assembly and Welsh Government. It will strengthen Wales and it will strengthen the United Kingdom. It further enables the Welsh Government to deliver the things that matter to people living and working in Wales, and to be held to account for their decisions and policies. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.52 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): It is said that devolution is a process, not an event, a journey rather than a destination, and that is certainly true when it comes to the Bill. The journey has taken longer than it should have done, because in the draft Wales Bill the immediate predecessor of the Secretary of State seemed determined to drive us along a tortuous and convoluted path, going back the way we had come. That was in spite of an extraordinarily united chorus of navigators—everyone from Cymdeithas yr Iaith to the Conservative group in the Assembly—telling him to turn round the other way. It was quite an achievement to unite everyone against that Bill. Mind you, the Bill was so bad that it would have made the Assembly’s job impossible, and it would definitely have taken Welsh devolution backwards, not forwards. I am glad, however, that the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) eventually listened, put the brakes on, and prepared to change direction. We now have a piece of legislation that, while not perfect, is definitely a marked improvement.

I suppose like any lost driver, the right hon. Gentleman could be forgiven for hurling some irrational abuse at those of us trying to offer navigational advice. In February, he told us in no uncertain terms that we were launching some kind of separatist plot, that we had “given up on the union” and that all our criticism was actually a bid for Welsh independence. I hope that we can have a more sensible and measured debate today.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend will remember from the Welsh Grand Committee debate on 3 February that the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) said:
“There is nothing in the draft Bill that makes the Welsh Assembly consider whether legislating in a devolved area is necessary.”—[Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee, 3 February 2016: c. 61]

Is my hon. Friend as pleased as me that finally the then Secretary of State realised what was in his own Bill?

Nia Griffith: Indeed, it was laughable at times when the former Secretary of State noticed things to which we assumed he had already given his approval.

I want to make it clear at the outset that we welcome the reserved powers model, for which we have been calling for some time, as we feel that it has the potential to clarify the devolution settlement, and we welcome each of the new powers contained in the Bill. As the party that established the Welsh Assembly, we want to see our devolution settlement strengthened, with more powers devolved from Westminster to Wales. We are glad that the Assembly will have new powers over transport, energy and elections. As with the areas it already controls, the Assembly will be able to use those new powers to make different choices that reflect the will of people in Wales.

The powers over shale gas extraction will allow the Assembly to take into account the very real fears that people in Wales have about fracking. Labour has made it clear that, as the necessary safeguards cannot yet be met, we should not push ahead with fracking. We welcome the powers over energy planning consents for projects generating up to 350 MW, but we would certainly like full powers over grid connections devolved to Welsh Government. I hope that that is what we will hear from the Secretary of State.

That would not solve the delays with the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, which are due to the failure by Conservative Ministers to agree a viable financial framework for investors to proceed. I very much hope that the Secretary of State does everything he can to speed up this project. Labour is glad that the Assembly will meet, we should not push ahead with fracking. We welcome the powers over energy planning consents for projects generating up to 350 MW, but we would certainly like full powers over grid connections devolved to Welsh Government. I hope that that is what we will hear from the Secretary of State.

The power to change the name of the Assembly means that we could call it a Welsh Parliament. Responsibility for the voting age in Welsh elections means that the Assembly could introduce votes at 16 for elections to the Assembly and to local councils. Whatever the Assembly decides, what matters is that those decisions will be taken in Wales by elected Assembly Members.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): What concerns me about the devolution of powers to the Assembly on elections is that 16-year-olds could vote in local government and Assembly elections, but not in elections for MPs to the House. Does my hon. Friend share that concern?

Nia Griffith: Indeed. As a long-time supporter of votes at 16, which is now Labour policy, I share my hon. Friend’s disappointment that that could be the case.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does the shadow Secretary of State accept that the new electoral legislation might enable a Welsh Parliament or Welsh Government to impose compulsory voting on our country? Would she support that or oppose it?

Nia Griffith: The Secretary of State has told us that he will clarify that, so we will know whether that will be possible. I understand from what he has said today that it is very unlikely, because he said it was about people who can vote, not the system itself, but we await clarification from him to know where we are going.

The Bill is designed to strengthen and streamline the current devolution settlement. For example, clause 18 allows the Assembly to implement European Union legislation directly where it relates to devolved responsibilities. That is a sensible development, and one that I sincerely hope does not become redundant by the time the Bill goes into Committee after the referendum recess.

The biggest structural change in the Bill is the move to a reserved powers model, as recommended by the Silk commission. As Silk said, that should allow the Assembly to legislate “with greater confidence and with greater regard to the purpose of the legislation, rather than being constrained by uncertainty”. That change will bring greater clarity to our devolution settlement and, if the Government get the Bill right, it should result in fewer cases being taken to the Supreme Court. Too much public money has been spent on such manoeuvres.

I welcome the important statement on the permanence of the Assembly and of Welsh government in clause 1, and the inclusion of the Sewel convention that the UK Parliament will seek consent from the Assembly before legislating on devolved subjects. This recognises that just 17 years since the process of devolution began, the Assembly has become a fundamental part of our constitutional landscape. In 2011 the Welsh people voted for the Assembly to have full law-making powers, an important sign of confidence in the institution. Together with this Parliament, the Assembly should now be recognised as one of two significant legislatures that represent the people of Wales.

It was the Assembly’s ability to pass laws in devolved areas that the draft Bill put at risk in the most unnecessary and short-sighted way. It is a simple fact that as a law-making body, the Assembly must have the ability to change the law, but the draft Bill would have required it to pass a number of necessity tests before being able to amend the civil or criminal law. In the words of David Melding, the Conservative Chair of the Assembly’s Constitution Committee, these tests would have created “an atmosphere of profound uncertainty”.

He went on to say:

“Taken to extremes, the very exercise of the legislative function could be compromised.”

I am pleased that the Government have seen sense and removed these tests so that the Assembly can amend the law when it needs to, but there are other tests that I will return to later.

The removal of the necessity tests means that a distinct body of Welsh law will continue to grow over time, a fact that poses a challenge to the single legal jurisdiction of England and Wales. We understand that the justice impact assessments outlined in clause 10 are intended to address this point, but a more long-term solution may need to be objects at some point in the future. We trust that the working group consisting of the Ministry of Justice, the Lord Chief Justice and the Welsh Government will keep this issue under review.
On the areas of the Bill that require more work, I want to deal with the reservations, the necessity tests, and the devolution of income tax. It was a common theme in the response to the draft Bill that the list of reservations was far too long. Even the Secretary of State’s predecessor expressed surprise at the number of reservations—an unusual admission, given that it was his Bill. This rather suggested that there was a lack of a clear rationale for the compilation of that list. I note that the list of reservations in this Bill is very slightly shorter but it still runs to 34 pages, and the justification for reserving some subjects is far from clear.

The root of the problem with the reservations in the draft Bill was that the Wales Office allowed Whitehall to have free rein in deciding which areas it was willing to devolve, rather than adopting the principled process that the Silk commission recommended. In its report on the draft Bill, the Welsh Affairs Committee said that Whitehall Departments should be given “clear guidance about the questions they should ask themselves before deciding whether or not to reserve a power”, and that this guidance “must be published prior to the publication of the Bill, so that the final list of reservations can be assessed against the criteria given.”

It is regrettable that no such fresh guidance has been published, which would allow us to decide whether the list of reservations has been drafted with clear criteria in mind.

In response to the Select Committee’s report, the Secretary of State said:

“The explanatory notes that accompany the Bill provide a clear rationale for each reservation included in the list.”

I am afraid that this is not the case. The justifications offered in the explanatory notes are patchy at best. Most just state what is reserved, without explaining why. We will consider the list in more detail as the Bill proceeds, but the Secretary of State must be ready to justify each of the reservations and to present a rational basis for the final list.

It is already clear that some of the reservations are unjustified. The decision to create a special category of reserved trust ports is one example. This means in practice that control of every Welsh port except Milford Haven will be devolved to the Assembly. The Government have presented no sensible justification for this, or for the turnover requirement in clause 31, based on the Ports Act 1991. As the Bill stands, ports that meet an annual turnover requirement of £14.3 million or more remain under the control of the UK Government, while powers over those with a smaller turnover would be transferred to Welsh Ministers. This seems to create a perverse incentive, because if the Welsh Government foster economic development in smaller ports, which significantly increase their turnover as a consequence, the Welsh Government could find that they lose control over those ports.

In the absence of an explanation, we can only assume that the Government want to keep control of the most profitable ports, with a view possibly to privatising them in future, as indeed the Government considered doing in 2011. Strange, is it not, that this annual turnover is the same threshold above which ports can be privatised under the 1991 Act? Previous privatisation proposals have raised serious concerns about asset-stripping by speculators and the fragmentation of ports, and these dangers would be just as real in the case of Milford Haven.

On the necessity tests, I am pleased that the most problematic of these, relating to civil and criminal law, have been removed from the Bill. This has made the Bill markedly clearer and more workable than its predecessor. However, two necessity tests remain in clause 3 and in paragraph 1 of new schedule 7B. As many witnesses noted during the Welsh Affairs Committee’s inquiry into the draft Bill, the problem with these tests is the uncertainty surrounding the word “necessity”. A representative from the Law Society described it as certainly not a term that is as well understood by lawyers as a concept, which raises the potential of legislation being challenged not just in the Supreme Court, but in the course of other civil and criminal proceedings. Given these very real concerns, would it not be preferable to ditch the necessity tests entirely and retain the wording in the Government of Wales Act 2006, which avoids invoking this legally difficult concept?

On the ministerial consents, we welcome the simplified system proposed in the Bill, but the Government could go further. The Welsh Affairs Committee has recommended introducing a 60-day time limit for consent to be given or refused. A change to this effect would give greater confidence and I urge the Government to consider adopting it in law.

Finally, on income tax, the current situation is that the Welsh people would have to support the devolution of income tax in a referendum before the powers could be transferred to the Assembly. This Bill removes that requirement, meaning that the Secretary of State could devolve income tax powers via an Order in Council, without the Assembly even having to agree to it. That cannot be right. Allowing the Assembly to levy taxes is a very significant constitutional development, and one which should not take place without a clear democratic decision, so we are asking the Secretary of State to consider amending the Bill to require the Assembly to agree to the devolution of tax powers before they are devolved.

Jonathan Edwards: The shadow Secretary of State for Wales will be aware of the comments of the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, who said on the BBC on 9 November 2015, on the Scotland Bill, which gave full income tax powers to Scotland:

“When this Bill becomes law, it will present the Scottish Parliament with the opportunity to make Scotland the fairest nation on earth.”

I assume that that would be an objective for the hon. Lady and her party. Why, therefore, is she dithering about giving her colleagues in the Assembly the same powers as Scotland to achieve that objective?

Nia Griffith: It comes as no surprise that an intervention from the hon. Gentleman focuses on his party’s determination to see Wales become an independent state, regardless of the economic consequences. As I have just explained, it is crucial to give the Assembly the opportunity to negotiate a proper, fair fiscal framework
with a “no detriment” principle before it accepts responsibility for income tax. That opportunity is extremely important.

Mr David Jones: The hon. Lady mentions what she sees as the need for the Assembly to consent to the devolution of tax powers, but what about the people of Wales? Given that the people of Scotland were consulted in a referendum prior to tax-raising powers being given, does she not think that the people of Wales deserve the same respect?

Nia Griffith: We have moved on since the last Wales Bill, but it is vital that there is a mechanism to establish a clear financial framework with a “no detriment” principle so that the Welsh Assembly can have the confidence to decide whether to accept the devolution of tax-raising powers.

As I said at the outset, this Bill is not perfect and it will require amendments, but I hope that the UK Government will commit to working constructively with the Welsh Government and with Opposition parties to ensure that we deliver the strong, stable, workable settlement that the people of Wales deserve.

2.9 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I begin by thanking all the members of the Welsh Affairs Committee who took part in the pre-legislative scrutiny. When the Select Committee was formed after the last Parliament, I wooed Members in all parts of the House to encourage them to join the Select Committee, telling them tales of all the pertinent and interesting things that we had done in the previous Parliament: considering broadband, the Severn bridge, S4C and the Welsh language, and even visiting the Welsh speakers of Patagonia in Argentina. I think some of them may have been a bit taken aback when we spent the first year or so just doing pre-legislative scrutiny of the government of Wales Bill, with an endless series of academics and legal experts coming in and out to talk to us about legislative consent orders and the like, but everyone persevered, and I am grateful to them for that. I would like to think that we worked in a completely non-partisan fashion, and we offered a number of recommendations, which the Government have taken forward, and I will come to those in a moment.

I am a former Member of the Welsh Assembly, but I actually opposed it in the first instance. I was very much involved in the 1998 referendum campaign, when I often heard the argument that laws that affect our nation should be passed by people who are based in our nation and elected by the people of our nation. I thought that that was quite a powerful argument at the time, and it is one that Government Front Benchers and Opposition Members might want to think about at the moment, because that principle that was certainly accepted then.

I and others had genuine concerns about the Welsh Assembly. One of my concerns was that, having got the Assembly, we would have a constant drive to give it extra powers, and that does seem to be what has played out over the past 17 or 18 years. My concern was that that could undermine the Union of the United Kingdom, and I therefore supported English votes for English laws because there has to be some answer to the English question. Opposition Members may not agree, but if they do not, it is for them to come up with another answer to the English question. Asymmetric devolution, where we give more and more powers—not always even the same powers—to different legislative bodies around the United Kingdom while ignoring the largest constituent part, will surely not create stability. That was one answer to the question, and the other was to come up, finally, with a lasting solution that will keep us on an even track for years, which is what the Government have attempted to do.

When I have been into primary schools and I have been asked about the issue, I have tried to explain it thus—this is a fairly simple analogy, perhaps, but I like such analogies. At the moment, the Assembly is a bit like a legislative park: it has a slide and swings, and it is quite well maintained in its own way, but there is no fence around it. What has happened is that Members of the Welsh Assembly have wandered out of the park into slightly dangerous areas—areas inhabited by other people—while other people have perhaps even trespassed on their park. Ministers have therefore come forward with what is almost a legislative version of Alton Towers: an enormous theme park with all sorts of exciting things for Members of the Welsh Assembly to deal with, such as taxis, buses and sewage, but with a great big fence to prevent them from getting out and perhaps encroaching on other areas, while preventing other people from encroaching on their area. I therefore welcome the Bill as a move towards stability.

Let me quickly go through a couple of the Committee’s recommendations. Obviously it is important to work with the Welsh Assembly to come up with a deal that everyone can live with. Constitutionally speaking, if there were a majority in the House of Commons, we could do practically anything we wanted, but I think all of us accept that, with a Government from one party here and a Government from a different party in the Welsh Assembly, it would be foolish to push something on the Assembly that it clearly did not want—that might be possible constitutionally, but it would be a non-starter politically. I am glad that my colleagues accept that and that talks are ongoing.

I am glad the Government have removed the necessity test. I got a strong feeling from talking to legal experts that it just would not work in its proposed form. At the same time, however, it is important that the Welsh Assembly is unable to change criminal or private law in a way that would affect non-devolved areas or people living outside Wales, in England, so we must be mindful of that in all cases. For example, the Welsh Affairs Committee held a public meeting in Chepstow yesterday to discuss the Severn bridge, which is one of the areas that is being retained—not least, perhaps, because three of the four ends are in England. A resident of Gloucester made the point that if it were handed over to the Welsh Assembly, how would people living on the English side of the border who use it every day be able to raise concerns about delays, tolling or pre-payment systems? They would have no MP who could take up those issues for them, despite the fact that they would affect almost as many people in England as in Wales. Those principles are important.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman’s speech carefully. I commend to him the work of the all-party group on Mersey Dee North
[Ian C. Lucas]

Wales, which is addressing precisely the issue that he raises. It works with Members on both sides of the border to deal with practical issues that affect all our constituents every day. We have the capability to do these things if we work together.

David T. C. Davies: I had to think hard about this, but I think it was the hon. Gentleman himself who, during the discussion of English votes for English laws, raised the concern that giving England the power to decide over NHS matters would affect his constituents who use the NHS in England. He felt that it was therefore wrong that English MPs should have the last word on that matter, and I would reflect that back to him. Whenever we hand things over to devolved systems, people living on the other side of the border who use whatever has been devolved can lose out, and that was the point I was making about the Severn bridge. However, I commend the all-party group of which he is a member, and I am sure it is doing everything it can to resolve these issues.

Let me turn to some of the other recommendations. The tax issue is obviously tricky. I am in favour in principle of having a referendum before tax-varying powers are devolved to the Welsh Assembly or, rather, tax-raising powers—let us be honest: Governments rarely vary taxes downwards. The issue merits further exploration throughout the Bill’s passage. Obviously, I will not vote against Second Reading, but I might discuss this issue further with Ministers. I am conflicted, and I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) because I suspect that the last thing anyone will want at the moment is another referendum on anything. I would not like to go back to my wife, Mrs Davies, and tell her that, having finished this referendum, we are about to start another one and I am going to throw myself headlong into it. I appreciate that that is rather a personal point of view, but I suspect that many people across Wales feel exactly the same way and really would not welcome a referendum. Surely, however, a way must be found to make sure that the Welsh Assembly is unable to go ahead with such powers unless full account is taken of what the public think.

Chris Davies: As someone whom my hon. Friend cajoled into becoming a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee under his chairmanship, and as someone who spent nearly 12 months scrutinising the draft Wales Bill, may I ask him whether he is as disappointed as I am that we could not scrutinise the withdrawal of the referendum during those many hours and months of our consideration?

David T. C. Davies: This certainly came through rather late in the day, and I think we made it clear in our report that we were disappointed that we did not have enough time to scrutinise the issue, but I suppose that it is now done with. I am here not to defend the Government but to scrutinise them, and I am very happy to do so.

Paul Flynn: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the evidence of the momentum of Welsh opinion is enough for us to forgo the joys of another referendum? Only 11% were in favour of Welsh devolution in 1979, but 64% were in 2011. Is that not evidence enough that the public will certainly favour the development and growth of the Welsh Assembly’s powers?

David T. C. Davies: I have to admit that it is certainly evidence that the public have accepted the Welsh Assembly and, therefore, that it is pointless for even arch-devo-sceptics such as me to try to resurrect that particular battle—I have no intention of doing so. There will be people taking part in the next election who were born under the Welsh Assembly. While the hon. Gentleman and I can remember a time before the Welsh Assembly, that does not exist for some people, although he can go back a bit further than I can. I canvassed against the hon. Gentleman in 1983. He used to come into my school to try to brainwash me, but he never succeeded. We have moved on a long way. If he was trying to put me on the spot, yes, of course we have to accept that the Welsh Assembly is here for good, and that brings me back to the point about stability and trying to make this work.

I am pleased that one of the points that has been accepted was about ministerial consent, such that when the Welsh Assembly intends to legislate in a way that may affect England or have some impact on non-devolved areas, it will have to get permission from the Government, which I fully accept. As we have heard, there have been delays while this has been going on, with the Welsh Office blaming the Welsh Assembly for that and the Welsh Assembly blaming the Welsh Office—I have no idea who actually was to blame. Nevertheless, we recommended that if the Assembly applied to the Welsh Office for a consent and nothing was given within 60 days, the application should be nodded through on the basis that nobody had come up with an objection. Although that is not going into the Bill, it will, I believe, become part of the guidance—a convention, no less—so may I make a pitch for something? I have been here for a long time now and I have never had a convention named after me, but I think I am right in saying that this was my idea, so perhaps it could become the “Top Cat” convention.

I am glad that the Welsh Assembly will have powers to run its own elections. It would, if it wanted, be able to move out of the Senedd and to relocate anywhere in Wales—from Llanfihangel Tor-y-Mynydd, right down in the south-east of my own constituency, to Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch in the north-east. Is not that wonderful? Assembly Members will have more powers than MEPs in Strasbourg, who cannot even decide whether to move to Brussels full-time. Ministers are giving them a really good deal—a really good legislative theme park to operate in.

While I do have concerns about the Bill, I will, in the words of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), give it 7.5 out of 10 and go along with it for the time being.

2.21 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) on his speech. I agree with him on one thing: the need for an English Parliament to balance things out. I am sure that that debate will come forward and that he and I will be on the same side for once.

I congratulate the Government on pausing the Bill, which was the right thing to do because they got it wrong the first time round. The St David’s day agreement was not a major declaration in Welsh history—it will not be remembered as that—but it did move us in the
right direction, and the Government did listen. I pay tribute to the Welsh Affairs Committee for its pre-legislative scrutiny because that highlighted some of the draft Bill’s weaknesses. I am sorry that the process took 12 months and it could not get on to other things, but it is important that before we bring forward major legislation in the House of Commons, we have the pre-legislative scrutiny for which Members—two of them, my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) and for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), are sitting here to my left—fought very hard. Before, Bills were rushed through without the necessary scrutiny.

I very much welcome the fact that the Bill has now been changed, with major parts of it dropped, not least, as my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) said, the necessity test, which I felt was a step too far. Rather than a measure for moving forward with devolution, it looked a bit like the old secretary-general giving powers and the nod to what the Welsh Government could do, which did not sit very comfortably. I look forward to improving the Bill and, by doing so, we should act more as visionaries than victims. We have had devolution for a number of years and it has done a lot of good things. The additional powers will empower the Welsh Assembly to do more good things for the people of Wales, moving forward and taking the people with it. That is the idea of devolution.

I am a long-standing pro-devolutionist and I have fought three referendums—in 1979, 1997, and 2011. The score in those referendums was exactly the same as that for Wales on Sunday—a 2-1 victory. I am not so confident about the outcome of the referendum later this month, but I hope to be on the winning remain side. To me, devolution is about decentralisation and greater democracy, or it is about nothing.

The UK state has changed considerably since 1997. It is more open, democratic and decentralised. I congratulate all parties on playing their part in making the United Kingdom a more decentralised and democratic state. I also welcome the support from many Conservatives. The hon. Member for Monmouth, a former Member of the Welsh Assembly, has changed his stance on devolution, and I welcome the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) also used to be against it. It is important that we bring people with us as we move forward positively.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend agree that at the conclusion of the passage of the Bill and after the EU referendum, the time will genuinely have arrived for a constitutional convention to consider the future of the United Kingdom and its constitution, particularly with regard to how the nations of the United Kingdom and their devolved institutions relate to each other?

Albert Owen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a very important point. There has to be a time limit if we are going to have a constitutional convention, because we do not just want academics producing papers and having long arguments. We should draw on the experiences of the British state as it is today, with the degree of decentralisation that has already taken place, and look at the English question. I genuinely agree with the hon. Member for Monmouth that that needs to be looked at in a positive way. I welcome the extension of powers to the regions and cities in England.

I talked about the many people who have moved from being against devolution to now being very active pro-devolutionists. Many in this House, including those in the two nationalist parties, do not think we are going far enough or quick enough. I understand and respect that, but as a pro-devolutionist I want the devolution settlements to work for Wales and for the UK. I want us to move forward in a positive way, bringing the people of Wales with us. Rather than just having ideologies, we must have practical devolution that works. We are moving forward, and this Bill helps in many ways in doing that. It is no good having devolution that just devolves powers from London to Belfast, Edinburgh or Cardiff—I want it to be spread within the nations and within the rest of the United Kingdom. I have seen some bad examples in this regard. When I served on the Welsh Affairs Committee and we went up to Scotland, we saw a lot of centralising of services. I worry about that. As a real devolutionist, I think we need better devolution within the devolved countries, as well as England, to get the balance right. I want to see this Bill improved, but I say that as someone who is an advocate of practical devolution. I welcome the devolving of more powers.

I am not going to deal with the detail of the constitutional issues, but I do want to talk about the practical implications of devolving powers in the context of ports, transport, and energy. I have a specific interest in ports, as the Member for Ynys Môn, which has a principal port that has grown. I have seen how the flaws in the devolution settlement have hampered some of the development of ports. I recall a new berth being built in the early 2000s—I think it was 2003-04—when we had to get special consent from the Department for Transport, the Welsh Office and the Welsh Government, with one saying that it was not possible to build within the port. The new provisions clarify that. When the Welsh Government take over responsibility for ports, they will be able to develop them in a practical way, with the local authority doing the planning as well. I welcome that.

As a former member of the Energy and Climate Committee, I welcome the move towards devolving powers on fracking and on petroleum extraction on land, and, I think, if I am reading the Bill correctly, at sea in territorial waters. Perhaps the Minister could clarify that when he winds up. It is important for the Welsh Government to have those consents in the same way as they have consents for offshore wind and other things. Wales could be really radical in low-carbon energy and the low-carbon economy if it has the tools to do so. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on nuclear power. I think that we need to have baseload low carbon alongside renewable energies. We need to have the proper mix, and Wales can be a leader in low-carbon energy. I welcome the consent for power stations up to 350 MW. That is a very good step forward.

I am concerned, however, about the grid connections. The Bill gives consent to the Welsh Government in planning and various other areas, but it does so only for the distribution grid, not the national grid. The measures relate to developments under 132 kV. I would like some clarification on that, because in my area and many other areas of Wales, National Grid projects are going ahead that will have a great impact on local communities. The Welsh Government and local government are best
placed to look at those, rather than National Grid, which is an organisation that looks to its own private interests.

Hywel Williams: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the work that he has been doing on this matter in Ynys Môn, which is similar to that which I have been doing in Arfon. I share his concern that National Grid is not accountable to the people of Wales. It has supposedly carried out extensive consultations, but there has been no real consultation in our area.

Albert Owen: In the past couple of years we have highlighted the importance of giving the energy regulator more teeth to deal with that issue. We need the regulator on one side and the consenting authorities—which will be the Welsh Government, I hope, and the local authorities—on the other, so that we can put pressure on National Grid to take into account the impact that energy generation has on the environment and local communities, as well as on the national interest. I accept that there is progress in the Bill, but I would like clarification on that.

Clause 46 places a greater duty on the Secretary of State to consult Welsh Ministers before amending or establishing renewable energy incentives, such as feed-in tariffs and contracts for difference. That is important, because when Welsh Ministers then give consent, they will understand what it means for local developers and the total project. I would like to hear greater detail in Committee on what that means. A one-stop shop for energy developers sounds very good, but the involvement of multinationals and other developers will make it difficult.

I welcome the consent for fracking and extraction. As with other minerals, it is important that the Welsh Government have that. It is a tidying-up exercise.

I have already touched on port consent. The road transport powers are welcome, but they do not go far enough. Wales needs a more integrated transport system that takes into account sea, road and rail, rather than an approach that breaks them up. I want greater powers over rail. The franchise is coming up for renewal both of the Virgin Trains service on the west coast and of the Arriva Trains service on the Welsh borders. The Welsh Government will have an input, but the approach could have been tidied up a little bit better.

The Bill addresses predominantly constitutional issues, but it has important practical implications for Wales. I welcome the scrapping of the necessity tests and the fact that consents have been simplified. That is very good. I also welcome the reserved powers model, which a lot of Members from across the parties have worked together to establish.

I am concerned about income tax, an issue I argue about with some of my colleagues at the National Assembly. I have been involved in a number of referendums. If we think that the European referendum is going to be close, let us not forget how close the result was in 1997. I remember the differential between Scotland and Wales. I believe that if income tax powers for Wales had been on the ballot paper, the result would have been different. I say that as someone who argued the positive case for devolution, and that is what I am now doing for remain.

We have to be delicate in the way we talk about devolving income tax and what it really means to the people of Wales. If the Government are saying that the Bill will introduce it without further consultation with the people of Wales and without a proper financial settlement, we will be in trouble. I do not want a huge gap appearing as a result of the block grant being reduced and it having to be made up out of general income tax.

I am not against the principle of devolving tax-raising powers to the Assembly—we have already done that in other measures in the Wales Act 2014—but I have also consistently supported the principle of holding a referendum when a major constitutional change is proposed, and I think that the devolution of income tax is one such change. That is the principle that I held in 1997, and I still hold it now. We need a further debate on the issue, because it would be wrong for the UK Government to make that decision after saying in 2014 that they were not going to make it. Indeed, the Conservatives, who are now in the majority here, told the country that they did not want to devolve income tax powers. I am cautiously concerned about the way in which the change is being made.

Paul Flynn: Does my hon. Friend agree that the result of a referendum that asked the question, “Do you want to pay more or less tax?” would be so predictable that it would not be worth having the referendum?

Albert Owen: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying, but he is a democrat, like me.

Paul Flynn: Up to a point.

Albert Owen: Well, I am a total democrat by comparison with my hon. Friend. The tax-varying powers that the Scottish Government enjoy were given in a referendum. That is my point. There has to be consistency on these matters.

Hywel Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman concede, however, that framing a proper and understandable question that allows for a clear response is not easy? Does he have a suggested wording for such a referendum question?

Albert Owen: I have not thought of the wording, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that democracy is difficult. We have to make a positive case for things and do so honourably. I did not understand, and was not able to explain in great detail, the question on extending powers in 2011, but I argued, along with members of Plaid Cymru, that the Welsh Government deserved to have lawmaking powers. Tax-varying and lawmaking powers are simple questions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West has said, it may be difficult to win an argument, but we have to stick to principles. I have been consistent on this matter since 1997, and I do not think we can just jump into it after all the different elections we have had. However, given the current referendum, I understand the climate of fear that people find themselves in at present. I want to be radical and forward looking, and I want the Welsh Government to be so, too.

When the Minister winds up, I want him to clarify the issue of election powers. On the issue of lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, am I right in thinking that
the Welsh Government will have the power to do so and that it will apply to Welsh Assembly and local government elections only? If there were a Welsh-only referendum, such as one on tax-varying powers or another Wales-specific issue, would the Welsh Government have the power to lower the voting age from 18 to 16? I am an advocate of that and have argued the case for it in this House for some time. This is an opportunity for us to give those responsibilities to the Welsh Government.

My hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff West and for Wrexham have been campaigning hard on compulsory voting. This is a great opportunity for the Welsh Government to be radical. Let us give them the tools to do the job. If the Welsh Government decide that they want compulsory voting in Wales, that would be a good step forward.

Alun Cairns rose—

Albert Owen: I give way to the Secretary of State. I realise that I have taken up more time than I wanted to.

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman is making a considered speech. I have had further information since the earlier questions about compulsory voting. I am happy to clarify that compulsory voting is permitted under the Bill as drafted.

Albert Owen: That is excellent news, and it is on the record. It is a victory for the three of us on the Labour Back Benches that we will now have the opportunity for compulsory voting in Wales, which I think is a radical step. Hansard will make that known, but I hope the media in Wales are watching the progress of the Bill. After all, it is not dry as dust, but is about the real issues affecting people, including compulsory voting.

Alun Cairns rose—

Albert Owen: I am sure the Secretary of State is going to reconsider his considered view.

Alun Cairns: I just want to underline the fact that it perhaps provides even more justification for the justice impact assessment that may well be brought forward in relation to the legislation.

Albert Owen: It is the Secretary of State’s job, with his extra responsibilities and wages, to decide on the details. As a Back Bencher, I am saying that I am very proud that the Welsh Government have the opportunity to have compulsory voting.

As I have said, I want devolution to work. I want the Bill to work, but I want it to be considerably improved. I think the name of the National Assembly for Wales is a matter for the Assembly itself, but I do not see anything wrong with the current name. I am not a revolutionary, but I remember from reading about the French revolution when I was studying history that the French people wanted a national assembly. They did not fight for a parliament, and I do not think there is much in that word. I am very proud, as I know the French people are, of having a National Assembly. The National Assembly is a good term: it is a good name and it has a good meaning. It is a sovereign body, and I think the name should be kept, but that is my personal view.

I want a strong Wales, a strong United Kingdom and, yes, I want the United Kingdom to remain within the European Union. I agree that the Bill will provide some extra tools for the Welsh Government to do their job. I think there has been progress, and I congratulate Carwyn Jones on being re-elected as First Minister of Wales. I hope that he will get a good Bill once it has gone through its parliamentary stages, so that he can continue to do his job and serve the people of Wales with a Labour programme that will have been enhanced by the Bill.

2.41 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on introducing the Bill. I have to say, however, that that should not be interpreted as meaning that I greet it with unalloyed enthusiasm. This is the fourth major piece of constitutional legislation aimed at conferring devolved powers on Wales in less than 20 years. The very fact that we are in the Chamber to debate this yet again shows just how flawed the original devolution settlement was and how important it is that, on this occasion, we try to get it right at the fourth time of asking.

The Secretary of State has very kindly presented a briefing note on the Wales Bill, in which he acknowledges that “there is more work to do”, and that there are “unresolved issues” and “unfinished business”. He goes on to say that he is looking to “amend the Bill if necessary during its parliamentary passage.” I must say that he is probably not likely to be disappointed in that regard.

The opening clauses of the Bill follow the current fashion for declaratory legislation. We are solemnly told that the “Assembly and the Welsh Government are a permanent part of the United Kingdom’s constitutional arrangements.” We are also told that they are “not to be abolished except on the basis of a decision of the people of Wales voting in”—yet another—“referendum.”

We are told that there is a “body of Welsh law”, which should not of course be in any way confused with a Welsh jurisdiction. There is a declaration that in effect incorporates the Sewel convention into statute, in that the Bill declares that this Parliament “will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Assembly.” Such declarations are all well and good, but they are in danger of overlooking the constitutional fact that this Parliament is supreme, which makes one wonder about their worth and whether they are in reality mere window dressing.

It is somewhat ironic that, having quite rightly abandoned the necessity test, the Government are now apparently introducing a normality test. As my right hon. Friend acknowledged, that means that the courts might intrude on parliamentary sovereignty by deciding or being asked to decide whether a piece of legislation passed by this Parliament is, so to speak, normal.
The Bill does of course change the devolution settlement from a conferred powers model to a reserved powers model, which is deemed to make matters clearer. I have to say that I do not believe that a reserved powers model is, as many contend, a panacea. The reserved powers model is in reality simply a mirror image of the conferred powers model. The nature of the model is less important than the clarity of language, as other Members have pointed out.

That is particularly important in relation to whether the reservations are comprehensive. The danger is that if the reservations are not comprehensive, there will be problems. I am glad, for example, that my right hon. Friend has not emulated a former Secretary of State for Scotland, who made sure that Antarctica was a reserved matter, and that we will not therefore see an attempt to create a new Patagonia on that continent.

The necessity test has been abandoned to the extent that it is no longer the case that the Assembly can modify criminal and private law only where modification “has no greater effect otherwise than…is necessary to give effect to the…provision.” That was a positive invitation to go to the Supreme Court. However, there is still a necessity test in relation to the law on reserved matters. Proposed new section 108A(3) of the Government of Wales Act 2006 will provide that Assembly Acts cannot modify the law on reserved matters unless ancillary to a provision that is not reserved, but modification cannot go further than is necessary to achieve the devolved objective. Words such as “necessary” and “normally” lack objectivity, and are therefore subject to interpretation, including, in difficult cases, by the Supreme Court. I do not believe, therefore, that simply changing the model of devolution will necessarily achieve the clarity that everyone wants. In Committee, I believe it will be necessary to test whether the reservations are truly comprehensive to avoid any further difficulties of the sort we have already experienced. To be fair, however, the Secretary of State has acknowledged that the Bill is a work in progress, and he will no doubt be expecting such tests and, if necessary, significant amendments in Committee.

I do not want to dwell too lengthily on individual provisions, but some matters are worth mentioning. First, as the Secretary of State will have anticipated from my interventions, I have a huge concern about the proposal that income tax varying powers in the 2014 Act should now be triggered without a referendum. As a Conservative, I have a particular concern, because at the last general election—despite the apparently rapid passage of time, I remind him that it was only just over a year ago—I and Conservative colleagues campaigned on the basis that the powers would not be triggered without a referendum. Indeed, when I was specifically asked on the doorstep whether the powers would be imposed on the Assembly without consent, I made it absolutely clear that a referendum was contemplated. I must say that it is positively disrespectful of the people of Wales for this Parliament to seek to impose new tax-raising competences without consulting them first.

That was done in the case of Scotland, and despite the interventions already made by Opposition Members, it is perfectly possible to formulate such a question and, in the case of Scotland, one that could be answered in the affirmative. If the Scots are entitled to that, surely the people of Wales should be entitled to the same level of respect. I invite the Secretary of State to think about that, and to consider whether, in the circumstances, the Bill should be amended by the deletion of clause 16.

Secondly, although this may appear to be a minor point, I find it difficult to understand the rationale for devolving to the Assembly the setting of speed limits. Wales and England have a continuous, porous border, and every day there are many thousands of journeys back and forth across the border. It does not bear scrutiny that there should potentially be different speed limits on either side of that border—it makes no sense. I cannot understand what possible reason there could be for devolving the setting of speed limits. What mischief is it aimed at? Who asked for it? Why is it necessary?

Thirdly, there is the issue of electricity generating consents, set out in clause 36. I intervened on the Secretary of State about that. The 350 MW limit provided for in the Bill seems to have little practical significance, because wind generating stations are expressly excluded. The granting of energy generation consents for capacities of more than 350 MW will remain with the Secretary of State, and there are few conventional power stations with an output of less than 350 MW.

The worrying fact is that although the Bill is silent on the subject, it devolves competence to the Assembly for all onshore wind farms, with no upper limit at all. I refer the Secretary of State to the excellent Library note, which points out that the Energy Act 2016 has transferred competence for wind farm consents to local planning authorities. A piece of Welsh legislation with which I have no doubt we are all familiar, the Development of National Significance (Specified Criteria and Prescribed Secondary Consents) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, provides that all wind farm developments in Wales are designated as developments of national significance. According to the Library note, which I have no reason to doubt, that means that all such developments, whether of up to 50 MW or more than 50 MW, will be determined by procedures set by the Assembly.

Given the thrust of policy at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, I suggest that the consequence of that will be a rush to develop wind farms in Wales. Indeed, I suggest that there may be a free-for-all. Areas such as my constituency, Montgomeryshire and Brecon and Radnor, which already have a lot of wind farms, are likely to be under further pressure for wind farm developments.

Jonathan Edwards: I hesitate to accuse the right hon. Gentleman of scaremongering, but the pace of development of renewable technologies relies on the subsidy that is available, which is determined by the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Mr Jones: That is not the point that I am addressing, which is about competence. Given that the upper limit for wind farm consents in Wales is currently only 50 MW, it is alarming that it is now likely to be unlimited.

Jonathan Edwards: The right hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. I have two TAN 8—technical advice note 8—areas in my constituency, and in one of them the only developments that have occurred have
been determined by Westminster. The local planning authority, which is responsible for developments of below 50 MW, has turned them down.

Mr Jones: That may be the case, but I say with huge respect that I think the hon. Gentleman is missing the point, which is about competence. It seemed clear from the Secretary of State’s response to my intervention that what I said was news to him. It was based on the Library note, which I believe is accurate. I therefore ask the Secretary of State to reconsider the matter, and he may well wish to table amendments himself in Committee.

The Bill is a further step in the process of devolution, and I believe that it is a brave attempt to rectify the errors of the past. However, I strongly question whether, in its current form, it will do the job that it is intended to. As I said, the Secretary of State anticipated amendments in his briefing note, and I have no doubt that he will look forward to them with great anticipation.

2.54 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Congratulations to the Government on the improvements to what was an ugly draft Bill. We have before us a Bill that will be a genuine step forward in devolution.

I was taken by the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), who talked about Welsh people seeing themselves not as victims but as visionaries. Absolutely right—we can go forward on a confident note, but not by having referendums. The whole system of our democracy is in peril at the moment, partly because of the debasement of political discourse, which is the worst it has been for a couple of centuries. The worst example was in the referendum on the alternative vote. Here was an opportunity for an advance in the quality of our democracy, but it was not argued in that way. As I came in every morning at Vauxhall Cross, anti-AV campaigners were telling people that those who voted for AV were the sort of people who believed in seeing babies die in hospitals and our brave soldiers die in Afghanistan. That seemed a rather extraordinary argument, but it was the one put forward by those opposed to AV. It was based on the idea that AV would cost money—a tiny amount of money, really, because democracy is expensive—and that the first thing the Government would do would be to cut the protection of our soldiers in Afghanistan and the money provided to baby units in hospitals. It was an outrageous lie, but that is currently the quality of parliamentary debate.

David T. C. Davies: Would the hon. Gentleman therefore like to dissociate himself from suggestions that voting for independence from the European Union would lead to world war three and the collapse of western civilisation?

Paul Flynn: If the hon. Gentleman reads his local paper, he will find that I did precisely that the other day—it was next to a column by him, so I thought he might have had the grace to read my column, even if he did not read his. I thought it was rather better written, although I am slightly biased. I made the point in that article that I am embarrassed by the lies of people on my side, just as I treat with contempt the lies of people on the other side. That is the choice facing the public—whose lies they will vote for next week.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. While I am certainly enjoying the hon. Gentleman’s speech, the House would appreciate it if he addressed the matter in hand, which is the Second Reading of the Wales Bill. I understand that he is giving some illustrative examples in order to come to his point, but I am sure he will do so quite soon.

Paul Flynn: The point is, of course, that the Bill covers how we deal with income tax. I challenge anyone to imagine some future time when there will be somebody for tax and somebody against it. The argument is unwinnable—it is impractical to suggest that there will be people marching down the streets with banners, saying “What do we want? More tax! When do we want it? Yesterday!” It is so unlikely that it is not worth wasting money on.

The public are in a strange, deep and profound anti-politics mood. They are more interested in jokes and trivial points than in the leadership that we offer as politicians, which is damaging to us. I gave the example earlier of Boaty McBoatface—the public showed their contempt in that way, and they are continuing to do it.

I have supported the idea of proportional representation for all my parliamentary life. I remember that in two of the general elections that we have had in my time here, the Conservative party secured 20% of the Welsh vote but did not have a single representative among the 40 Welsh MPs. That was a distortion of democracy that we put up with—we all believe in our own forms of democracy.

Here we have something remarkable in Welsh devolution. In 1886, Cymru Fwyd was founded in this city by a couple of Welsh MPs and some others, seeking a form of devolution for Wales. It has been a long, slow process. In 1888, the Welsh Parliamentary Party was formed, from all Welsh MPs. It has a spectral and occasional existence now, but it still goes on, and has met in the past five years.

One of the joys of my political life, and one of many things I feel fortunate about, is that I am in this generation of MPs. Those who, from the 1880s onwards, fought to achieve devolution made no progress whatever; in our generation, we have got there. The process has been very slow, mainly because of the power-retentive features of this House. It does not want to part with anything; it sees these offsprings and is rather jealous. Now is the time to make progress and give the Welsh Assembly the dignity of making more of its own decisions and having a title that befits it.

It is interesting that, for the first time in history, the two Ministers for Wales and the two shadow Ministers are all Welsh speakers. That has never happened before. Yet the status of the Welsh language in this House is the same as that of spitting on the carpet—it is out of order. Speaking Welsh is disorderly behaviour. If I were to turn to Welsh now, you would quite rightly have me ordered out of the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is a novel way to treat one of the beautiful languages of these islands. It should get the same dignity. I am sure that that will come about.

Generally, I accept the Bill, but we should not follow the very limited restriction on the Welsh Assembly’s adjudication on electrical generation schemes.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a great speech,
Surely anyone with a modicum of trust in the Welsh elected forum of Welsh opinion, or in Westminster, will reside: in Wales, the most democratically ultimately boils down to the question of where Welsh as ever. It strikes me that, as with Scottish issues, the Bill can be tapped in so many ways.

Paul Flynn: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. In 1953 I took part in a march in Cardiff in which I carried a Labour party banner that said “Senedd i Gymru”. It did not say that we wanted a half Parliament in Wales, but that we wanted a Parliament. That has been part of my political life. One thing that enthuses me is that that was a tiny minority movement in 1953. In 1979, my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn and I took part in a very painful referendum—well, it was a painful result, anyway, as we scored less than 12% of the vote in Wales. That was a very emphatic rejection. The 1997 referendum was absolutely knife-edge, with about a 0.5% majority. But in the last measure of public opinion in Wales, in 2011, the vote in favour of giving considerable powers to Wales was 64%. The momentum is there, so we can go ahead and give Wales the tax-raising powers that any dignified self-governing Assembly should have, without going to the people for a referendum that will be in the hand of the Crosbys, the lobbyists and those who are not telling the truth.

Mr MacNeil: The point the hon. Gentleman has just made illustrates the fact that when people are free from media scare stories and have the experience of making decisions for themselves, that only grows in popularity. When we contrast Cardiff with Westminster, it seems to me that Cardiff comes out on top each and every time.

Paul Flynn: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn said, let us not think of ourselves as victims—an obsession with a sense of victimhood is debilitating—but as people going forward as victors. That is how we should be going.

David T. C. Davies: Just to take the hon. Gentleman back a little and pick up one point, the Welsh language is being treated with a good measure of respect here. It is used regularly at the Welsh Affairs Committee. I would have liked it to be used in the last Welsh Grand Committee, and I am sure we will get there in the end, with cross-party support.

Paul Flynn: At business questions last week that was emphatically turned down by the Leader of the House. I hope that we can have a sensible discussion on that. It has been a huge success in the Welsh Assembly itself, where the language is used quite freely and in a very relaxed way. That is greatly to the benefit of Wales.

My main point about the Bill is about the level set in clause 36, which will act as a great restriction on Wales’s progress in using the greatest source of power that we have. It has long been neglected, yet it is like our North sea oil—it is that great cliff of water that comes up the Bristol channel twice a day. It is a source of immense power. It is entirely predictable, unlike wind or solar power—we know when it is going to happen—and it can be tapped in so many ways.

To our credit, we have already used that source in hydropower. But under the scheme in the Bill, even the hydropower station at Ffestiniog would be too big for the Welsh Assembly to authorize, at 360 MW. The one at Rheidol would have been fine, but Dinorwig would be too big at 1,800 MW. Those stations are a wonderful way of using that power. They are entirely demand responsive. The excess electricity can be used in off-peak hours to pump the water up to certain levels and then bring it back down again.

The greatest chance Wales has to produce power that is entirely non-carbon is through using the tides. Where would we be under the restriction in the Bill? The Swansea bay lagoon would be just within the 350 MW limit. But the Newport lagoons—both start at the River Usk, then one runs in the direction of Cardiff and one the other way—are both over 1,800 MW. They have enormous potential. The resource is there, and the topography is perfect.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is making some very valid points. Does he agree that the huge investment by energy companies in storage technology means that renewables could seriously take off, making them something that would be hugely beneficial to our economy in Wales?

Paul Flynn: Absolutely. It is the untapped resource. I know that there are objections to various other forms of power. Another question that comes in here is about nuclear power. The scheme in the Bill will not allow Wales any control over Hinkley Point, which is very close to us in Wales; although it is almost certainly doomed now. The future scheme at Wylfa would be outside the limit. Small modular schemes mostly start at about 300 MW, but go up to about 700 MW, so if people wanted to go down the road of nuclear power, they would be outside the scope set in the Bill. We should allow the visionaries of the Welsh Assembly to go ahead and develop power. We have an enormous resource. We could be a vast power station for ourselves and for the whole United Kingdom.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good point. Does he find it telling that in my constituency there was a plan to develop a hydroelectric scheme at 49 MW to avoid the bureaucracy of having to come to London for permission? Now that the changes in the Bill are afoot, the people in charge of the scheme are talking about going up to 350 MW. Why should they be constrained by what seems an entirely arbitrary limit?

Paul Flynn: It is a great shame. The Rheidol station is of that order, at about 45 MW. The stations exist. They enhance the beauty of the scene—they do not detract in any way. Wind turbines do and so are very unpopular, but no one knows that Tanygrisiau is there. The three main ones were built in 1963, which is a long time to have been manufacturing electricity from a wholly benign source without appreciating its value. We go on from there to tidal power.
I believe the people in the Welsh Assembly should be in charge of decisions on power. We can be a great source of power generation in a way that is wholly British and free. It will last eternally, and, as I say, it is entirely predictable. I hope that point will be considered.

If the Bill goes forward with goodwill from all parts of the House, we should remember the story of devolution in Wales and how it has grown up and can stand tall among the nations of the world. It is a matter of pride to see the development of the Welsh Assembly in that beautiful building in Cardiff.

We have just opened a centre in Newport. A marvellous poem by Gillian Clarke about the story of Wales and the struggle for our rights over the years is emblazoned on the side of Friars Walk. She writes about the Chartists who came down to Newport in 1839, with the cold rain stinging their faces and “heads bowed against the storm like mountain ponies” marching for something they believed in. Twenty were shot and killed outside the Westgate hotel. That is commemorated today, with the six points of the People’s Charter, on Friars Walk. She writes about that and the rise of devolution:

“...they stormed the doors to set their comrades free, and shots were fired, and freedom’s dream was broken.
A score dead. Fifty wounded. Their leaders tried, condemned, transported. The movement, in disarray, lost fifty years. Then came, at last, that shift of power, one spoonful of thin gruel at a time, from strong to weak, from rich to poor, from men to women, like a grudged gift.”

The grudged gift keeps on giving and now we have another example of it. The gruel is a bit thicker and the spoon is a bit bigger.

3.11 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). I begin by thanking my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), for the constructive way in which they have engaged across party divides to try to ensure that the new Bill will be a positive step in the devolution process and a positive move for the people of Wales.

I might not have started out being one of the great advocates of devolution, but I have, through my years as a Member of the National Assembly, come to realise that the devolutionary process is something that is important not just to Welsh political life, but to Welsh cultural and national life on many levels. I am sure that the Bill will continue to improve and add to the devolution process and I look forward to scrutinising it during its passage through the House.

I will talk briefly about a topic that has been well-exercised today: taxation powers for the Welsh Government. There is a famous American slogan that there should be no taxation without representation. I am concerned that the new tax powers for Wales will receive no seal of approval from the people of Wales and no democratic process, and will involve no representation for the people of Wales. At the key stages of the devolutionary process, the people of Wales have been able to debate and have informed discussions about their future and what they want their democracy to look like. Of course, that process led to the creation of the National Assembly and law-making powers for Wales. Taxation powers represent a major step in devolution, so they deserve the same level of debate and discussion.

As an Assembly Member, I am worried about the level of scrutiny not just in the Assembly, but in Welsh political life, where there is limited media and political analysis. That is part and parcel of the Assembly being a young institution in the process of finding its distinct place in Welsh life, and its own methods of scrutinising Government and debating major issues.

The huge sea change in the level of scrutiny is something that has really struck me since I have become a Member of this House. One cannot fail to be impressed by the House’s extremely long and detailed process of scrutinising Bills. The Investigatory Powers Bill that has just been through the House is a key example of that. We had Committee reports, a Public Bill Committee and, perhaps more importantly, a constructive debate about not just the Bill, but society, technology and the crucial issues of privacy and security in a world that is becoming ever more dangerous. The process highlighted the crucial role of a constructive Opposition in the passage of legislation. It highlighted the significant role of the Back-Bench MP and reflected positively on a Government who wanted to engage in a process with all parties to achieve the very best piece of legislation.

This is the process that is missing in Wales. There has, until now—I am sure some of the new Assembly Members will change this—been very little in the way of Back-Bench scrutiny of proposed Welsh legislation. I have witnessed Bills being essentially nodded through, with serious and sensible amendments refused simply because they have come from an opposing party. It has simply been a case of, “This is the legislation. It is what we as a Government want and that’s the way it is going to be.”

That is not the way an institution that now has major powers over everyday life in Wales should be run. We need a wider debate in Welsh society and political life about our democratic processes, and our scrutiny over the Welsh Government and their processes. This is a genuine cross-party point. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House agree about the need to discuss these issues without fear or favour to ensure that the devolution process is the very best it can be.

Albert Owen: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about scrutiny in both this House and the Assembly. I chaired the Investigatory Powers Public Bill Committee, so I know the length of that process. Does he agree that one reason why scrutiny is lighter in the Assembly is because it has fewer Members? The number of Members who are not on the Front Bench and in the Executive is an issue. Does he think we should look at the number of Assembly Members as this Bill progresses?

Byron Davies: That is a difficult question to answer. Should we increase the number of Assembly Members, particularly in the current climate in which the amount we spend in the world of politics is scrutinised? I had great difficulty coming to terms with that when I was an Assembly Member, but the honest truth is that if we are going to have proper scrutiny, we will have to consider increasing the numbers. I accept that many AMs are in government and unable to scrutinise.
Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): Is it not right that we should be debating this? The whole point about devolving electoral arrangements is that the Assembly should make these important decisions, not this Chamber?

Byron Davies: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes a very good point.

This is what concerns me regarding taxation powers: the Welsh people have not had their voices heard. They have not had the chance to hear the arguments, to debate with their neighbours and friends, or to discuss with their local politicians what the new powers will mean for their lives. The powers are significant not just to family lives, but to the economic future of Wales. I have felt that the Welsh public deserve a major discussion about this most crucial of issues, which will affect their day-to-day lives.

I have made my points about how we view the Assembly and how it scrutinises the Welsh Government, but I hope that I will be forgiven for going into my concerns regarding the Welsh Government. The previous Welsh Government were, I am afraid, completely adverse to any scrutiny or constructive criticism, as I saw at first hand. I was an Assembly Member until May last year, and I saw a complete lack of will and want in that Government to hear an opposing view or to discuss a different solution. That led to the appalling running of certain services in Wales. For example, there is a complete lack of an integrated transport system that would be fit for a modern and outward-looking nation. Legislation was not to the standard it should have been and there were scandals such as the regeneration investment fund for Wales. The Welsh Government scandalously sold land massively under value—we are talking about millions of pounds—and deprived Welsh taxpayers of key revenues, which highlighted the very inadequate processes for and governance of major public assets. That leaves me deeply sceptical about that Government's ability to control billions of pounds of revenue that they raise themselves. I do not make that point to be party political, but it would be remiss of me and remiss of the House if we did not consider such issues, which are absolutely crucial to our constituents.

As it stands, I am completely unconvinced of the Welsh Government’s ability to run a Treasury. That Government have chronic and long-standing problems regarding their ability to run projects, so I feel uneasy about giving them such powers. I therefore hope that the Secretary of State will assure us that the Treasury and the Wales Office will ensure that there is a clear process so that the Welsh Government are prepared and equipped to use these powers in a way that befits the Welsh people.

I look forward to scrutinising the Bill. I know that it could not be in better hands than those of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). I know that they will listen and speak to Members to ensure that the Bill benefits the people of Gower and the rest of Wales and, above all, to give the people of Wales greater confidence in further devolved powers.

3.20 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Bill is the latest in a long line of Wales Bills to be presented to the House since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly. Part 1 of the Silk commission resulted in the Wales Act 2014, while part 2 has resulted in the Bill before us today, aside from its elements that were covered by the famous, great St David’s day agreement, which I am sure schoolchildren will discuss for the next 50 years.

The Bill represents the latest part of a long saga of political tinkering around the edges of devolution in Wales that has been a constant theme in political circles since the establishment of the National Assembly. Devolution has brought with it the possibility that Wales can make its own choices and go its own way, with its own Government elected by the people of Wales. The Welsh Government are entrusted by the people of Wales to act in their interest, and I am confident they have done so, in so far as they can under the current constitutional settlement. However, I believe that vast swathes of Wales have been turned off by the constant political debate over the constitutional arrangements. It almost seems as though the argument is, “Once we have the powers to Wales, all the problems in Wales will be solved.” That is a simplistic view of a complicated situation. What we need is clarity in a Welsh constitutional settlement that will last for longer than a few short years, or until we have the next commission funded by the Government.

This Bill is much better than the draft Bill. Like many Members, I had problems with the necessity test. To me, that was a simple case of a lack of understanding of devolution. It treated Wales as a Commonwealth outpost, with the Secretary of State doubling up as the governor-general. I am delighted, as many others will be, that the Bill removes provisions for a further referendum on income tax powers. I for one am looking forward to 23 June and the end of another referendum.

Until we settle this matter of constitutional certainty once and for all, considerable time—and, yes, political opportunity—will be spent arguing the merits of further constitutional change. As someone who came into politics to change the world, I do not want to waste the next five years, as we have the past 15, debating the dry subject of constitutional reform. That subject not only turns off the political commentariat, but costs money.

When the Silk commission was set up, the then Secretary of State for Wales gave it a budget of “around £1 million”. Overall, the Wales Office spent £1.3 million on the Silk commission between 2011-12 and 2014-15. If we do not show ambition with this Bill and leave more to be argued and debated for years to come, what will be the cost? How many more commissions will we need to create? A freedom of information request to the Wales Office found that the 2011 referendum on powers to the National Assembly was expected to cost upwards of £8.2 million. How many more referendums will we need to go through, and at what expense, before we reach a final constitutional settlement?

The real question and the real test of any Wales Bill, or any Bill that comes before us, is this: what in this Bill will speak to the people of Wales and address their day-to-day concerns? Although support for further powers for Wales is strong, with 43% of respondents to the BBC/ICM St David’s day poll this year saying that the National Assembly should have more powers, and only one in three people saying things should stay as they
are, the issue does not really enter the daily lives of my constituents. I cannot recall a single instance in the past few years when a constituent has written to me about the Welsh constitutional settlement. Indeed, when I was knocking doors just a month ago, not a single person spoke to me about the Wales Bill, the Silk commission or the Williams and Smith commissions. All these people have entered the lexicon of the commentator who go absolutely mad for constitutional reform, but to the people on the streets, they mean absolutely nothing.

Having read the Bill, I think it is little wonder that people are switched off when the issues discussed are of so little relevance to their lives. The dry subject of constitutional reform might float the boat of commentators and politicians in this place and in Cardiff Bay, but it is simply not something that people talk to me about on the doorstep. The prospect of Wales switching from a conferred to a reserved powers model might have excited some, and the necessity test might have caused a row here and in Cardiff Bay, but I have to say that people on Blackwood high street in my constituency who are trying to feed a family on a shoestring budget, who are signing on in the jobcentre as they have still not been able to find a job, or who are desperately trying to find ways of making do after their disability payments have been slashed care very little about the Wales Bill.

The one element of the Bill that will have a direct impact on my constituents is the devolution of some—not all—income tax powers to the Assembly. I have long been an advocate of regional taxation. I genuinely believe that the challenges we face in Wales are different from the ones faced here in London, which is an economic powerhouse, and from those in the north, in Scotland and in other regions. However, as we pull ourselves to pieces over whether we can devolve income tax or have a referendum, we should reflect that this means nothing if we look at the Scottish model. The Scottish Parliament has never raised income tax or used the powers given to it in 1999. It seems an absolute moot point.

The fact of the matter is that we are an economy that is heavily based on the public sector, rather like in Northern Ireland and the north-east. If we are allowed to start reducing income tax rates, we may start attracting ever greater numbers of entrepreneurs and wealth creators to the Welsh economy. It is a contradiction in terms that Northern Ireland, which has high public sector unemployment and fewer businesses and entrepreneurs than it should—very much like Wales—should be allowed to slash its own corporation tax in the hope of attracting more businesses, as its neighbour in the south has done, while Wales cannot.

Why is it good for Northern Ireland to have the power to alter corporation tax when Wales does not? Although it is true that Northern Ireland has a land border with the Republic of Ireland, which has notoriously low corporation tax rates, Ireland is still only a short distance from Wales, so we are competing with it. We are a small island race. We can get to Ireland and back in one day, yet we are not allowed to compete. Northern Ireland is allowed to reduce its corporation tax, attracting massive business to come in and create jobs, while we are to be fed with the scraps. Yet again, it seems that Wales is being forced into the role of the poor cousin. Do we want a powerhouse economy, moving forward and attracting high-tech, high-skilled jobs, or do we want to continue to be reliant on the public sector and grants from the European Union? Regardless of how the referendum goes in a couple of weeks’ time, that is no future for the people of Wales.

Wales is a country with access to cutting-edge technologies and a skilled work force. General Dynamics in Oakdale in my constituency, and BAE Systems in Glascoed, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), underline this fact. They attract some of the finest minds from our universities, but how can we attract more good people unless the Government are given the lever of corporation tax to encourage more large businesses to come to Wales, bringing jobs with them, and the lever of income tax so that people can have more money in their pockets to spend in our local economies, such as on the high streets that I mentioned earlier? I believe that that is the way forward.

As for the rest of the Bill, it seems that, again, there is a working group of officials from the Wales Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Welsh Government and the office of the Lord Chief Justice to monitor the prospect of a Welsh jurisdiction. That, surely, is legislating for legislation’s sake. The joint legal jurisdiction in England and Wales has been maintained for just under 500 years, and I believe that tinkering around the edges of that could cause more problems than it would solve. We must either commit ourselves to a wholesale split and devolution of policing and justice, or retain the union of the England and Wales legal jurisdiction.

Those are the questions that we should be asking in the Bill, but we are not asking them. Again, we are just tinkering around the edges. We shall be back here again in two or three years’ time with another Wales Bill, which will cause more constitutional uncertainty and more arguments in which people are simply not interested. The message, in my view, should be that the Bill could have been so much more. It could have settled, once and for all, the constitutional argument in Wales. It could have allowed constitutional arguments to be put aside, with a line drawn under them, so that we could get on with the things that really concern people: health, education and transport. Those are the bread-and-butter issues that affect families and constituencies across Wales.

The Bill represents yet more tinkering and yet more argument. It must be realised at some point that what we discuss in this place when we talk about the constitutional settlement is far removed from what concerns people in Wales. I support the Bill, but I am extremely disappointed, because it could have been so much more—it could have brought about the ambition that we need in Wales.

3.30 pm

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): The Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee is no longer in the Chamber, but I should like to thank him for a fascinating insight into both the previous Wales Bill and the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has brought to the House today to start a new journey. The pre-legislative process certainly gave us an insight into how legislation is put together, but, perhaps more broadly, it also gave us an insight into the devolution journey on which we embarked with the creation of the National Assembly for Wales.
I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State and his team for the amendments that have brought us from the pre-legislative Bill to what is before us today. The dropping of the necessity test is very welcome, as are the inclusion of the Severn tolls in the reservations and the removal of various elements. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the cross-party Welsh Affairs Committee to establish how we can improve the Bill further as it proceeds through its various stages.

Let me begin by tackling the elephant in the room. I support the income tax provisions, but I think that the horse has bolted to some extent. If we look at business rates and council tax receipts, we see that more than £2 billion of income is being raised, and is already devolved to the Welsh Government. That is more than income tax, and it gives the Welsh Government a bit of accountability, which is welcome. The more accountability we can give that institution, the better. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) touched on some of the more worrying aspects of the competence of the Welsh Government to date. It has taken many forms, but it has, I am afraid, been Labour-led since the creation of the Assembly.

I understand the passion expressed by some of my colleagues, and I find it difficult to separate my heart from my head. My heart says “Do not give the Welsh Labour Government any more power. They must prove that, to date, they have been competent in regard to education, health, local government and economic development.” At the same time, my head says that this is a very principled debate about the devolution journey and the powers that the House needs to give the Welsh Assembly as an institution. A journey is taking place in my own head, or a fight between poor performance and accountability, although we are already there with the Welsh Labour Government, and I want to strengthen it and one day return a Welsh Conservative Government who have the levers and powers to get on and do the job.

I will touch on bus regulations a little later. I refer Members to my declaration of interests: I served on the board of a major bus company for many years, and I welcome the bus regulations we are giving to the Assembly, because of the importance of issues such as integrated transport.

I do not want to jump around the issues too much, but the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) mentioned corporation tax, and there is always something else to get. Now business rates are with the Assembly. In terms of the Cardiff city deal and getting high-value companies from London to Cardiff, we have discretion over business rates, and we can do exciting things with them. Rather than talk about more powers again, we should encourage the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues in the Assembly to put a visionary bid together with the powers they already have, if we manage to get this Bill through with income tax included.

Craig Williams: My hon. Friend stated that his constituents are unhappy with what has already gone on under the Welsh Assembly, so does he not agree that the timing of this Bill is not right? Let the Welsh Assembly get its house in order before we pass to it even more commitments.

Craig Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for making one of his classic interventions. I touched on this when I spoke about the heart and head. I disagree fundamentally with a lot of what the Welsh Labour Government do, but I support the institution of the Welsh Assembly, and I want to strengthen it and one day return a Welsh Conservative Government who have the levers and powers to get on and do the job.

I want to talk a little about the capital side of this. The more revenue streams and accountability we are able to give the Welsh Government, the more capital they can borrow, so the more capital they can put into infrastructure projects off their own bat, and we can judge them on the success of that. The Commonwealth games bid will require some capital. More revenue streams, and more accountability and transparency in
being able to raise money, would mean that we could make a Commonwealth games bid in Wales. We could put more into the south Wales metro, too, and top up the Cardiff city deal. At the moment, the Welsh Government come to Westminster to access borrowing powers—the old Welsh Development Agency powers, for example—but this Bill tidies things up; it enables the Welsh Government to get on and hopefully deliver for the people of Wales. If they do not, we can more appropriately judge their failure or success.

I have touched on the worrying parts of the RIFW scandal and how I see that as an example of a lazy approach and attitude within the Welsh Government and Welsh Assembly more broadly, but I want to move on to the single legal jurisdiction question for Wales. I believe that a single legal jurisdiction of England and Wales has served us well and should be maintained. Although we acknowledge that the Assembly is now going to make a greater body of law, and I commend this Bill for tackling what has been a very thorny issue, I agree that the disruption and cost of establishing a separate legal jurisdiction is not justified at this time. A separate jurisdiction would create upheaval and huge cost for no good reason.

Another issue that has been modified owing to the scrutiny of the draft Bill is the formal recognition in this Bill of a body of Welsh law made by the Welsh Assembly and Welsh Ministers—or Welsh Secretaries, as I should now call them. This change reflects the importance placed on this matter during the revision process in the past few months. Most of the debate on a distinct or separate jurisdiction revolved around the necessity test, and I am hoping that the Bill in its present form will have lanced that boil. I am sure that we will hear more about that from Plaid Cymru Members later. The Welsh Affairs Committee, on which I am proud to serve, concluded that the necessity test was wrong and recommended that it be replaced. I therefore welcome the Secretary of State’s approach to this issue.

The body of Welsh law continues to grow. I have made the point in the Welsh Grand Committee and the Select Committee that the Assembly is making Welsh laws and a body of Welsh laws exists, and that the Assembly should have the security and confidence to stand up and say that, rather than constantly looking for reassurance from Westminster that it can have its own body of laws. We can now build our legal infrastructure around the body of Welsh laws, but we would risk economic and commercial damage if a separate jurisdiction were pursued. We would risk a flight of talent, given that Cardiff has strong professional legal services. We would also face problems with our universities. The University of Aberystwyth is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), and I would not want to put it or any other Welsh university in a position of having to debate whether to teach English or Welsh law to international students. That might be a difficult one for the dean of law at Aberystwyth. For all those reasons, I support the Government’s belief in maintaining a shared legal jurisdiction, and I welcome the work being undertaken by representatives of the Lord Chief Justice’s office.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): The short answer is that I am sure the head of the law department at Aberystwyth would enjoy teaching both English and Welsh law. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the positives that has come from the Government in recent days is the at least partial acknowledgement of the need not for a separate legal jurisdiction but for a distinct legal jurisdiction? The difference seems to have been lost on some Conservative Members. People are talking about a separate jurisdiction, but many of us here are calling for a distinct one.

Craig Williams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. We debated this matter in the Select Committee and in the Welsh Grand, and I constantly said that I thought we already had distinct arrangements and could not understand what was being asked for. He was right, however, and the Secretary of State has made it clear in the Bill that those distinct arrangements will be put in place.

Mr Williams: But surely the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that the creation of the working group that the Government have announced is a step in the direction of a distinct jurisdiction. Otherwise, we shall be revisiting this matter in the years to come, as the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) has suggested.

Craig Williams: I am going to touch on something that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said. I agree that this is a pragmatic solution to a thorny issue, and I cannot see why the distinct arrangements would not stand the test of time as the body of Welsh law emerges. This is a significant change.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In that case, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the findings of the working group will be extremely important to our discussions on the Bill? Given that it is going to report back in the autumn, should we not ensure that its findings are incorporated in the Bill?

Craig Williams: Being a new Member of Parliament, I am guessing that that will fit into the timetable of the Bill’s passage through the House, given that we do not exactly rush things here. I think the Secretary of State alluded to the fact that that work would be carried out coterminously. I look forward to the findings; they will be important and they will perhaps bring Members together to deal with the thorny issue of jurisdiction. I am looking forward to the findings of the working group and I hope that they will be produced in a timely fashion so that we can consider them in Committee. These proposals represent a significant change from those in the draft Bill.

I support the proposals on the judicial impact assessments. I do not follow the rationale behind the objections to them. Any sensible institution or Government would have them, but I look forward to sitting down and discussing that rationale with anyone who opposes them. Adopting those assessments would be a sensible approach. Similarly, the electoral arrangements have been a long time coming. As I have said, it is not right that we in this place should debate how many Assembly Members there should be or at what age people in Wales should have the vote. The new arrangements are quite right, and if the Assembly chose to call itself the Welsh Parliament, I would be entirely relaxed about that—a rose by any other name—given that it is making laws, generating revenue and borrowing against capital.
Craig Williams]  

In drawing my contribution to a close, I wish to talk about two practical things. The shadow Secretary of State mentioned ports and the protections on trust ports, particularly Milford Haven. Some 62% of all UK natural gas is coming through that port, so I judge it to be a port of national infrastructure on a UK level, and it is entirely warranted that there is protection there. I have alluded to a welcome, practical measure on bus regulation, which I see as an excellent step forward for what the Welsh Government have been trying to do on integrating transport. It is also an excellent step forward for local authorities. I served on the board of Cardiff Bus, the largest south Wales bus company, and I think this measure will enable the integrated approach between buses, city regions and the train services.

I hope that the Bill has a speedy and successful passage through the House, and I very much look forward to seeing what the Welsh Government do with these powers and, as I said to the hon. Member for Islwyn, the business rates and the huge powers and levers the Welsh Government currently have to better the lives of my constituents and the people of Wales. I commend this Bill, I thank the Secretary of State and his team, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): After the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, the Prime Minister promised the people of Wales that just as the rights of Scottish voters will be “respected, reserved and enhanced”, so, too, would the rights of the Welsh voters. He promised that Wales would be “at the heart” of the devolution debate. Since then, the Wales Office has published a draft Wales Bill and now we have the Wales Bill proper, billed as the UK Government’s response to the cross-party Silk commission. The draft Bill failed to deliver on the recommendations of the Silk commission—a commission established by the Tories themselves. Its recommendations were supported by all four of Wales’s biggest political parties, including the Secretary of State’s own Welsh Tories. Plaid Cymru, civil society groups, and people in all parts of Wales had hoped that the re-drafted Wales Bill would return to the consensus of the Silk commission and would offer the people of Wales the devolution settlement that is ours as of right, one that is sustainable, ambitious and fair. Today, we are very far away from that wholly reasonable goal.

I freely acknowledge that, compared with the draft published last autumn, some progress has been made in making the Bill fit for purpose, but we still have a long way to go before this Bill will become fit for enactment. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has acted on some of the criticisms of the previous draft, for example on the reservation of criminal law and the necessity tests. The recognition of the fact of Welsh law is very much to be welcomed, but it is just a recognition of the reality of the situation in Wales. There remain serious concerns regarding the complexity, uncertainty and indeed lack of coherence in some parts of the Bill.

Throughout Wales’s long devolution journey, Plaid Cymru has always tried to get the best possible deal for everyone and anyone who chooses to make their home in Wales. Those people who call Wales their home best understand the needs of our country. I believe it was Gwynfor Evans who once said that anyone can be Welsh, as long as they are prepared to take the consequences. One of those consequences is that those who live in Wales face up to deciding for Wales, but we recognise that not all parties share this view, which is why we signed up to the Silk commission. It was a cross-party commission, with nominees from each of the four biggest parties in Wales, along with academic experts, who talked, formally and informally, with people all over Wales. It was a truly representative commission and the two reports it produced represented a true consensus.

That consensus was not easy to achieve. We in Plaid Cymru gave way on some points, ones that were important to us but not to others, as did other parties on their issues. The Silk process involved all parties making compromises, including my own, so it was deeply disappointing and frustrating to see the Wales Office dump that true consensus in order to find a lowest common denominator and then call it an “agreement”. Far from being an agreement, the St David’s day White Paper and this eventual Wales Bill fall well short of the consensus that Silk worked so hard to achieve. The profound criticism of this Bill, after just one week, is in the same vein as that of the discredited draft Bill those weeks ago. The criticism is really striking when we contrast it with the consensus and welcome that surrounded the Silk recommendations in Wales.

What happened to the consensus on the idea that Wales’s natural resources should be in the hands of those living in Wales? What happened to the consensus on the idea that it is the people of Wales who are best placed to determine our policing policies? What happened to the consensus on the idea that it is the people of Wales who best understand our country’s transport needs? Under this Bill, Wales can set its own speed limits, but drink-drive limits are just too complicated for little old us. One of the historical political controversies in Wales relates to water. Water is much too valuable a resource to be left to the Government of Wales, but, yes, we are allowed to have sewerage.

I have many concerns regarding the current list of reserved policy fields, and I shall return to them later. I wish to start by focusing on the foundations of the draft Bill. I should stress that Plaid Cymru warmly welcomes the move to a reserved powers model—that is, to move away from the current devolution model in which the settlement lists areas on which the Assembly can legislate to a model in which the settlement lists areas where they cannot.

There was an unusual and welcome consensus across all of Wales’s six biggest parties on the need to move to a reserved powers model. That consensus stems from the lack of clarity on where the responsibility lies, especially as compared with the Scottish dispensation; the challenges to Welsh legislation in the Supreme Court under the current dispensation; and the danger of further and increased challenges in the Supreme Court if we do not get this sorted out.

It was thought that moving to a reserved powers model would provide clarity both legally and for the public as to what is and what is not within the legislative competence of the Assembly. This is a problem for MPs as well, and it is no small matter. When considering legislation, I do not know how many times I have had to ask: “Is this Wales only? Is it England only? Is it
England and Wales only? Is it Great Britain, or is it even Great Britain and Northern Ireland?” Whatever people’s opinion on devolution—whether pro or anti—we can all agree that such ambiguity is bad for democracy.

Moving to a reserved powers model should also be about changing the ruling attitudes towards devolution. It would be for the UK Government to justify whether something should be reserved, rather than justifying why something should be devolved. This is devolution based on subsidiarity—real subsidiarity, as I said to the Secretary of State earlier—rather than retention. It is enabling rather than hobbled, and trusting and respecting rather than suspecting and resenting. That is the case, however much some Whitehall Departments might snarl—and I think we know who they are.

I fear that these principles—the foundations of the arguments in favour of the reserved powers model—have been lost, and the result is a Bill that is unclear, somewhat unstable and possibly unsustainable. We have gone from a position as recently as last May where all six of Wales’s biggest parties agreed on a way forward, to a position now where the UK Government are alone in thinking that this Bill delivers a lasting settlement. The Wales Office has admitted that, rather than using the Scotland Act 1998 as a starting point—a devolution dispensation that has avoided the constant legal challenges and political tinkering that have bedevilled Welsh devolution—it has used the Government of Wales Act 2006, the failed devolution settlement that we are trying to replace. In fact, it is a model based on the administrative devolution in the 1960s, from the creation of the Welsh Office, as it was then known, onwards. It is a deeply outdated model and not fit for today, let alone tomorrow.

The Bill claws back the powers for which the people of Wales voted overwhelmingly in 2011, and returns to a long list of reservations. The Wales Office has admitted that, rather than using the Scotland Act 1998 as a starting point—a devolution dispensation that has avoided the constant legal challenges and political tinkering that have bedevilled Welsh devolution—it has used the Government of Wales Act 2006, the failed devolution settlement that we are trying to replace. In fact, it is a model based on the administrative devolution in the 1960s, from the creation of the Welsh Office, as it was then known, onwards. It is a deeply outdated model and not fit for today, let alone tomorrow.

The Bill claws back the powers for which the people of Wales voted overwhelmingly in 2011, and returns to a long list of reservations. The Western Mail, which, I concede, is not always 100% correct, lists 267 powers that “Westminster doesn’t want Wales to have”, ranging “from axes to outer space”.

Almost every measure in the draft Bill was roundly criticised, but there was particular ire for the lengthy list of reserved powers. The Wales Office admitted that the list was too long, and promised to shorten it. It may well have taken out a few reservations, but the fact that the list has increased from 42 pages to 44 suggests that the number of reservations or their complexity.

Hywel Williams: I am grateful for that point, which we have discussed before, and I have said that the number of pages might not be the best indication of the number of reservations or their complexity.

There are new reservations in this Bill that were not in the draft Bill, for example, on matters as important as the Severn bridges—that nagging toothache for our economy in the south.

Jonathan Edwards: Going back to the intervention by the Secretary of State, does not the fact that the number of pages has increased indicate that this is not the bonfire of the reservations that we were promised?

Hywel Williams: No doubt that is something that we will debate. I relish the opportunity to discuss the reservations and hear the Secretary of State or his colleagues justify them. The explanatory notes include a description or explanation of the reservations but, as far as I can see, there is very little justification for them. Therefore look forward to hearing about that in subsequent debates.

The report by the Wales Governance Centre and University College London on the draft Bill described the list of reservations and said:

“Complexity is piled on complexity...the potential for legal challenge casts a long shadow.”

I see little evidence that the revised list is much clearer. It remains, alas, a lawyer’s playground. As I have said, the shift to a reserved powers model was supposed to be made in tandem with a shift in mentality—that is extremely important—to determine what needed to be reserved, rather than what should be devolved. It is clear that the Secretary of State has instead facilitated a Whitehall trawl of the powers—a pick and mix of what the Sir Humphreys fancy bagging for themselves—sometimes based on principles no deeper than the chance to shout “Mine!”

If the Secretary of State is serious about creating a lasting devolution settlement, he cannot simply flip the current settlement from the conferred powers model to the reserved powers model, then allow Whitehall to pick and choose which tasty bits of power they want to hang on to. The process must be built on principles. I agree with the principles that he identified—clarity and coherence—but I would add proper subsidiarity.

Some time ago I had an entertaining lunch with the Irish Minister responsible for a new Irish language Act. He was quite candid, loquacious and hilarious. He had been to Canada and Quebec and had thieved—his words—a little bit of their language law. He had been to Wales and has snaffled bits of ours. He had been to Ireland and there in the rest of Europe, hey presto, here was their language bill. We do not need to roam two vast continents, stitching together a bit of this and a bit of that. A model is already there for the borrowing and—perhaps Plaid people will forgive me for saying this—it is a home-grown British model called the Scotland Act.

The Silk commission hoped that moving to a reserved powers model would be a chance to rewrite the settlement to remove some of the defects of haste and inconsistency that have so far marred legislative devolution in Wales. The list of reservations does not reflect that hope. The director of the Wales Governance Centre has described
the Bill as being underpinned by a “patronising attitude” and as continuing to regard Wales as “enjoying a lower status” than the other devolved nations. In practical terms it will undoubtedly lead to more blame shifting between Cardiff and London. That is the last thing that people in Wales want and the last thing that the governance of the people of Wales requires.

Both the Welsh Affairs Committee, which has a Tory majority, and the National Assembly’s Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, which was also chaired by a Tory, recommended that each reservation should be individually justified. That recommendation has been ignored and, as I said, I look forward to hearing the Secretary of State or his colleagues making up for that as we go into Committee.

The Wales Governance Centre has offered a list of considerations for identifying functions that should be devolved: is it necessary to retain function X for the functioning of the UK as a state? Does retention of Y make the governance of the UK less clear or comprehensible? Does retention of Z undermine the workability, stability or durability of the devolution settlement? These are the questions that the Secretary of State should be asking himself for each and every one of the reservations in the Bill and I hope we will have time to hear him go through those steps. Simply making hundreds of reservations for no given reason is not acceptable, particularly when the real rationale seems to be a deeply suspect power grab by Departments of Government that have failed Wales so spectacularly over the past few years.

Mr David Jones: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good speech. He talks about the need to analyse each and every one of the proposed reservations. Does he think that two days in Committee will be sufficient to achieve that?

Hywel Williams: I am not sure. I am in two minds about that. If we have full days of debate, that might indeed be the case. I have been here too long, so I remember days of Welsh debates which have been interrupted by statements, urgent questions and all kinds of shenanigans that have led to Welsh debates being curtailed. If we have protected time, we shall see. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) will be looking into this point further in his remarks and I hope the right hon. Gentleman will be here to hear him.

I challenge the Secretary of State to respond today and offer justifications for why he believes the people of Wales do not deserve the same responsible government as the people of Scotland. As has been said, the Secretary of State voted for the Scotland Act. He voted to give the people of Scotland a Government with full control of Scottish natural resources, policing and criminal justice. He voted to make the Scottish Government responsible for raising a significant proportion of the money that they spend. He has also voted to devolve policing to Manchester, yet he refuses to do so for Wales. What practical reasons are there to insist that Welsh police forces follow the agenda of English forces? Those who were fortunate enough to be in the House last night would have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) making just those arguments. What reason is there for focusing largely on problems prevalent in urban England, such as knife crime, rather than on meeting the needs of Wales, and in my case, particularly of rural Wales?

What practical reason is there for setting, for example, a 350 MW limit on the Welsh Government’s power over energy—a point that I made to the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who is no longer in his place—when there is no such limit on the Scottish Government? I raised the wholly practical question about that in my point to that hon. Gentleman. I will expand a little on it now, with the permission of the House.

A local hydroelectric scheme in Snowdonia was going to limit itself to 49 MW—that is the old limit. Those involved told me quite plainly that that was to avoid the entanglements of London bureaucracy. Now they are aiming for 350 MW, and they could produce more, but why should we skew reasonable economic development on the basis of a number that has, as far as I can see, been plucked out of the air? I would like to know why the figure is 350, and not 351 or 349.

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman referred to the Silk commission. Does he not accept that 350 MW was a recommendation from Silk and that it was arrived at based on a proposition from members of all political parties?

Hywel Williams: We have moved on from the Silk commission, and we are now looking at this issue—[Interruption.] If the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary can contain themselves, I will explain the position in a moment.

I would still like to hear the justification—not from the Silk commission, but from the Secretary of State—as to why the figure is not 351 or 349. What practical reasons are there for devolving the tidal lagoon in Swansea bay but not the lagoons proposed in the Cardiff area or in Colwyn bay, in the area of the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones)? What is the justification? I am interested, and we might even get an answer. However, there is no sensible argument for this limit—for me at least—and there is no limit in Scotland. Unless such decisions are based on reason and principle, the devolution settlement will never be long-lasting, and we will perpetually be debating the constitution.

It is not Plaid Cymru who is the constitutional obsessive here, despite frequent challenges that it is; it is successive Westminster Governments who have chosen Sir Humphrey’s fudge, mudge and fix over empowering the Welsh Government to settle down and get on with the job of bettering the lives of the people of Wales—and, boy, do they have a job on their hands!

The Bill is, among other things, an attempt to keep as much power as possible in Whitehall by devolving as little as possible to Cardiff. As far as I can see, it is not likely to build a stable, sustainable and fair devolution settlement for our country. However, the Wales Office has an opportunity to give us the devolution settlement we need: one that leads not to court cases and blame shifting, but to economic growth, a healthier NHS and a better educated workforce—one that will actually work and stand the test of time.
Plaid Cymru will be tabling amendments to the Bill to ensure that the people of Wales are treated with respect. We will demand a devolution settlement that facilitates progress, rather than puts up blocks. I still hope that the official Opposition will support those amendments. The opportunity to shape Wales’s constitution does not come around that often.

The Bill is crucial to all of us who care about the future of our country so I do not want to be forced to vote against it, and neither do my hon. Friends. There are many things in it that we welcome, including powers over fracking and the devolution of electoral arrangements, for example. For the party of Wales—a party whose very reason for existing is to empower the nation and the people of Wales to run their own affairs—it would be a painful decision to vote against those powers, and I sincerely hope the Secretary of State will not force us to do that. I therefore urge him to take our criticisms in the constructive spirit in which they are intended and to bring forward his own amendments to rescue the Bill.

I urge the Secretary of State to reflect on the significance of what he is building. He is reshaping the constitution of Wales, and he has an opportunity to create a significant shift in Wales’s future—to build a new Wales for a future history of Wales. This is an opportunity to construct the foundation on which his country’s economy will be built; his country’s NHS will be healed and his country’s schools will be transformed. He should not waste it.

The Bill falls well short of the Silk commission’s recommendations. However, the reality is that the commission, despite its good work, has now been superseded by the Scotland Act. Wales must not be forced to lag behind. The Secretary of State can be stubborn and push the Bill if he wishes to, but he will be in danger of pushing yet another failed Bill and of becoming a failed Secretary of State for Wales, and I would not wish that on him. He would be one in the line of a great many others who, as Secretary of State for Wales, have failed to serve Wales all that well. He should heed the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, who last night made a compelling case on, for example, devolving policing. We heard not a peep from Welsh Tory Back Benchers or Welsh Labour Members on this matter, let alone ascertained their opinions in the Lobbies, with the honourable exception of the Secretary of State himself, who I think I spotted trooping through the No Lobby. He should also take the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, who called for him to follow in the footsteps of the great Conservative reformers of the past—politicians who foresaw the future and legislated with foresight rather than submitting to the constraints of the present.

Disraeli wrote novels, now largely unread, as well as getting in a bit of prime ministering while he was at it. When asked if he had read “Daniel Deronda”—a very good novel—he replied:

“When I want to read a novel, I write one.”

The Secretary of State might likewise wish to see a good Wales Bill, so he should write one. I am sure he is capable of doing that, but this one is not quite it. He and his Under-Secretary now have a rare opportunity to prove that they are politicians of vision. My hon. Friends and I envy them. As to the Bill, I say with our national poet, Waldo Williams,

“Beth yw trefnu teyrnas? Crefft
Sydd eto’n cropian”,
or, “What is ordering a kingdom? A craft that’s barely crawling.” I say to them: do not waste this opportunity to build your nation into the country that it could be—the country that, by rights, it should be.

4.11 pm

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams). Even though I did not agree with a great deal of his speech, I congratulate him on the passion for and commitment to Wales that we are accustomed to hearing from him.

I both congratulate and sympathise with the Secretary of State and his Minister. It is never easy taking over a Bill that was started by a previous Secretary of State, but he has brought this forward, and I congratulate him on doing so. I sympathise with him because, as many will now know, many Members within his ranks are very unhappy with the Bill as it stands. In fact, with 11 Members from Wales, and taking the two Ministers out of the scenario, the majority of Welsh Conservative MPs are unhappy with the Bill.

This is an important Bill, but so far today we have seen most of these green Benches empty. Members who have spoken have done so with great passion and great commitment to Wales, but we have had a lot of green shown to us today and not many Members from throughout Great Britain and across the House joining us. That is very disappointing.

The Bill comes at a crucial time for our home nation. The Welsh economy is now chugging back into life after a protracted stall since 2008. Businesses are hiring again, the unemployment rate is falling, and our GDP is beginning to rise. The historic Cardiff city deal introduced by this Government that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) does so much to champion is bringing great infrastructure and further job prospects to south Wales. That will have a knock-on effect on many hon. Members’ constituencies, including my own, boosting our local economies.

This is also a crucial time for Wales because it is so soon after the Welsh Assembly elections that returned no overall majority. On its own, perhaps that result does not have a great knock-on effect on uncertainty in the Welsh economy, but coupling it with the EU referendum, whichever way the vote goes, makes for an uncertain time for Wales. It is imperative that we do all we can to make Wales strong and resilient for the future. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and I do not want Wales to be the weak link in the United Kingdom chain. I think that we can all agree on that, as we all want Wales to be a strong, successful player in the United Kingdom.

Some Members might be surprised to hear that I am not opposed to the overall concept of further devolution in trying to achieve that goal. I agree with the Government that power should be held as close to the people as possible, which is why I believe that some parts of previous Wales Acts need to be tidied up. I also agree that the Welsh Assembly needs to be more accountable to the people of Wales. We should stick to our manifesto pledge to deliver the Wales Bill that I and other Conservative Members were elected to deliver by the people of Wales.
That, however, is where my agreement with this Bill wanes. I cannot stand idly by my principles and accept the Bill in its current form. I am disappointed about the timing of the Bill, its application and much of its substance. I want a Wales that can decide its own destiny and has control over its future, but most of all I want a Wales that plays a key part in, and remains a strong part of, a United Kingdom. The only way we can achieve those goals is through a devolved settlement that the people of Wales actually want and accept—a settlement that will hold long into the future.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is making some powerful points based on his principles as a politician. Does that mean that he will vote against the Bill?

Chris Davies: I thank my parliamentary neighbour for his intervention. As far as I am aware, there will be no vote this evening, but I shall scrutinise the Bill exceptionally closely over the next two or three days and I will table amendments.

We as politicians should never assume that we know exactly what the people of Wales want. On matters as important as this settlement and the Bill, which will affect me, my children and my children’s children long into the future, we cannot afford to get it wrong. That is why the devolution settlement should, above all, have accountability and democracy at its very core and as its foundations. Without such strong pillars on which to build our settlement, we cannot expect our structure to hold. As we have seen recently in Scotland, we could come dangerously close to a total collapse if it is not right.

Does the Bill uphold what I suggest, with little dispute, to be the settlement that Wales wants and needs? First, I want to consider the timing of the Bill. Government Front Benchers will no doubt be aware that the Welsh Affairs Committee looked long and hard at the draft Wales Bill. Many hours over many months were dedicated to studying its detail, and I was very pleased to be part of that Committee and grateful for the time we were allocated.

Although it appears that we were given plenty of time to look at the particulars of the draft Bill, the Bill in front of us today includes important clauses that the Committee was not asked to consider. We spent hours scrutinising the draft Bill, not this Bill. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who used to work at the Wales Office, and to the current Secretary of State for Wales for the evidence and assistance they gave our Committee during our inquiry. However, we have had an about-turn on the need for a referendum on the devolution of tax-raising powers and the new commitment to allowing for the abolition of the Welsh Assembly through a referendum squeezing their way into the Bill, so it was disappointing that the Committee was not given the chance to look in depth at those issues, which underline the whole Bill and will have enormous consequences for the people of Wales. Many members of the Committee would, I am sure, have welcomed more time to look into those important changes to the constitution of Welsh devolution, but we have been denied that chance by the apparent rushed introduction of the Bill.

On the substance of the devolution settlement, it was while looking over the draft Bill that I felt the most sympathy for one of the Welsh Affairs Committee’s witnesses—I do not usually feel sympathy for him—namely Professor Richard Wyn Jones, who told us that:

“to read this Bill, you have to have a copy of the 2006 Act, and a towel doused in cold water wrapped around your head, and you have to compare the two pieces of legislation. As a constitution for Wales, this isn’t user friendly.”

Nevertheless I, like many in this Chamber, persevered, and I have found many surprises. First, I was struck by proposed new section 92A(3) of the Government of Wales Act 2006, on the very first page of the Bill before us—I do not propose to go through each clause—which says:

“the Welsh Government are not to be abolished except on the basis of a decision of the people of Wales voting in a referendum.”

I was heartened because I believed that there would be true democracy in the Bill, with the people being given the chance to abolish the Assembly if they so wish. I was therefore very encouraged, only to find, when I turned the page, that there was no instruction in the Bill about how that referendum would be triggered—I found only the next clause. I had hoped that the foundations of accountability and democracy were to be upheld, but that seems to be missing. Why not state in the Bill that the referendum could be triggered by a petition of the people?

When I looked at the will of the people, as expressed in the recent Assembly elections, I found that the Abolish the Welsh Assembly party had achieved a decent share of the vote—4.5%, in fact—from a standing start. I have been approached by people saying they would have lent that party their vote if they had believed that it would have made those of us in Westminster sit up and listen. While I neither support nor dispute the aims of that party, it shows that there is an appetite for political engagement in Wales, so the Government should do what they can to support that. I was sorry not to see that reflected in the Bill, and I believe that the provision falls disappointingly short of providing the key democratic pillar on which the settlement should be built.

Secondly, I want to touch on the application of the devolved settlement. Last night, I sat up in bed with the Wales Bill by my side and a copy of our manifesto open at pages 70 and 71. I am sure that everybody in the Chamber will know what was on those pages, but I remind them that it was the section on Wales’s devolution settlement. With my highlighter, I was ready to mark out each commitment that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I stood on to gain election to the House. I went through each point: introducing a Wales Bill—check; implementing much of the Silk report—check; devolving control over the Assembly’s name—check; reserving police and justice matters—check; introducing a funding floor for the Welsh Government once it has called a referendum on tax-raising powers—ah! I was ready and waiting with my highlighter, my eyes scanning swiftly across the Bill and my hands turning the pages, eagerly waiting to find the commitment that I had mentioned so many times on the doorstep. Clause 13 went by, as did clauses 14 and 15, and then it hit me—clause 16. I checked our manifesto and checked the Bill again, and there it was in black and white: a commitment to give the Welsh Assembly tax-raising powers without a referendum. It was a further
disappointment to find that the pillar of democracy on which I believe our settlement should be built was missing from this Bill.

In his op-ed on the Bill on the day of its First Reading, the Secretary of State himself said:

“Welsh men and women want sensible legislation that reflects their priorities and allows them to live under laws of their own choosing.”

Why will the Welsh people not get to choose the legislation under which they want to live? Why is the Welsh people’s voice being silenced on this issue? Why are the Welsh people being denied a say? Might referendums really be going out of fashion? Surely the whole idea of devolution was to move power out of Whitehall and closer to the people when they wanted it. I fully agree with that. Many political pundits have said that Cardiff Bay is the most centralising Government in Europe, and my constituents quite often feel that Cardiff Bay is far more remote than Westminster. Why have powers been moved from one Government to another when our constituents are either missing out altogether or being doubly burdened?

Finally—I am sure you are glad that I am coming to a close, Madam Deputy Speaker—I must stress that I am not in principle against the devolution of further powers to any Assembly, mayor, local authority or Government, and I want to put that clearly on record. I have absolutely no problem with the devolution of powers. In fact, I often think of devolution as a good thing, where it works. My concern in this case is about the Welsh Assembly’s ability to take on the extra powers outlined in the Bill and to utilise them in a competent and constructive way, particularly at this time of no overall majority.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) spoke eloquently about the devolution of wind energy provision, and my neighbour, the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), said that he was scaremongering. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the prospect of having more pylons in Brecon and Radnorshire is scaring my constituents and is a serious worry, but I believe the Welsh Assembly will take it lightly.

Let us take some further examples. The first is health. The Labour-run Welsh Assembly Government have so far presided over a fall in real-terms spending on the NHS in Wales. Waiting times are through the roof, and some people are reregistering in England just so that they can be seen by a doctor within a reasonable timeframe. Ambulance and A&E targets are constantly missed, and there has been no implementation of a cancer drugs fund to save lives.

The second example is education. Standards in our Welsh schools are slipping under the Welsh Assembly Government while those in England rise. Schools in my area are closing due to cuts in local government settlements by the Welsh Assembly and its outright rejection of the excellent academies programme that is being rolled out across England. That makes no sense at all to me.

Jonathan Edwards: The points that the hon. Gentleman raises are about Government decisions, as opposed to decisions on devolution.

The hon. Gentleman accused me of accusing the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) of scaremongering. I did not say that, but perhaps he might be willing to inform us of how many projects in Powys have been above the 50 MW level.

Chris Davies: I think the question to ask is how many will be above that level if we have Welsh devolution on the matter.

My third and final example is agriculture. The Welsh Assembly is just not hearing the voices of those of us in rural areas. It has substantially cut the agricultural budget and taken the maximum support payment away from our farmers. Until a month ago, it did not even allow agriculture, the environment and rural affairs a full place around the Cabinet table. This is the same Assembly that spent nearly £50,000 on a wind turbine that generated £5-worth of energy before being switched off.

Hywel Williams: I am afraid I must insist that the hon. Gentleman says that it is the Government doing that, rather than the Assembly. It is the Labour Government who are taking those decisions, not the Assembly itself. It might be ruled by a Labour Government, but those decisions are not the fault of the Assembly as such.

Chris Davies: The hon. Gentleman is quite right, and I stated that earlier in my speech. However, there is collective responsibility down there, and it is the Assembly Government who are making those decisions.

This is the same Assembly that, when given the independent living fund by the Department for Work and Pensions, passed it on to local councils, but not before taking a so-called administration fee. That cost the adult social care budget for people in my local authority area of Powys £49,000.

Devolving further powers before the Welsh Assembly proves that it can utilise the powers that it already has is like hiring the same cowboy builder who has built a structurally unsafe house to come back and build the extension. It is unsound to make the assumption that piling more bricks on top of a wobbly Jenga tower will make it sturdier. It just does not make sense. Surely this is not the pillar of accountability.

Albert Owen: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on reading his party’s manifesto, which was a brave step. But seriously, we have just had an Assembly election, and his party went down from second to third. He says that he wants to bring power closer to the people, so is he arguing for more powers for local authorities? That would in some way devolve powers within Wales.

Chris Davies: As much as it saddens me, I actually quite agree with the hon. Gentleman. The record so far suggests that it would be better to have devolution to local authorities than to a centralised Government in Cardiff Bay.

Glyn Davies: To follow on from the point that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) made, devolution to local government is fine. The British Government have devolved planning to local authorities, but the first thing the Welsh Government did was to take that power away from local authorities and centralise it to themselves. Planning powers are devolved to local authorities in England but centralised to Cardiff in Wales.
Chris Davies: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely valid point. My theme is the centralisation of government in Cardiff Bay. That is not devolution to the people of Wales. Sadly, devolving further powers at this time, when that Government are not capable of handling the powers they have, is a bad way forward.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will just say in relation to the intervention by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) that the last time I went along to Torfaen’s planning committee it seemed to have some planning powers. To return to the point, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) is attacking the Welsh Labour Government. Will he show some respect to the people of Wales, who on five occasions have elected Labour as the largest party in the Assembly?

Chris Davies: The hon. Gentleman said the important thing, which was not said by the hon. Member. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen): the people of Wales have elected the largest party, not a majority party. That party has achieved government by a coalition—is it a coalition; is it a merger? I am not quite sure what it is down there at the moment. They do not seem to know down there either, so is now the time to pass on more powers?

There we have it. I have asked only for a devolution settlement that allows Wales to decide its own destiny and future and to play its part in the United Kingdom, and that is built on the firmest foundations of accountability and democracy. Let us give Wales desired devolution, not disappointment, and a settlement, not a setback. Most of all, let us give real democracy to Wales.

4.31 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words, not least after that tour de force by my neighbour the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies). I assure him that there has been no merger; the Liberal voice for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) is attacking the Welsh Government. Will he show some respect to the people of Wales, who on five occasions have elected Labour as the largest party in the Assembly?

Mr Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes a historical interpretation. I use the phrase “home rule” in this context, because home rule failed and led to Ireland leaving the United Kingdom. Does he not think it would be better to use a phrase that conjures up a vision of success within the United Kingdom, rather than failure?

I was privileged to take part in the St David’s Day discussions. Looking around the House, I think I am the only other person here who was in the room having those discussions with the other representatives: the former Plaid Cymru leader, the right hon. Elfyn Llwyd, the former Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith). I well remember the first meeting. I reminded the Secretary of State that I would be discussing our meetings with my colleagues in Cardiff Bay, and that our discussions—the four of us sitting in isolation around that familiar big table in the big office...
in Gwydyr House—should not be seen in isolation. I have to say that I do not believe those discussions were as inclusive as they should have been. Cross-party and cross-parliamentary collaboration will be the key to the Bill succeeding as discussions proceed if the durable, permanent settlement we wish to see is to be secured.

Were the St David’s day talks an attempt to move the agenda on? Yes they were, and indeed they have moved the agenda on. Inevitably, however, allowing a veto from any one of the four participants risked stopping discussions in their tracks. That was how it was. We went through every one of the Silk commission’s recommendations, item by item: hands up boys if you agree, hands down if you do not. If one person objected, the issue was not pursued. When people talk about the advancement of the debate by the lowest common denominator, they are correct: it was very, very easy to stop aspects of the Silk recommendations. I say that as someone whose party was one of the first—my friends in Plaid Cymru might have been there just before us—to endorse all that Silk said in his second report.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Will the hon. Gentleman spill the beans today and tell us who the biggest culprits were in raising their hands?

**Mr Williams:** The hon. Gentleman, who is my parliamentary neighbour, will not expect me to answer that question. I suspect his sources in Plaid Cymru have given him the answer to that question already. Despite the best intentions, the structure was going to fail from the outset.

Now, to the Bill. To start at the beginning, it is welcome although not surprising that clause 1 recognises the permanence of the National Assembly. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire has told us that the detail of a referendum to abolish the Assembly is not there, and I am pleased about that, but it does establish the principle that the only way we could ever abolish the National Assembly would be through the consent of the Welsh people as expressed in a referendum.

The recent National Assembly elections were not—this will come as no surprise—a stunning success for my party, but they were even less stunning for the Abolish the Welsh Assembly party. Whatever our concerns, and perhaps with just one or two exceptions, there is a recognition that our Assembly is here to stay. Importantly, clause 1 provides for a new and specific recognition of Welsh law:

“There is a body of Welsh law made by the Assembly and the Welsh Ministers.”

It is the first time that such recognition has existed, and it is of course welcome, but it must not end there. If the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire were tempted to divide the House later and vote against the Government, the Government Front-Bench team can have some assurance that I would be likely to go through the Lobby with them—but with significant caveats and provisos. I do not know how much power solitary Liberal Democrats have these days—perhaps more than the hon. Gentleman thinks in an Assembly context. I will support the Bill at this point, but with the proviso that certain things must change.

**Chris Davies:** I am sure that the Secretary of the State and the Minister will be overjoyed to hear that the Liberal Democrats will join the Conservatives once again—just like in the previous five years. It was remiss of me not to congratulate my parliamentary neighbour on becoming the new leader of the Welsh Liberals and the last man standing—or last person standing. I should say—in the Welsh Liberal party. Was I hearing Liberal-speak when the hon. Gentleman said he was glad to have a provision for abolishing the Welsh Assembly, but not to have a mechanism included? Surely the Liberals would nowadays want to give people the democratic rights that they should have.

**Mr Williams:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Reference is made to it in the Bill, which should satisfy the hon. Gentleman. We look forward, as I am sure the people of Brecon and Radnorshire do, to seeing the detail in the lengthy schedule that the hon. Gentleman will table to allow the abolition. He might be helping the 4.5% of people who voted for the Abolish the Welsh Assembly party in their cause, although I am not sure it will help his cause if he proceeds along that route. There we are; we will see.

I was talking about the issue of distinct jurisdictions. There is, I think, a concern—the Secretary of State might have gone partly down the road to addressing it—about the Bill’s reference to a distinct Welsh legal jurisdiction. It seems pointless to refer to a body of law without addressing the issue of jurisdiction. With the growing body of Welsh-specific law that will emerge, this seems necessary if the Bill is to provide a proper and long-term settlement.

In common with the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and others, I do not want to be back here, if I am lucky enough still to be here in five, 10 or however many years, to encounter what would be the fifth Wales Bill. I predict that this issue will not go away, and the Secretary of State should be mindful of it. He is partly mindful of it through the creation of the working group, for which I am grateful. Even if Conservative Back Benchers will be grinding their teeth at the thought of any changes to the judicial system, I think there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the fact that this issue will not go away.

Let me move on to clause 10 and the necessity test, which was an issue of real concern, as many Members on the Opposition side have confirmed. The Welsh Affairs Committee was concerned about it, and I believe the concerns were legitimate that this could be used to curb the powers of the National Assembly. Whether it be true or false, that was the perception. I am glad to see movement on that issue, and although the necessity test remains in part—it will be justified for cross-border and reserved matters—I am glad about the extent to which it has gone. That test seems to have been replaced—I use that word cautiously—by the justice impact assessment undertaken by the Welsh Government. In the spirit of devolution, the Bill says that that is done in the “way they see fit”, and presented with accompanying legislation. I note, however, that the Welsh Government have stated that the Assembly already has the potential to deal with that issue through their Standing Orders.

Quite where that assessment goes, I am unsure; and quite what the response from Westminster Ministers and officials from the Ministry of Justice to it will be, I am also unsure. What would it take for the intervention powers of a Secretary of State to be enacted? I am not
sure. What would set in train the mechanism to go to the Supreme Court—something we want to avoid? I am not sure. I wrote this speech before I heard the opening remarks from the Secretary of State, who reassured us that this measure will not go anywhere, but that prompts the question as to why we need it, if the National Assembly can pursue that device through its Standing Orders. I seek reassurance from the Minister that there is nothing sinister that devolutionists like me and others on the Opposition Benches—and, to be fair, on the Government Benches—should be concerned about.

Is there any need for this provision, given that according to the First Minister the Assembly has the capacity to introduce its own impact assessment? I welcome the fact that there will be a joint Justice in Wales working group to consider that and other judicial matters, and to establish the protocol on judicial arrangements. The group’s objective is:

“To provide clear and efficient administrative arrangements for justice in Wales that fully reflect the distinctiveness of Wales—

I am surprised that the Wales Office allowed that word in the group’s remit, because we are all against distinctiveness or separation, but it is an encouraging sign—

“and the distinct body of Welsh law within the England and Wales justice system.”

I look forward to that report. I do not know what form it will be in, or whether there will be opportunities as work proceeds for people to come to the House or report to the Secretary of State, who will answer our questions. However, it is worrying that this Chamber will not consider the outcome of that work before the Bill goes to the other place. People may say that I cannot have it both ways—I cannot have the working group as well as the Bill coming speedily before the House—but I am reflecting on the quality of debate that we will have on such matters, if the body of expertise and officials are meeting and reaching conclusions, and we do not have the opportunity to respond to them as we proceed.

Recommendation 28 of Paul Silk’s report states that he believes we should hold a review within 10 years of devolving legislative responsibility for the Courts Service, sentencing, legal aid, the Crown Prosecution Service and the judiciary to the National Assembly. Let the remit of the working group be as broad as possible, and perhaps I will be reassured that it will consider those matters. If that is the case, the Secretary of State will have trumped—I dare I use that word?—Paul Silk on timescales, which is to be welcomed.

The bulk of the Bill relates to schedule 2 and the detail of reserved matters. The Western Mail says one thing, and David Melding in the Welsh Assembly tells us that we are down from 250 to 200 reservations, which is a move in the right direction. We may have had the bonfire of the quangos, but that is not quite the bonfire of reservations that some of us had hoped for. A reserved powers model will inevitably involve a list, and we are told that 15 to 20 reservations have been taken out of the Bill—I do not know where those numbers are coming from—and that three more have been added. My elementary maths tells me that that is a positive of up to 17 reservations in our direction, but interestingly, the three added reservations concern the second Severn crossing, prostitution, and heating and cooling systems. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us as to the rationale behind those three things.

I would also be interested to hear more about how the process was undertaken by the Wales Office, and the extent of the consultation when deciding on those reservations. The Select Committee made clear recommendations. It said that the Wales Office should go back and start the list again. Did that happen? I rather doubt it, given the time that elapsed between the publication of our report and the inception of the Bill.

We are where we are, and the Bill does represent a significant move forward. I would not be so churlish as to suggest that the last year has wasted the opportunities provided by the work of Paul Silk and the limitations of the St David’s Day agreement, because much has been learned on the back of the unfortunate draft legislation that followed. At the very least, it has taught the Government, and many in the House, that devolution is an important issue that will not go away, and that if we are to achieve a lasting settlement, the Government must do better: they must consult widely, and they must respond. They have done that to a degree, and I am therefore prepared to give the Bill cautious support at this stage. However, I do so on the understanding that the work of the working group is not peripheral but important, and that it will enhance our democratic processes rather than inhibiting them.

According to a press release issued by the Wales Office last week:

“The Wales Bill is in the finest traditions of Welsh radical reformers like Lloyd George.”

Neither I nor, I suspect, anyone in the Wales Office has had the benefit of Lloyd George’s wisdom on the Bill, literally or spiritually. The nearest that I got to Lloyd George was having tea with one of his daughters, a prominent lady in the constituency of the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams). However, notwithstanding what the Minister has said about the need for cross-party consensus—and I wish him well in that regard—I suspect that my party’s agenda is rather more in tune with the thinking of David Lloyd George than the Government’s.

4.51 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my friend and neighbour the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), who, as always—but he is not even listening to me as I congratulate him on the quality of his speech! It is also a pleasure to have been in the Chamber for most of the debate, and to have heard some fairly strong opinions delivered in such a reasonable way. It has been a constructive debate, and it has been pretty enjoyable.

I was pleased to see a Wales Bill in the Gracious Speech, although I believe that every Queen’s Speech since I have been a Member of Parliament has contained a Wales Bill. I think it was the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) who said that we did not have many opportunities to look at the constitution of Wales and change it, but it seems to me that we have such an opportunity pretty well every year. I do not know whether we shall have one next year; that will depend on the success of the Secretary of State.

There has been a fair degree of agreement across the House today. I have sensed that everyone wants to support the Bill, although many Members will clearly
want to see some changes to it. I, too, was surprised by the speed at which Second Reading arrived. It is fairly obvious to me that the Secretary of State is a man of action and a man in a hurry, given that it was only a few days ago that we first knew that there was to be a Wales Bill.

The Secretary of State told us at the beginning of the debate that his two objectives were clarity and accountability, and those objectives will form the two most significant parts of the speech that I intend to make. The Secretary of State also said that he hoped that we would be able to end the squabbling between the Welsh and United Kingdom Governments for good, and that we would have a permanent settlement. I wish him the best of luck with that, because I should be surprised if we Welsh managed to stop squabbling.

Clarity is a key aim of the Bill. Like the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), who spoke earlier, I was opposed to devolution in 1997. Indeed, I campaigned against it, and voted against it on 18 September. However, I was on the losing side. The National Assembly for Wales was set up, and I became a Member of it for eight years.

One reason why I opposed it was the obvious lack of certainty and clarity on how the devolution process would develop. It did not seem to me as if it was stable or could last. The leader of the Conservative party in Wales at that time, who was opposed to devolution, did not think that there was any certainty to the process, and a leading Labour party member described the process as being a magical mystery tour with no obvious end. My hon. Friend suggested that the end might be like Alton Towers. The truth is that we do not know, and I am still not convinced, even with this Bill, that we can ever actually reach the end, because in terms of constitutional settlements, there will always be debate and change. One day sometime in the future there may be a Wales Bill that reduces the amount of power that goes to the Assembly. Who knows?

I became Chair of the legislation Committee in the National Assembly quite early on, and partly through my experience of that I became convinced that we needed to have a reserved powers model, rather than the conferred powers model: that all power should be devolved unless there was a very good reason why it should not be. That has informed my attitude to devolution ever since. If something can reasonably and sensibly be devolved, I think it should be, and I think the move to a devolved model delivers that. It is a much more permanent settlement and is much less likely to lead to visits to the Supreme Court for arguments to be heard. I greatly support that, therefore. It is one of the two fundamental drivers behind the Bill, and one of the two issues that make me very keen to see it go through.

The second one, however, is more controversial: accountability, and in particular financial accountability. I know that there is some disagreement, certainly on the Conservative Benches, on this issue, but I became convinced many years ago that responsibility for a significant level of income tax was crucial if the Welsh Assembly was to become an accountable body that engaged with the people of Wales at election time. People could look at both sides of the ledger—how money was raised as well as how it was spent. When I first took that view and espoused it publicly, there were not many people in my party who agreed with me, but it has been consistently and solidly my opinion ever since, and it is as strong today as it has ever been.

On a number of occasions at the last election I was asked about my position on this. I said very clearly that my view was that we should devolve a significant proportion of income tax—probably the ability to levy up to 50% of income tax—and until that power was devolved, I could not see how the Welsh Assembly could be seen as a Parliament.

Part of this Bill is about giving the Welsh Assembly the name “Parliament”, but how can we have a Parliament that does not have the ability to levy the most important tax that people understand? Without that, it cannot properly be described as a Parliament; there have to be powers over income tax.

Members have referred to the £2.5 billion that is already devolved to the National Assembly, but it is income tax that engages people. When voters in an Assembly election are looking at what parties to support, income tax is what engages them. They consider not just the parties’ spending promises, but how they are going to raise that money. It is crucial that we go down that road.

Apologies to Labour Members, but it is a weakness to assume that the Welsh Government will always be a Labour Government. There will not always be a Labour Government in Cardiff. It is not the Welsh Assembly that passes the laws; it is the Labour Government who do so. If we can properly engage with people at election time—financial accountability is a key part of this—we might be able to have something other than a Labour Government. We might be able to have a genuine view among the Welsh people and the possibility of a Conservative Government in Wales.

There will be debates on many other parts of the Bill as well, and we have already talked about a separate legal jurisdiction for Wales. There is no doubt that a body of Welsh law is developing. It is a small body at the moment, but it will grow. It will be a long time, however, before it becomes a significant body of law and I do not feel that it is justifiable to have a separate legal jurisdiction to deal with the limited amount of Welsh laws that we have. I cannot justify having a separate jurisdiction from the current England and Wales jurisdiction.

There has also been quite a lot of debate about the justice impact assessments. We removed the necessity test, which was pretty important. Almost everybody thought that that was the right thing to do. However, it seems unreasonable that there should be no mechanism within an institution to assess the impact of the laws it passes on any other institution. All this means is that when the Welsh Government pass legislation, they will have to assess the impact of that legislation on other legislation. That seems entirely reasonable, and I suspect that every other legislative body in the world does it, so I really cannot see why this should be an issue.

Policing has also been an issue. Perhaps this is just my view, but I have never been opposed in principle to the devolution of policing. However, we cannot support the devolution of policing to Wales until a very strong case can be made that it would improve policing there. We need to know how it would be improved and whether the new arrangement would work well for England and Wales.
Jonathan Edwards: Had the hon. Gentleman been here during last night’s debate, he would know that I support the devolution of policing because of what has happened to the police helicopter service in Dyfed-Powys. It has been lost because policing is a reserved power. The helicopter services were not lost in Scotland or Northern Ireland, but the service has been lost in Dyfed-Powys because policing is reserved, and we now have a pooled service that is letting my communities down and letting his communities down.

Simon Hart: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Glyn Davies: Are you intervening on me or on the hon. Gentleman? Go on!

Simon Hart: I thought it might be helpful, before my hon. Friend replied to the Plaid Cymru intervention, to take careful note of the fact that the Dyfed-Powys police helicopter has not been lost, and that it would be a gross misrepresentation of the truth to claim that it has been.

Glyn Davies: I thank my hon. Friend; that is exactly what I was going to say.

I also want to touch on the question of devolution in regard to energy. We all pay a price when we support a Bill that is as comprehensive as this one, because there are often parts of the Bill with which we are very uncomfortable, and I have to say that devolving power over wind farms up to 350 MW to the Welsh Government really sticks in my craw. For me, that is a high price to pay to support the Bill. Perhaps I did not make what I meant absolutely clear in an earlier intervention, but we know that the Welsh Labour Government—perhaps supported by some of the other parties—are hugely enthusiastic about covering mid-Wales with wind turbines, wind farms and pylons. There has been a huge battle to try to stop them, but the Welsh Government are very keen to do it.

On 1 March this year—St David’s day—the United Kingdom Government passed powers over onshore wind to local government across England and Wales. In England, local government now has the power to make decisions on wind farms of any size, and that power has also been devolved to Wales. On that same day, the Welsh Government took that power unto themselves. In England, local government now has the power to make decisions on wind farms of any size, but in England, local government now has the power to make decisions on wind farms of any size, and that power has also been devolved to Wales. On that same day, the Welsh Government took that power unto themselves. It has been lost because policing is a reserved power.

The Government make much of lessons learnt from the draft Bill: the necessity tests have almost disappeared; ministerial consents no longer apply to so-called “Wales public bodies”, but they remain none the less; and the previous 267 reservations have been whittled down to 250. This is hardly evidence of a change of heart, although I particularly welcome the devolution of powers of heritage railways, having six in my constituency—very lovely they are, too, and I recommend a visit to any of them.

The Government have still got us jumping through hoops to maintain the fiction of a unified legal jurisdiction of England and Wales, when the very existence of the legislature at the Senedd, the growing body of Welsh legislation and the vast majority voice of civil and professional opinion together, in consensus, prove otherwise. Perhaps talk of distinct legal jurisdiction is the domain of political obsessives—we have heard this already this afternoon—but it is the very fabric of the infrastructure of government. It is boring, in the same way that the infrastructure of a country is boring, and roads and railways are boring—unless we have to travel to get somewhere and be there on time.

Wales is on a journey. Each new piece of constitutional legislation promises to deliver us at our destination, but the road ahead is not yet clear. We have had 17 years of learning to walk, but why are we still to be hobbled when we want to run? The present England and Wales single legal jurisdiction is past its sell-by date; it yokes together two diverging legal landscapes. Acknowledging this reality will remove the problem. Attempting to tie them together with legal shackles only underlines how much this is really about asserting London’s sovereignty over Wales—the last of the home colonies—and how little it is about mutual respect and support among equals.

What we have allegedly gained in the vaunted listening exercise between this Bill and the draft Bill runs the risk of being little more than a sleight of hand and a change
of name. Out go necessity tests and in come justice impact assessments and a diktat to Assembly Standing Orders, which impose—as compulsory—something that Westminster treats as optional in its own affairs.

We are told that the protocol for dealing with disputes as a result of these assessments will be determined by the Justice in Wales working group—I am glad to learn of that working group, as it reflects the concern that some of us on the Welsh Affairs Committee had with the draft Wales Bill and that we raised in our report. None the less, it does concern me that there is no mention of these justice impact assessments in the working group’s remit. Indeed, there are concerns all round.

Alun Cairns: Does the hon. Lady accept that a justice impact assessment is a sensible thing for any mature legislature to have in relation to the scrutiny of legislation? If she does, what is her objection or question when I say that it is merely a statement of fact that helps with the scrutiny of a Bill, as we have not had justice impact assessments up until now?

Liz Saville Roberts: I note first of all that the impact assessments are compulsory in that they would be compulsory in their effect. However, for this Bill, they are not compulsory, but optional. We do not know for sure what results they could trigger. It interests me that they are not in the working group remit, but that they appear in the Bill. We should explore more fully what their impact is likely to be. Yes, at face value, they are to be welcomed, but we need to know more about them. We need to know the mechanism by which we will know more about them, and we need to be sure that that will feed into the process of this Bill.

Indeed, there are concerns all round about the pace of the Bill’s introduction, the need for scrutiny on its workability and how it synchronises with the timetable of the justice working group, which reports in the autumn. I anticipate that the Secretary of State will outline how these material issues co-ordinate, but I am disappointed that we are being asked to vote today on matters about which so many questions remain unanswered.

In passing, I also note further concerns about the working group. I seek a guarantee that the interests of Westminster departmental workings will be secondary to the best interests of Wales with regard to membership, remit and stakeholder evidence. To reiterate, I ask the Secretary of State to assure me that this Bill will not reach its Committee stage until the working group has reported. It would be unacceptable to move ahead in the present state of uncertainty.

I recall that, in discussions on the draft Bill, the sheer unworkability of the foundation principles meant that the reservations themselves did not receive proper attention. That must not happen again. We have had many speeches about the potential of Wales—I applaud the speech of the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) who is no longer in his place—and how the Wales Bill should be looking to realise the fantastic future for Wales. We should be optimistic in our anticipations.

In fact, rather than giving the people of Wales more control over their own resources, some aspects of the Bill give the UK Government a greater hold. Clause 44 amends section 114 of the Government of Wales Act 2006—a section that gives the UK Government a veto on any Welsh legislation or measure that has an adverse impact on water quality or supply in England. Incidentally, that section is exclusive to the Welsh devolution settlement. It appears in neither the Scottish nor the Northern Ireland settlements. Rather than removing this section, bringing Wales into line with Scotland and Northern Ireland, clause 44 extends the veto to cover anything that has an adverse impact on sewerage systems in England, too—so we have water and now we have sewerage.

In last October’s debate on the flooding of Capel Celyn, I recall the Secretary of State referring to the joint Government review programme and how it was considering the Silk commission’s recommendation on water. I understand that this group is to report shortly. Perhaps the Secretary of State will be minded to amend the Bill to include a reciprocal power for the Welsh Government to veto UK Government measures that impact on Wales, or perhaps he will see sense and remove clause 44 from the Bill. That will, at long last, right the wrong of Capel Celyn and give Wales full powers over our own water.

5.14pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) as another member of the 2015 generation.

I welcome the Wales Bill in its new form, which is a significant improvement on its first incarnation last October. There is still work to do, but I am reassured that the Secretary of State has made it clear that he will continue to have constructive discussions on the Bill with the Welsh Government, and there is still scope to amend the Bill during its passage through the House. I welcome the additional powers on elections, energy, transport and marine licensing. The Bill represents a further stage on the devolution journey that began under a Labour Government in 1999.

In the Welsh Grand Committee on 3 February, I highlighted three concerns about the Bill regarding ministerial consents, reservations and the necessity tests. As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State, the then Secretary of State said:

“There is nothing in the draft Bill that makes the Welsh Assembly consider whether legislating in a devolved area is necessary.”—[Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee, 3 February 2016; c. 61.]

I am pleased that there has been a rapid move from denial to acceptance, and that changes have been made in that regard.

The necessity tests have not been scrapped completely, and they remain in the Bill, admittedly in a watered-down form, in clause 3 and new schedule 7B. They apply, first, if Welsh legislation touches on reserved matters and, secondly, if there is an effect beyond Wales. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State made it clear that there may be scope to remove that altogether, and that may be something that the Secretary of State will consider during the passage of the Bill. Simpler ministerial consents are welcome. It is entirely right that the Welsh Government have the power to remove or modify UK ministerial powers in devolved areas without consent, and the shortened list of reservations is welcome too.

I spent some time teaching politics before entering the House and I remember many debates 10 to 12 years
ago about pre-legislative scrutiny. Such scrutiny has been helpful for the Bill, and I pay tribute to the work of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee in the Assembly, as well as to my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State, particularly for the speech that she made in the Welsh Grand Committee in February.

I want to deal with the issue of jurisdiction. I should refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, and declare that I am a non-practising barrister, following my door tenancy at Civitas Law in Cardiff. There is an emerging body of Welsh law, which is a reality, and it will grow in years to come as a consequence of the primary powers devolved in the 2011 referendum. I am pleased that that has been explicitly recognised in the Bill, and I welcome the working group to which the Secretary of State has referred. As I understand it, the group can take in representatives from the Wales Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Welsh Government and, indeed, the Lord Chief Justice, all of whom should be able to contribute.

The power to modify criminal and private law on matters in the competence of the Assembly is welcome too, along with clause 10 and judicial impact assessments. However, a steer on a distinct jurisdiction would be extremely useful, and was proposed by the Welsh Government in supplementary pre-legislative scrutiny evidence. That would assist in the longer term—we all want a lasting settlement, not one that is revisited. I do not, however, think that a separate legal jurisdiction is the answer to the problem. I approach this from the perspective of access to justice. I have been critical of the Government in other contexts and their record on access to justice, but that issue has to be borne in mind in the Bill.

At present, if someone wishes to take a legal action on something outside the jurisdiction, within the civil procedure rules—sadly, I can remember these things; this is covered in part 6—a number of requirements have to be met in order to do so. I do not want a constituent from Torfaen, who goes, for example, to Bristol, falls over or has an accident, and then wants justice in that matter to find that there are barriers in the way of securing that. As the working group goes forward, it must look at the access to justice issue and ensure that we have a pragmatic way forward—the kind of vision of devolution set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen)—so that individual access to justice is at the heart of the matter. It would also be useful to have far fewer clashes in the Supreme Court. I hope that as we proceed, the Bill will be able to achieve that.

On the devolution of income tax, I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), the shadow Secretary of State: it must be on the basis of no detriment to the current funding settlement for the Welsh Government.

My vision of the Bill is the vision of one of my hon. Friend’s predecessors as Member of Parliament for Llanelli, James Griffiths, whom I regard as one of the most esteemed politicians of the previous century, particularly for his work as Minister for National Insurance after the second world war. He was the very first Secretary of State for Wales, appointed by a Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, in 1964, and his vision was of strong devolution for Wales within a strong United Kingdom. That is precisely the vision that I have today, and I sincerely hope that we can achieve that by building on the Bill and passing it.

5.21 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). I do not always agree with everything he says, but what he says, he says with substance, and is well thought out. I enjoyed his reference to James Griffiths, who is a proud son of Ammanford, which is my home town as well, so I will make sure that the South Wales Guardian reports his comments.

At the start of my contribution, I would like to raise an issue relating to the programme motion, which will be taken after these proceedings. There will be no debate on the programme motion, but when the Under-Secretary makes his winding-up speech, will he clarify the time allocated for the Bill’s Committee stage? In our view, two days will not be enough—the Scotland Bill had four days’ deliberation—but if the Under-Secretary is able to give guarantees that that time will be protected, we will be willing to concede on that. Will he also give an outline of the likely timetable for the Bill as it proceeds through its various stages?

We have heard some fantastic contributions to the debate from Members on both sides of the House. I particularly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Islwyn, in which he made a passionate case for the full devolution of corporation tax. I fear that my comments will be tame in comparison. I made similar comments in the Western Mail on Saturday while I was out in Bordeaux, only to be accused by the shadow Secretary of State for Wales of nationalist dogma. The hon. Member for Islwyn, who is not in the Chamber, might be in trouble with the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) after this debate.

After less than two decades of devolution in Wales, we have had to change the settlement four times—this Bill will be the fifth time. Every one of those changes was meant to settle the constitutional question for a generation, yet here we are, debating another Bill that, it is claimed, will settle the constitution for our lifetime. I fear that we yet again have another tinkering Bill which will be past its sell-by date before the ink dries. During the course of the previous Bill, Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales, endeavoured to strengthen it, as we will do during the course of this Bill. I am glad to see that some of our amendments, which were ruthlessly voted down last time, are reflected in provisions in this Bill, specifically the parts that allow the National Assembly to determine its own electoral system and give the National Assembly the right to change its name if it chooses. Surely since the last Assembly election, when one party had 50% of the seats on 30% of the vote, every true democrat must realise that we have to do something about the electoral system for the National Assembly.

On the question of the name, as far as I am concerned, now that the National Assembly can pass laws, it is a Parliament in its own right. However, I accept the arguments of some of my colleagues back home in the motherland that law-making bodies in Europe are known as assemblies, such as the Assemblée nationale in France.
I particularly welcome the Chancellor’s decision in the autumn statement to remove the need for a further referendum before the proposed income tax-setting arrangement is implemented. Referendums should be held only on a fundamental point of principle, as with next week’s vote on the UK’s membership of the European Union. Conversely, the 2011 Welsh referendum on a very opaque matter indicates the problems associated with holding a public vote on technical issues.

The principle of fiscal devolution from Westminster to Wales has already been conceded in the 2014 Act, with the devolution of minor taxes, stamp duty land tax, the aggregates levy and landfill tax. Devolution of power is the settled will of the people of Wales, as is highlighted by a long list of opinion polls. Political parties just need to get on with it now and react to the growing demand for more powers for Wales, as opposed to hiding behind referendums. The only future referendum that should be held on the constitutional question in Wales is the referendum on Welsh independence, when the time comes.

The Bill is a step forward from the draft Bill, which was published last year by the then Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). That Bill included roll-back powers, which would have been completely unacceptable to Plaid Cymru, because they undermined the settlement overwhelmingly endorsed in the 2011 referendum.

Three new reservations have been added, including the Severn crossings. We will be pushing an amendment to repatriate the bridges during the Bill’s later stages and look forward to the support of Labour and Conservative Members. It is allegedly Labour Government policy in Wales that the bridges should come under the control of the Welsh Government. It is also the policy of the Conservatives in the National Assembly. In 2013, their transport spokesman said:

“Devolution of the crossings—and future use of the tolls—has the real potential to help hard-pressed motorists, provide significant investment in Welsh infrastructure and encourage economic growth”.

The hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who uttered those words while in the Assembly, was singing from my hymn sheet, and I am disappointed that he is not in the Chamber.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): Which of the three ends of the Severn bridges that are in England does the hon. Gentleman feel are subject to a right to be repatriated to Wales? After all, there is a geographical reality that should be recognised.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful for that point, which is always used by the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies)—I am glad to see him in the Chamber, as we have debated this issue many times. However, the reality is that the Severn bridges are the two main supply links into the south Wales economy, so it is clearly in the interests of the Welsh Government to have control over them.

I always endeavour to be helpful in my politics, and when I look at the rate of constitutional change in the UK, it appears that the only way the British state can possibly survive is as a confederal arrangement between its constituent parts. The only reserved matters in that scenario should be those relating to currency, the Head of State, defence, welfare and foreign affairs, although the boat on welfare may have started sailing with the Scotland Act.

The necessity tests have been replaced by so-called justice impact assessments. In response to the Bill, my former academic master, Richard Wyn Jones, from the Welsh Governance Centre, said in the Western Mail:

“I’m afraid this unexpected addition to the Bill suggests the mindset that devised the necessity test is still alive and kicking in Whitehall.”

He went on to say:

“It clearly undermines the UK Government’s claim to respect the National Assembly as a mature democratic institution able to make its own laws without interference.”

He concluded by saying:

“Ultimately the Secretary of State would be able to override a piece of legislation passed by the democratically elected Assembly. It is a mindset which sees the Assembly as a second-class legislature. There is no similar provision at the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Scottish Parliament.”

Alun Cairns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Edwards: I will refer to the Secretary of State’s earlier points and let him intervene following that.

Professor Jones makes the further valid point that these impact assessments are not reciprocal, citing the example of the super-prison in Wrexham, where the UK Government took no account of the impact on devolved Welsh public services such as health, social services, education, lifelong learning and skills.

I welcome the Secretary of State’s comments during the debate and the guarantee that the justice impact assessments cannot trigger a UK veto—I accept him at his word. However, we will have to take our own legal advice to ensure that these assessments are not a Trojan horse to stymie the ability of the National Assembly to function fully as a legislative body.

Alun Cairns: Let me politely reassure the hon. Gentleman that the justice impact assessments are in absolutely no way considered to be a veto. He referred to the prison in Wrexham—HMP Berwyn. When two mature institutions come to agreements, and one is seeking to encroach on devolved areas or another to encroach on an area that is non-devolved within the UK, the UK Government need a legislative consent motion to take action in Wales. There is a mature arrangement. We need to come to a position where we understand each other, and these mature discussions should take place, rather than one having a right over the other. That is not the area that I want to get to.

Jonathan Edwards: I am extremely grateful for that intervention by the Secretary of State. His point about the Wrexham super-prison makes our argument for us. That facility has not been created to deal with the custodial needs and requirements of our country. That is partly why we will aim to remove the reservation on policing and prison services during the passage of the Bill.

My other major concern, as my party’s Treasury spokesperson, is the second-class settlement we are being offered in relation to fiscal powers. The Scotland Act 2016, which all Labour and Tory MPs based in
Wales voted for, fully devolved air passenger duty and income tax—including, crucially, the tax bands and half of VAT receipts— to Scotland. The Scottish Government will now be responsible for raising over the half the money they use in all devolved expenditure. Yet, as the recent Cardiff University assessment, “Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales 2016”, notes, following the fiscal plans in this Bill, the Welsh Government will be responsible for raising only about 20% of the devolved expenditure for which they are responsible.

If the twin arguments for fiscal devolution are accountability and incentivisation, surely we need more ambition for Wales than what is currently on offer. After all, in essence, we are talking about keeping more tax revenues raised in Wales directly in Wales, as opposed to collecting them in London and sending them back. The Welsh Government should be responsible for raising the money that they spend. That is a very valuable principle in politics. We will seek to amend this Bill and the forthcoming Finance Bill to secure parity for Wales with Scotland, and challenge Labour and Conservative Members who supported these powers for Scotland on why they oppose them for Wales.

The other issue in relation to tax powers that must be addressed if the measure is to receive our support is the fiscal framework to accompany tax devolution. As we have seen with the debate surrounding the Barnett formula, words such as “fairness” and “non-detriment” are extremely opaque and open to interpretation. The Bill will put in place a Barnett floor to stop further funding convergence, but let us be clear that that is not the same as “fair”. A fair settlement would surely, at the very least, peg Welsh funding at the Scottish level, especially since that is what Labour and Tory Members of Parliament from Wales voted for for Scotland. I will let them explain to the people of Wales why they think that Wales deserves less support through public funding per head than Scotland.

Returning to the fiscal framework, I am glad that there seems to be genuine good will around a non-detriment principle, but that will need to be clearly outlined before we finally vote on the Bill. I would expect the Treasury, at the very least, to publish its recommendations in an official statement to the House during our proceedings on the Bill because Members of Parliament will otherwise be voting blind on the consequences of the tax proposals. I say this as a strong supporter of devolving job-creating levers to Wales, as I outlined earlier. However, neither I nor my colleagues will support the Bill if the UK Government intend to push a straightforward indexed deduction method. I note the significant concessions gained by the SNP Scottish Government on this issue, so I would hope that the Labour Government in Wales and the Wales Office here will be pushing hard for a suitable deduction method for Wales.

This vital issue is even more complicated than my favourite topic of Barnett consequentials, so we must get it right. We need a formula that will reflect the fact that the population of Wales, and hence our tax base, will grow more slowly than the UK average. We cannot be left in a position whereby a successful fiscal policy in Wales leaves us standing still in terms of Welsh revenues. Incentivisation can work only if the Welsh Exchequer is not at a loss before the process starts. Scotland has once again achieved a fair settlement, and so must Wales. It would be far easier to come up with a fair framework if we were debating full income tax powers similar to those awarded to Scotland—that is, full devolution of the bands and thresholds.

If the other main aim of fiscal devolution is to increase the political accountability of the Welsh Government, the sharing arrangement envisaged for income tax would continue to allow them to pass the buck. The shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), said that full devolution of income tax powers under the Scotland Act would stop the Scottish Government playing the politics of grievance. If Wales has a sharing arrangement, the politics of grievance will continue. In the interests of accountability, incentivisation and, critically, transparency, the UK Government need to revise their plans and fully devolve income tax powers to Wales.

This March, in an act of blatant electioneering, the previous Welsh Labour Government published an alternative Wales Bill that called for a separate legal system for Wales and the devolution of policing. I look forward to the Labour Opposition here tabling such amendments to the Bill. If they do, I will support them with vigour, but if they do not, Plaid Cymru will do so and the people of Wales will be able to judge for themselves whether the First Minister has any influence over his bosses here in Westminster.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the policy areas devolved to Scotland that are not included in this Bill, which include legal jurisdiction, policing, prisons, probation, criminal justice, full income tax, VAT sharing arrangements, air passenger duty, welfare and employment, consumer advocacy and advice, gaming mechanisms, full energy powers and rail franchising of passenger services, to name but a few. As I have said before, it will be up to our political opponents to explain why they voted for those powers for Scotland, but are opposed to them for Wales.

That brings me to the forthcoming parliamentary boundary review, which has not been mentioned at all during the debate, but will reduce Welsh representation in this place to 29 Members. That means a loss of more than a quarter of Welsh seats in the House of Commons.

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman has drawn up a long wish list of things that he wants to be properly devolved. What is the difference between that list and independence?

Jonathan Edwards: I am extremely surprised by that intervention, because the hon. Gentleman voted for those powers for Scotland. Is he now saying that he voted for Scottish independence? That is incredible.

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman and I are good friends. He is a fine cricketer, but he is also a naughty boy. Will he just answer the question?

Jonathan Edwards: I will take that intervention in the spirit in which it was intended. Those powers now reside in the Scottish Parliament, so is the hon. Gentleman saying that Scotland is independent? That is ridiculous. I am sure that the good people of Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire will be delighted to hear that he is in favour of full Scottish and Welsh independence.
Albert Owen: Earlier the hon. Gentleman referred to something similar to what I believe in, which is a confederal system in the UK. Is he now advocating that and not independence? Is that his party’s line?

Jonathan Edwards: As I said when I made those remarks, I always try to be helpful in my politics. My party’s position is independence for my country—

Albert Owen: Say it.

Jonathan Edwards: I have made that clear in my contribution. However, if I was a Unionist such as the hon. Gentleman, I would make exactly the same argument as him, and I commend him for it.

Before I was rudely interrupted by my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), I was talking about the boundary review. Wales is about to lose more than a quarter of our political representation. To put that in context, Wales will experience the largest proportional cut in representation here while simultaneously being denied powers and responsibility for our devolved Government. If the boundary changes go through without our significantly equalising the Welsh settlement with that of Scotland and Northern Ireland, there will be a further democratic deficit. With that in mind, I will vote against the boundary changes unless we have the same powers as Scotland.

The constitution of the UK is rapidly changing. This is a time for bold and visionary acts in the finest traditions of this House. I am afraid that the Bill does not reflect the realities we face, nor does it respond to the practical problems that arise from tinkering with the settlement. We will endeavour to strengthen it during its passage so that our country is not treated like a second-class nation.

5.40 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), although I am not brave enough to call him a naughty boy.

When the Welsh Assembly was constituted in 1999, there were 20 conferred subject areas in which matters were to be determined by the Welsh people through their democratically elected representatives. One famous Welsh politician once said that “devolution is a process, not an event”.

In the 17 years since the Assembly came into existence, there have been three constitutional settlements, which reflects the need to expand the powers of the Welsh Assembly because of the evolution of the legislative procedure in Wales. However, Members who served on the Welsh Affairs Committee during its inquiry into the draft Wales Bill sometimes wished that it was an event, not a process.

The fourth constitutional settlement—the draft Wales Bill introduced by the then Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), in October 2015—promised “a stronger, clearer and fairer devolution settlement for Wales that will stand the test of time.”

It lasted for four months. On 29 February 2016, he announced that significant and substantial changes would be made to his baby. It may just have been serendipity, but on the day that the Queen officially opened the fifth National Assembly for Wales, the current Secretary of State introduced the revised draft Wales Bill as the fifth constitutional settlement—or, rather, the second fourth attempt—to this House. He said:

“Welsh men and women want sensible legislation that reflects their priorities and allows them to live under laws of their own choosing. I have heard that instruction loud and clear, and I will deliver on it.”

Those were brave words, indeed.

I will not speak about the modification of the necessity test, ministerial consents or even the list of reserved matters, which has been reduced by some 15%. I will concentrate on the devolution of justice, which has been a major area of disagreement between the UK Government and the Welsh Government. There was no mention of devolution of jurisdiction in the draft Wales Bill. First Minister Carwyn Jones has made it known that he is in favour of the devolution of justice, and in 2015, in response to the draft Wales Bill, the Welsh Government argued for “a Welsh legal jurisdiction that is distinct, but not separate from that of England.”

The new Bill does not propose the devolution of the justice system or of policing, but explicitly recognises that there is a “body of Welsh law”. It allows the Assembly to continue to modify the civil and criminal law to give effect to its legislation, but does not extend to legislating on substantial areas of criminal law, such as offences against the person. The new Bill creates a working group of officials from the Wales Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Welsh Government and the Lord Chief Justice’s office to monitor the situation. I welcome that because in Wales many areas of justice need clarification.

What matters to the people of Wales is whether they can get access to justice. I must admit that in the many campaigns during which I have knocked on doors, I have not found that devolution of the justice system has been a burning issue for constituents. Many of my constituents contact me because they cannot get access to legal advice, or have problems that they do not necessarily identify as legal issues. I am sure that many other Members find that their advice surgeries are inundated by constituents who are being denied access to justice.

It is fundamentally important that the justice system of England and Wales and the ever growing body of law in Wales are clear and accountable, and work for the benefit of my constituents in Neath and those of other Welsh constituencies. It is not straightforward to understand the administrative justice landscape, which is made complex by the intertwining of devolved and non-devolved systems. Administrative justice is not only about citizens’ rights and redress but about learning from what has gone wrong and producing a vision of good public administration. It covers issues including disputes between the citizen and the state, and it is the cornerstone of social justice in Wales—a means by which citizens can have a voice other than through the ballot box, and by which public services can be held to account. It will lead to better results for citizens, less work for the appeals system, lower costs and, most importantly, social justice.

In areas such as housing, education, health and planning, Wales has its own administrative law, and the Welsh Government have responsibility for relevant justice policy
and daily administration. Clause 10 introduces justice impact assessments, meaning that the person in charge of an Assembly Bill must make a written statement about its potential impact on the justice system of England and Wales. Every regulatory Bill and statutory instrument introduced to this House and the other place that affects private, civil society or public services has—or should have—an impact assessment, which Opposition Members rightly often use to attack the proposed legislation and suggest amendments.

Most tribunals still operate on an England and Wales basis, but some are devolved—for example, the Agricultural Land Tribunal for Wales, the Adjudication Panel for Wales, the Mental Health Tribunal for Wales and the Residential Property Tribunal Wales. These devolved tribunals are supported by a single Welsh tribunal unit, and there are issues to consider concerning the status of the judiciary in devolved tribunals. They are not a fully integral part of the judiciary for England and Wales, and there is a lack of clarity concerning arrangements for their appointment, training, conduct and discipline. Statutory responsibility is not clear in all cases, and formal agreements are needed so that there is no room for doubt about roles and responsibilities.

The working group may wish to consider the following suggestions: that all devolved Welsh judicial appointments have a standard procedure agreed by the Welsh Government and the Judicial Appointments Commission, and that training, appraisal and disciplinary arrangements be of a standard as demanding as that elsewhere in the UK; that the Welsh Government work with the Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service, the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and other UK Government Departments to ensure that data concerning redress systems can be separately identified and made available to elected representatives; and that the Lord Chief Justice appoint an existing Welsh judge to lead on devolved Welsh tribunals.

As the Bill passes through Parliament, efforts must be made to articulate how the body of Welsh law that it recognises forms part of the law of the legal jurisdiction of England and Wales, with the primary purpose of making it accessible to practitioners and citizens alike.

The working group should also consider youth justice. When Charlie Taylor began his review of youth justice, the first place he visited was Hillside secure unit in my constituency. It is the only institution in the UK that offers placements for children who have suffered through multiple social service placements and/or who have got into trouble with the law. Children from all over the UK are placed at Hillside, but placements last only three months, which is not long enough to make a positive difference to a child’s life. The judiciary and social services departments often see Hillside as a place of last resort, but if children came there earlier in their troubled lives, they would not suffer the trauma of multiple placements and/or many visits to youth courts.

The work at Hillside is aimed at helping children turn their lives around and involves health assessments, psychological assessments, behaviour modification, academic and vocational education, the improvement of communication skills and children becoming self-sufficient before leaving to resume living in the community. It is an excellent example of partnership working, with Neath Port Talbot Council, the police, police and crime commissioners, the Youth Justice Board, the Welsh Government and the UK Government working together for the benefit of troubled children.

Hillside wants to build a step-down unit on its site, so that children can make a smooth transition from living in a secure unit to living in independent accommodation such as flats and dormitories before they have to fend for themselves in the community. Hillside needs funding to build that unit, but it is not clear who is responsible for paying for it. Is it Neath Port Talbot Council, which is responsible for social services and whose funding has been cut by £50 million because of the austerity policies of the UK Tory Government? Is it the Welsh Government, who are responsible for education, health and housing, and whose funding has been cut by the UK Tory Government? Or is it the UK Government, who are responsible for police and youth justice? We need clarity.

Youth justice and access to comprehensive and coherent legal advice are two areas where the involvement of the Welsh Assembly and devolution to the Welsh Government have significantly contributed to rationalising the offer to citizens. The UK Government should look to those models of delivery for examples of how they can support the Welsh Government to create Welsh law within the parameters of current jurisdiction. I look forward to the passage of the Bill.

5.51 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate on the next stage of Welsh devolution. We have heard a range of insightful contributions from Members from across the Chamber, including from those valiant souls who have served on the Welsh Affairs Committee and did much of the pre-legislative scrutiny. We are deeply grateful to them all. Their inquiry into the Bill was quite an undertaking, and it is important to thank them properly for it.

Our debate has been very positive. I will speak about some contributions, and apologise that I will not be able to go into greater depth, but it would not be on for me to speak for 80 minutes—we do not believe in letting Ministers off the hook that way.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, was once an arch devo-sceptic, but I think he is thawing a bit—on 24 June he might even decide he likes the European Union. He discussed a range of constitutional issues, complete with theme park analogies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) gave a wide-ranging speech. He talked about visionaries, and about how devolution is about practical measures that improve people’s lives, stating that we always need to take the people of Wales with us. That is very important. He mentioned many other things, including the important debate about votes at 16. We will hear more on that on another day, I think.

The right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones)—a former Secretary of State, of course—raised a number of concerns about the reserved powers model and various aspects of income tax varying powers, along with the fact that no referendum has been promised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) gave a characteristically wide-ranging speech. I am amazed that he was around with that placard in
nineteen-fifty-whatever-it-was, but I believe him. As he discussed the current democratic discourse, and spoke of the Chartists and of Cymru Fydd, he reminded me—I will come on to this again later—that there has been a very proud Welsh Labour tradition of support for devolution, even if it has taken us a little time to bring everyone else on board.

The hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies) expressed concerns about the introduction of income tax powers without a referendum, as well as concerns about levels of scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) raised the practical point of the importance of measuring our work by its impact on the lives of ordinary people, and how we can empower ordinary people in Wales.

The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) discussed numerous aspects of strengthening the Welsh Assembly. The hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) raised many issues, including the welcoming of the reserved powers model. He spoke of his fears of being taken to the Supreme Court if we do not get the Bill exactly right. Lord knows we need to get the Bill exactly right, because life is too short to keep coming back here every year.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) expressed what I think Sir Humphrey might have called “a few concerns”. He said that he felt the Welsh Assembly Government were “not capable of handling the powers they have”. That is his comment, not mine.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) spoke of his party’s long-standing support for devolution. He also raised a number of issues, including some very thoughtful reflections on justice impact assessments. I suspect we might hear a bit more about them, too.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), in a wide-ranging speech, was broadly supportive of the Bill. He expressed his support for a reserved powers model and for income tax-levying powers. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) raised several issues, some of them quite technical, including those relating to the justice impact assessment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) gave a very thoughtful speech, raising a number of legal matters and the very important issue of access to justice. He paid tribute to the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Affairs Committee and to the Welsh Assembly’s Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee. He spoke about Jim Griffiths—we do not talk about Jim Griffiths often enough in this place—who was pro-devolution and pro-UK. I am sure that if he were around now, he would have been pro-EU as well.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) spoke about a fiscal framework. He said that he hoped the next referendum in Wales would be on independence “when the time comes”. How wonderfully vague! I think Plaid Cymru AMs were probably a little more direct when they were having their conversations with Neil Hamilton. The one thing I would say is that we can always rely on the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr to be a bit partisan, so he should expect a bit of that from me, too.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) gave a very powerful and moving speech about access to justice and legal advice, and how that is reflected in the Bill.

The process that has led to the Bill has been long, and, I think we could say, rather fraught. When we last met to discuss the draft Bill at the Welsh Grand Committee, I think we can say that it did not exactly command consensus. Lawyers, academics, members of civic society—all those people in Wales who write at length, speak at length and normally disagree at length—all agreed: they felt it was time we sent the Bill back. The previous Welsh Assembly, of course, was unanimous in its criticism.

We have come a long way since then. While not perfect, this Bill is a big improvement. There is, however, still work to be done to deliver the clear, well-founded devolution settlement recommended by the Silk commission. I hope the Secretary of State will proceed in the spirit of consensus to make sure we get the Bill right, because none of us, absolutely none of us, wants to be here again in a few years’ time. We owe it to the Welsh electorate to deliver a coherent settlement that will allow the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh Government to do their jobs and deliver for the people of Wales.

Welsh devolution has moved on at a rapid pace since Labour established the Assembly just 17 years ago. My late, departed constituent, one Owain Glyndwr of Corwen, would probably make the point that, as we have been waiting 600 years for our Welsh Parliament to reconvene, it is fair enough that we have been making up for lost time. But since then the Assembly has gained full law-making powers and what a delight that is.

Glyn Davies: I think Owain Glyndwr lived a significant part of his life in my constituency of Montgomeryshire—in Sycharth in Llansilin.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Boundary changes are upon us, so who knows what might happen.

Susan Elan Jones: Yes, I am sure he did.

Since the establishment of devolution, the Assembly has gained full law-making powers. I know that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) discussed having the power to abolish the Welsh Assembly. Let us remind him and others that we had a referendum to establish full law-making powers. What a delight it was to look at parts of north-east Wales, which had voted against the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, and see them backing full law-making powers.

The powers have gone along, and critically, Wales has led the way, introducing the landmark Human Transplantation (Wales) Act 2013 and the landmark Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, the first of its kind in Europe. This Bill will now further enhance the Assembly’s powers by devolving a range of important new responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West provided some great examples from history, and my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen mentioned Jim Griffiths. I wish to be allowed to be a little partisan for a few moments as a north Walian. I am thinking of people who have fought for this devolution over the years, some of them household names, some not. I mention some north Wales Labour MPs: Cledwyn Hughes who represented Anglesey; Goronwy Roberts of Caernarfon; Eirene White from Flintshire; Robert Richards, James Idwal Jones and Tom Ellis of Wrexham; Thomas William Jones and Will Edwards of Meirionnydd. These were
some of the people who carried the flame of devolution through very difficult times. Anyone who suggests that Welsh Labour is not behind this development is wrong. We look at our history, and we see that we are proud to death of the creation of the National Assembly and what it has achieved.

Finally, while I hope we will not need another Welsh Grand Committee—I do not say ever—to get this Bill sorted out, I trust that when we next meet in that Committee, we will be able to use both the official languages of Wales. I was pleased to see that the Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee today supported that, as Members on the Opposition side have already done. As the Bill reminds us, English and Welsh have equal status in Wales, and there are Members of different parties who speak both languages. I hope that when the Minister gets to his feet, he can, as a Welsh speaker, throw his support behind our campaign to get the rules changed.

We look forward to the next stages of the Bill. I dare say there may well be a few amendments coming along, but we want the House and the Welsh Assembly to work as closely as we can together. At the end of the day, devolution for Wales means what it has always meant—how to get the best for our people in Wales.

6.2 pm
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): It is a pleasure to close today’s debate and to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), who made a passionate speech, highlighting and reminding us of the Labour Members who fought for devolution over the years. I am quite certain that most of those Labour Members would have been very supportive of this Wales Bill. I can offer my sympathetic support to the argument that the Welsh Grand Committee should be able to use the Welsh language, but as a Back Bencher I was not a very keen attendee of that Committee, so it might not be a power that I would use.

This has been an important and constructive debate. Although Members on both sides of the House have criticised what is in the Bill, it would be fair to say that there is a general feeling of support for it. I sometimes deplore the fact that the BBC argues that if it is attacked by people on both sides of an argument, it must be doing something right. However, having heard the speeches by the hon. Members for Arfon, for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) and for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) on the other, I somehow feel as though I am a member of the BBC in saying that if those two sides of the argument are both unhappy, we must clearly be doing something right.

It is important to touch on some of the main issues identified as changes to the draft Wales Bill, and it is important to note that when we published the draft Bill back in the autumn of 2015, the Wales Office was more than willing to allow for a period of pre-legislative scrutiny. That should not be seen as a weakness; it is a strength, reflecting how this place works. Many of the criticisms have been taken on board. Some were perhaps too strong or ill-conceived, but the Bill is stronger as a result of that pre-legislative scrutiny. I pay tribute to members of the Welsh Affairs Committee who did the hard work of carefully considering the Bill clause by clause, and to the Committee Chair, who has done a fantastic job. His speech today was incredibly constructive, and he highlighted some people’s concerns, while also ensuring that they understand the genuine feeling that the aim of the Bill across the House is to make the devolution settlement work.

The change to a reserved powers model is important and fundamental, but I take issue with comments made by some Members, not least the hon. Members for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) and for Arfon, who highlighted time and again the important fact that the Bill does not propose a settlement that is identical to that in Scotland. When I was growing up, the “Encyclopaedia Britannica” in our house—I think it was owned by my grandmother—stated clearly, “For Wales, see England”. It appears that some criticism of the Bill from Plaid Cymru Members basically states, “For Wales, see Scotland”, which ignores the fundamental differences between the Scottish situation and the historical settlement there, and what we are trying to create in Wales. A settlement identical to the one in Scotland is not necessarily the right way to go, and it would not necessarily create a settlement that is fair to Wales and right in that context.

Hywel Williams: The Minister referred to the first edition of the “Encyclopaedia Britannica”, which said, “For Wales, see England”, but the real scandal is that when someone looked under England, there was virtually nothing about Wales. Our point is that a great deal in Scotland is pertinent to Wales. As some Members have said, successive Secretaries of State have highlighted the fact that the latest change to the Welsh devolution settlement will end the issue once and for all, but I genuinely think that this Bill will create a long-standing settlement. I remind the hon. Gentleman that when the Welsh devolution settlement was voted for by the people of Wales back in 1999, it was welcomed by the then leader of Plaid Cymru as a significant change to the Welsh situation. We must recognise how far the devolution settlement in Wales has travelled since that point.

The hon. Members for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr that I am pleased to offer a full two days of Committee with protected hours, which I hope will be sufficient to ensure his support for the time allocated for the Bill.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): On air passenger duty, Bristol airport lies just outside my constituency of Bristol South, in which it started its life. We had a good debate in Westminster Hall on regional airports, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). Bristol airport employs
11,000 people and has 7 million passengers, many of whom are from Wales. Our relationship with Wales is obviously important for trade and commerce, notwithstanding the issue of bridge tolls, and I am grateful that we have been able to consider that. This issue is about the equalisation of air passenger duty across the United Kingdom. Does the Minister agree?

Guto Bebb: Air passenger duty has been raised during the debate, and the fact that we are not proposing to devolve it has been criticised, although I think that that is right and proper. Silk made it clear that there is a need to devolve provisions for long-haul passengers, but there has been no consensus on that issue. I also ask what benefits such a measure would bring to north Wales in terms of the impact on the Welsh devolution financial settlement. At this time I think it is the right decision not to devolve air passenger duty, and I am happy to stand by that.

Many Members called for the list of reservations to be shorter, although it is important to point out that the list in the Scotland Act 1998 is not short either. It would, in my view, be impossible for the model of devolution that we are trying to create to have a two or three-page list; a long list will always be necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the aim was to secure a positive working relationship between this place and the Assembly, and I think it important to emphasise that. I believe that those reservations can be dealt with positively, and that we can work in a way that will benefit the people of Wales.

The hon. Members for Dwyfor Meirionnydd and for Torfaen, my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion highlighted the issue of the single legal jurisdiction. They made some positive comments about the Bill’s acknowledgement that there would be a body of Welsh law, but I think it imperative for us to understand the context of our decision.

We have consulted far and wide. We have consulted the legal profession in Wales, law colleges in Wales, legal departments in Wales and universities in Wales, and their clear response has been that it would be premature to move towards a separate legal jurisdiction. However, a working group is looking into the administrative processes involved in the development of a body of Welsh law, and I think it important that the Bill acknowledges the existence of Welsh legislation. We must try to develop a distinctive way of operating the administrative side of the legal system in Wales, rather than concentrating on the issue of a separate legal jurisdiction.

Some Members raised concerns about the justice impact assessments. I think my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear that the aim was not to prevent the Assembly from legislating, but to ensure that the impact of legislation was understood. The Welsh Assembly is already committed to looking at the impact of its legislation on the Welsh language and on equality issues, and I see nothing wrong with requiring it to look at the justice impact assessments as well. That, I think, is a proportionate request. It is a request that is acceded to by Westminster Departments when they legislate, and I think that it treats the Assembly as a mature body which is not only able to create law, but to understand the consequences of the development of that law.

I believe that when the aim of the Bill is clarified in Committee—if there is a need for such clarification—Members on both sides of the House will be assured that the justice impact assessment is not a necessity test. I should add that the article by Professor Richard Wyn Jones, which was quoted by numerous Members, showed a lack of understanding of the aims of the assessment, and, indeed, of who would be responsible for delivering and creating it. The responsibility will be passed on to the Assembly. It will be for the Assembly to develop justice impact assessments; there will be no dictation from Westminster.

Income tax is clearly a real issue for Conservative Members. In a powerful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire expressed his concern about the changes, and the issue was also touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones). It has been suggested that the decision to omit the need for a referendum was in some way a betrayal of a manifesto commitment, but I take issue with that. There appear to be two versions of the Conservative manifesto, the Welsh version and the national version. Page 58 of the Welsh version, which I read, makes clear that the promise could be questioned, because once a funding floor had been established, and we have delivered that funding floor, there would be an expectation—an expectation—that the Welsh Government would hold a referendum.

In my view, it is clear that the Welsh Government are prevaricating on whether they want income tax powers. I think it is absolutely clear to Conservative Members that provision for a tax settlement is essential, because the Bill is about clarity, accountability and responsibility for the Welsh Government. Yes, more powers are being devolved, but it is nevertheless essential for a degree of accountability to be passed on to the Welsh Government. I would argue that that accountability, which is understood by local councils and parish councils and by police and crime commissioners, is essential for good governance in Wales and for the Welsh Assembly. I would question whether this is indeed a breach of a manifesto commitment, but more importantly I would say the decision is justified in order to have a settlement which ensures that the people of Wales know that the Welsh Government and Assembly are responsible not just for spending in Wales but also for raising tax in Wales.

Jonathan Edwards: Does the Minister not therefore agree that it would be far easier to achieve those aims of accountability, incentivisation and clarity if 100% of income tax powers were devolved, as well as achieving the non-detrimental fiscal framework which is key to underpinning the devolution of that tax?

Guto Bebb: Once again the hon. Gentleman is putting ideology ahead of practicality. There is a significant difference between the population that lies along the Welsh border with England and the population on the border with Scotland. We have to move very carefully. This is a proportionate settlement that ensures there is a degree of tax accountability. He is possibly pushing his luck on this, because that ideology is not supported by the people of Wales.

We are moving in the right direction. This Government have achieved a funding floor, whereby we guarantee that spending in Wales will never be less than 115% of
spending in England. That guarantee was not forthcoming for 13 years of a Labour Government here in Westminster, and it has now been offered by this Government.

Nia Griffith: Does the Minister accept that it was in our 2010 manifesto? It was actually our Secretary of State who put it in our manifesto, so it came from us originally.

Guto Bebb: Well—[Interruption]—as the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) just said from the Treasury Bench, it took 13 years for it to become a Labour manifesto commitment, yet we have delivered it within a few months of having a majority Conservative Government. I think we should be very proud of the fact that we have delivered that funding floor.

Significant questions have been asked about the retention of the two necessity tests. Those two tests are justified. We are saying clearly that there is a necessity test where the Assembly is legislating on matters that affect England. That is the right thing to do because there is an issue of accountability and democracy, and I do not think the Assembly should be legislating on issues that relate to England without having the necessity test. In the same way, where the Assembly seeks to legislate on matters that relate to reserved powers, it is important to have that necessity test. It should be noted that that second test is also in the Scottish Bill.

The hon. Member for Llanelli asked whether there will be a disincentive for devolved ports to grow. I am pleased to confirm that the Bill is clear that the sum in question is a fixed sum at the point at which this Bill is passed. For example, if a port has a turnover of £14 million, it will be devolved; if it then grows, it will remain devolved. There is no prospect of a clawback. In relation to a trust port, the argument for retaining responsibility for Milford Haven in Westminster is clearly made by the fact that it is responsible for 62% of all our gas imports. But this is again a step in the right direction and if, for example, as a result of the Welsh Government or the Welsh Assembly’s activity there is growth in the ports of Holyhead or Newport, they will remain part of the responsibility of the Welsh Government. That is a step in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Arfon mentioned that there is a difference between the way we treat water services and sewerage. The reason why one is mentioned in the Bill and the other is not is because we are now equalising the situation. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are also looking carefully at the situation in relation to water, and more information will be forthcoming at a future point.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West, highlighted issues in relation to energy. It is fair to say that this House has legislated to pass responsibility for wind farm developments to local authorities in Wales, and I think there should be a challenge to the Welsh Government as to why they do not trust local authorities with that responsibility. The Energy Act 2016 made that commitment to a local level of control on wind farms. I think we should all challenge the Welsh Government as to why they are unwilling to trust the local people on an issue of that nature.

The capacity of power lines was also touched on. Again, clarity is required here. It is correct to say that there will be a limitation in that power lines going across the border at a higher level than 132 kV will remain the responsibility of Westminster whereas other such matters will be devolved. This, too, is a significant step in the right direction that will make a real difference for economic development in Wales.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion highlighted three matters on the reservation list and asked why they had been reserved. One was the Severn crossing, which I touched on in an intervention. We believe that it is inappropriate to devolve powers over the Severn bridges when three of the four landing points are in England. That would be taking devolution to an extent that would bring it into disrepute. He also asked about prostitution, which does not fall into the category of legislating for criminal behaviour. It falls under schedule 2, because the aim is to ensure that there is no possibility of changing the legislation. We had to place it separately within the legislation in order to respond to legal constraints. He also asked about heating and cooling systems, and the aim there is to ensure that everything to do with electricity and gas appliances is regulated in the same manner across England and Wales. Again, this is an effort to ensure clarity.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West asked about speed limits being devolved. It is important to point out that that was a recommendation by the Silk commission. The proposal was also part of the St David’s day process and there was agreement on it at that stage. Also, changes to speed limits in Wales are already being implemented at local authority level, so we believe that this is an appropriate change.

It is fair to say that this is a complex and difficult Bill. It has had a long gestation period, and it has been subject to significant scrutiny here in the House and in the Welsh Assembly, as well as by civic society in Wales.

Liz Saville Roberts: A number of Members have asked about the timing in relation to the Justice in Wales working group. I would appreciate a response on whether we will get the report back from the working group before the Bill goes into Committee, because it will be relevant to our work there.

Guto Bebb: In my view, it is unlikely that the report will be produced before the Committee stage, but it is possible that it will be with us before Report and Third Reading. Obviously, decisions relating to Report and Third Reading will be made by the Leader of the House. I hope that that gives the hon. Lady some certainty.

As I was saying, this is an important Bill. It clarifies the devolution settlement and puts into place the St David’s day agreement. It makes devolution clearer by putting in place a reserved powers model of devolution for Wales, with a clearer line between what is devolved and what is reserved, and I think that most people in Wales—especially the politicians—will welcome that clarity. It strengthens devolution through a further historic transfer of powers, and those powers will make a real difference to the lives of people in Wales. It will make devolution
fairer, and it removes the requirement for a referendum before the devolution of income tax in order to ensure that that accountability exists. It is fair to say that we have listened to the concerns raised during the pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill and made significant changes to try to address those concerns. As a result, we have in front of us a much improved Bill that deserves to go before a Committee of this House. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a Second time.

WALES BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Wales Bill:

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

Proceedings in Committee
2. Proceedings in the Committee of the whole House shall be completed in two days.
3. The proceedings shall be taken on the days shown in the first column of the following Table and in the order so shown.
4. The proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proceedings</th>
<th>Time for conclusion of proceedings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First day Clauses 1 and 2, Clause 4, Schedule 4, Clauses 5 to 19, Schedule 3, Clauses 20 and 21, new Clauses relating to those Clauses and Schedules, new Schedules relating to those Clauses and Schedules.</td>
<td>Six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second day Clause 3, Schedules 1 and 2, new clauses relating to Clause 3 and Schedules 1 and 2, new Schedules relating to Clause 3 and Schedules 1 and 2.</td>
<td>Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the second day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading
5. Any proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in Legislative Grand Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.
6. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

Programming committee
7. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to other proceedings up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings
8. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 3 and 4 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

COMPANIES

That the draft Statutory Auditors and Third Country Auditors Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 23 May, be approved.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will reappoint Alasdair Morgan as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 October 2016 for the period ending on 30 September 2020.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Question agreed to.
Air Passengers With Dementia

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

6.24 pm

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to discuss the important provisions for air passengers with dementia. The last time I was fortunate enough to have an Adjournment debate in this House was last November, when I launched my campaign to save the humble hedgehog. Members may be interested to know that 37,000 people have now signed that petition and we have until August to get the figure up to 100,000. I am hopeful, and I would be grateful if anyone who thinks that a debate on that issue would be useful would sign the petition. I hope that this evening we will be able to make the same amount of excellent progress on dealing with dementia as we have on saving Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle.

Let me give hon. Members the background on dementia. The word “dementia” is scary to many people, conjuring up all sorts of frightening thoughts and visions. Everyone knows someone who has been affected by dementia. Indeed, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) knows someone who has been affected by dementia. The word “dementia” describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. A person with dementia will have severe cognitive symptoms, including: day-to-day memory loss; difficulties concentrating, planning or organising; difficulties conversing; problems judging distances; losing track of their orientation; and changes in their mood. It is a progressive illness, and gradually those symptoms will become more severe. It was predicted in 2015 that about 850,000 people in the UK were suffering from dementia. One in 14 people over the age of 65 suffers from the illness, but it is not just over-65s who suffer from it; people can also get it when they are in their 40s.

While scientists around the world, and especially in the UK, investigate how to combat this condition, excellent work has been taking place to help those with the illness to live lives that are as unrestricted as possible. That is where this evening’s Adjournment debate topic comes in. Inspirational work has been taking place to help people with dementia who travel by air. I wish to pay a special tribute to Ian Sherriff from Plymouth University for all his hard work, and not only on this angle of the dementia debate—I am also thinking of his wider work on helping those suffering with this illness. Ian is the chairman of the air transport group, which was set up by the Prime Minister with a remit to gain a better understanding about people who have dementia and travel by air. As one can imagine, this situation can be quite difficult. If one has an elderly parent or an elderly relative who needs to take an aircraft somewhere, they need to be looked after, and we need to make sure that that happens. The air transport group comprises experts, representatives from airlines, cabin crew members, airports, the Alzheimer’s Society, Plymouth, Exeter and Bournemouth Universities and security experts. It is a truly diverse, cross-section of people who have first-hand experience of dealing with those who suffer from dementia.

The group will send an interim report to the Prime Minister’s dementia-friendly communities challenge group before the end of this year. I know that the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) is well aware of the excellent work that the air transport group has been doing, having met its members and myself in his Department towards the end of last year, and indeed on several other occasions. We are all incredibly grateful for the time that he has put into this and the interest he has taken.

Airports play an important role in helping people with dementia when they travel. Gatwick airport has been revolutionary in the way that it helps passengers with this condition. People who suffer from hidden disabilities, such as dementia, mental health conditions or autism, should be able to live a full life without fear of losing their dignity. That is why I am so pleased with Gatwick airport and the work that it has undertaken to help those living with hidden disabilities. I urge other airports around the country—and indeed internationally—to take a keen interest in this and to deliver some kind of action as well.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I had to rush to get to this debate, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. My brother was very seriously injured in a motorbike accident and has brain injuries. Last week, my mother went with him to ensure that he got special attention on the plane and at the airport. By the way, there is a legal obligation on airports to look after anyone who is mentally or physically disabled. There are many people out there who do not know that. In bringing this very important debate to the Chamber for consideration, the hon. Gentleman has raised awareness of this whole issue. When the Minister responds, perhaps he will confirm that there is a legal obligation on airports. Legally, the airports have to help these people get their luggage checked in, and we need to ensure that they do that.

Oliver Colville: The hon. Gentleman makes a very strong case. As he knows, I sit on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and this is a discussion that we should have at some stage.

I am told that 80% of workers at Gatwick airport are dementia-friendly. Indeed, I am very keen to become a dementia friend myself, but I have a bit of work to do before that will happen. Ian Sherriff has said that he will help me with that.

Gatwick airport has come up with an option for people travelling with hidden disabilities to have a discreet sign, which demonstrates that they may need additional support as they travel through the airport.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I apologise for missing the first part of my hon. Friend’s speech. I was caught out by the early end of the Second Reading debate on the Wales Bill. I pay tribute to Gatwick airport in my constituency for its lanyard scheme, which means that those with hidden disabilities and dementia can be better assisted on their travels through the airport. Does he agree that the airport leads the way in these enhancements for passengers?
Oliver Colvile: Absolutely. My hon. Friend has got that 100% right. Gatwick has been leading the way, but it will be very interesting to see how many emails and letters I get from other airports around the country and in Northern Ireland after this debate. As he says, the lanyard initiative is incredibly helpful, as it identifies those who are in need of help.

Help could also include: giving passengers more time to prepare at check-ins and security; allowing passengers to remain with their family at all times; giving passengers a more comprehensive briefing on what to expect from their travelling experience; and helping passengers to read a departure board or sign. Those are all about patience, and we must try to ensure that we can deliver that sort of help. These passengers may be low on confidence because of their conditions so these subtle yet highly helpful improvements will help passengers to get through what can be the difficult process of travelling through an airport.

As the House will know, national dementia awareness week was last month and the Alzheimer’s Society was on hand at the airport to discuss dementia with travellers and carers. That kind of education should be rolled out across the country. Today, I am calling on other airports across the UK to implement such a strategy of engagement with travellers.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister does not mind me speaking about this, but it is my sincere hope that should Plymouth City airport be reopened—I know mind me speaking about this, but it is my sincere hope that with travellers.

I am delighted to report that there are airlines that are taking the issue of flying with dementia very seriously. Indeed, the provision for passengers suffering with dementia is covered by both long and short-haul airlines, such as Virgin Atlantic and easyJet. I am acutely aware that easyJet is based in Crawley, in the constituency of my hon. Friend.

Henry Smith: I should like to pay tribute to easyJet, whose largest hub is at Gatwick airport, and to Virgin Atlantic, which is headquartered in my constituency. I am fortunate to have such responsible airline companies operating from my constituency.

Oliver Colvile: Flying can be an extremely stressful and uncomfortable experience, both for passengers who suffer from hidden disabilities and for their carers. I pay tribute to carers, as they have an awful lot of work to do to try to make sure that their patients—if that is the right word—are looked after and do not become flustered and so on.

As I mentioned, the lanyard initiative began about a month ago, so I have not seen any data showing the impact of the scheme, but I believe that it will be highly beneficial for travellers. Airports and airlines that show some understanding of the problem will do very much better, and they may want to put a sticker on their products saying that they operate a dementia-friendly service.

Moving forward, my hon. Friend the Minister may want to work with his international counterparts to formulate a globally recognised card or symbol that could be carried around in a passport to subtly tell airport staff and cabin crew that the traveller may need extra assistance. That is something that could be done whether we stay in or leave the European Union next month.

I was delighted to see research and a proposal by Dr Alexis Kirke of Plymouth University, which is based in my constituency, on the in-flight experience for accompanied travellers with dementia. Passenger announcements, in-flight entertainment and other ways to help travellers with hidden disabilities can go a long way towards easing the burden of travel. Proposals include making sure that announcements made during the flight are not distorted—for example, people can wait to make them until the plane has levelled off. Cabin crew are highly trained, but it is helpful to go that extra mile for someone who may be particularly distressed as a result of their condition. Music is also an effective way of helping a passenger with dementia to manage their mood. Perhaps we could have dementia-friendly entertainment systems on flights.

Ian Sherriff has informed me that the air transport group has even deployed its own version of a secret shopper, whereby a passenger suffering from dementia travelled on a flight with their carer. From what I have been told, the passenger and the carer were treated like royalty, and that is something that everyone across the industry should aspire to work towards. However, around the world, there is still much to do to ensure that hidden disabilities are treated with the same urgency and caution as physical disabilities. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for taking a very keen interest in this, and doing a great deal of work on it.

I look forward to the Minister’s response. I have certainly been sent an awful lot of information, and I have been lobbied very hard in the past few days since the announcement on the scheduling of this debate, and I am sure that he has been lobbied too. Will he spell out the kind of help that his Department can give to the air transport group? I should be delighted if he updated the House on his Department’s progress on helping air travellers with dementia. Perhaps he could subsequently tell us how we can try to encourage the train companies to do the same thing. As I have suggested, I should be grateful if he looked further into an internationally recognised card for travellers with hidden disabilities. Will he make a commitment to mandate that all airports in the UK become at the very least hidden disability aware?

I have been involved in the fight against dementia since I was first elected to Parliament in 2010. I am delighted to be a member of the all-party parliamentary group on dementia, and I have sought to become heavily involved in the issues surrounding hidden disabilities such as dementia, mental health and autism.

This is a very personal issue for me. I had a stepmother who was taken into a home because she was suffering from dementia. Sadly, she died within the past five years. She was incredibly bright, had served at Bletchley Park and got a degree at Oxford University in the 1930s. One of the things that was very interesting about her was that while she was working at Bletchley Park, she fellowed a man called General Kesselring, who was in charge of the north African campaign for the Germans during the war. He was put on trial at Nuremburg and sentenced to death. The court then got hold of her...
translations and worked out that he probably did not know too much of what he was doing under his own command, and his sentence was therefore commuted to life imprisonment. Before my stepmother died, the Prime Minister sent her a plaque commemorating her activities at Bletchley Park.

My city, Plymouth, has been at the forefront of dementia research and Plymouth University has just employed a PhD student on the very topic of air travel for people with dementia. I understand that she will be producing a dissertation of 80,000 words. Do I want to read 80,000 words? Nevertheless, I am sure it will be incredibly good. The House will be delighted to know that my contribution will be much less than that this evening.

I hope that over time the UK will ensure that all people with hidden disabilities are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. After all, we all grow older and we do not know whether we may suffer from dementia in the future. We must come to terms with the fact that long-term care for the elderly will probably affect all of us. I shall be interested to hear how the Government intend to move forward. The Secretary of State for Health has done an extremely good job on that. I look forward to hearing the response of my hon. Friend the Minister.

6.42 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) for allowing me to intervene briefly.

My wife was assaulted by a dementia patient on a British Airways flight exactly a year ago. She will not be pleased that I am raising the matter. I will not go into the precise details, but it seems so relevant after what my hon. Friend has said. This time last year we were all gathering here after the general election. One of our daughters who lives in America was graduating the day after the election, so it was a bit stressful to get out to Charleston, where she is. My wife had to go ahead and I followed, and it was all wonderful. My wife was recovering from breast cancer which, thank goodness, is all right, so she was in a pretty emotional state.

Because we had been told that there would be a hung Parliament, I thought we might be returning slowly together, but because there was a Conservative majority, I had to get back much more quickly than my wife. Then the nightmare started. She took a night flight with British Airways. She was at the back of the plane with two empty seats next to her. The plane was delayed and eventually, after a kerfuffle, an elderly gentleman was brought on to the plane somehow and was seated next to my wife. I will put it like that. All I will say is that when everyone nodded off, she woke up and was assaulted. I am not going to enlarge on exactly what went on.

If Lord King were alive today, he would be horrified at the way that British Airways has dealt with this complaint. My wife is not someone to make a fuss, but I am not going to let this matter drop. I shall deal with it through the small claims court. I made the complaint in June and did not get a decent reply from the executive chairman until 7 October. That is disgraceful.

The police, whom I eventually dealt with, said:

“You will be aware from our previous correspondence, that having liaised with British Airways, we were able to identify the passenger who is alleged to have assaulted my wife. They continued:

“We established that this male passenger is ninety years old and suffers from dementia. As part of our investigation we needed to ascertain if the suspect was fit to be dealt with by police, and further to that, to establish whether he would have an understanding of the allegation made against him.

We have since been provided with medical evidence that indicates the suspect’s dementia impacts on his ability to complete even basic mental tasks and that his dementia is likely to have impacted on his behaviour on the day of the assault.

In addition to the medical evidence, we were also able to refer to knowledge held about the suspect through previous police contact with him. The suspect has previously been reported as a missing person, and on that occasion, was located after members of the public reported him lost, disoriented and confused, wandering residential areas.”

The chairman of British Airways wrote:

“I hope you will appreciate that British Airways can only know details of a passenger’s medical condition if the passenger, or some other person acting on the passenger’s behalf, discloses this information to us. Having checked the booking record in relation to this passenger, no disclosure of any medical condition was made.

In the reports from the ground staff at Los Angeles and the cabin crew operating this flight, there was nothing in the passenger’s behaviour or hearing, other than he was obviously very elderly, to give any reason to believe that he suffered from any mental health issues. As such he was treated in the same way as any other passenger.”

It is absolute rubbish.

Then there is the final insult:

“Even had British Airways been aware of any medical condition affecting this passenger, it would have been inappropriate, and possibly in breach of data protection legislation, to disclose details to any other passenger. Additionally, we do not ordinarily consult with passengers as to who may be sat next to them during a flight.”

So there we are: my wife, at the back of the plane, is the mug. This is our national carrier—the best airline in the world, as far as I am concerned—and that is the quality of the response to someone who has been democratically elected. I therefore congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport on introducing the debate, and I am totally with him on his campaign.

6.47 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) on securing this debate about provision for air passengers with dementia. This important issue touches many of us gathered here this evening through our friends and family, and certainly through our constituents. I must admit to encouraging my hon. Friend to apply for the debate because it is important that we get the subject raised on the Floor of the House. The debate gives me an opportunity to say why the Government take this issue so seriously.

Before I do, however, let me briefly address the disturbing case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). I will not comment on the case in detail, but it does underline why it is so important that patients with this type of problem who are travelling,
particularly on long-distance journeys, have a carer with them. In almost every case when I have met someone in relation to our role of helping people with dementia, that person is accompanied by a spouse, family member or friend who can help them. From what I have heard, it verges on the irresponsible to expect somebody with such a condition to fend for themselves on these flights.

Jim Shannon: I am aware of the case of a lady with a baby who was travelling with her mother who had dementia. This was not long after she had given birth and she was quite traumatised by being on the plane. When she was not able to cope, the airline staff had to come to help the mother and the child, so there is an onus on airline staff to be able to assist the carer as well.

Mr Goodwill: Yes, absolutely. Many airlines and airports are taking the training of staff very seriously indeed. I will start by briefly going through the statistics, some of which we have heard already. We live in an ageing world, and we Europeans are living ever longer. A Eurostat survey forecasts that in 2040, if current trends continue, 25.5% of Europe's population will be 65 or over. In 2015, that figure was only 16%. With an ageing population, we will face new challenges. It has been estimated that more than 800,000 people in the United Kingdom suffer from dementia, and that figure is expected to rise to over 1 million by 2025. While dementia is usually linked to old age, it is not, as we have heard, solely an age-related condition. Indeed, today in our country, over 40,000 people under 65 years of age live with dementia.

Those are big numbers, but how do they relate to air travel? As we have heard, the word “dementia” is used to describe a set of symptoms that affect the brain. These symptoms may include memory loss or difficulties with thinking, problem solving or language, all of which will lead to everyday life becoming more and more challenging. However, suffering from dementia does not, and should not, mean that one should automatically cease to enjoy the activities we are all used to. Generation after generation, we are travelling more, exploring the world and gathering new experiences. For some, it is a lifestyle, but if one gets diagnosed with dementia, there could be a daunting decision to be made, either personally or by one’s family, to stop travelling altogether or to face a travel experience in all its complexity. For dementia sufferers, air travel, in particular, can be confusing, unnerving and even frightening. Crowded terminals, loud noises, queues, security checks, and armed policemen and women are enough to confuse a healthy person from time to time, never mind a person with a hidden disability. The term “hidden disability” is used to cover a wide variety of conditions that are not evident, such as dementia, autism, learning difficulties and hearing loss. According to Civil Aviation Authority research, as many as 7% of all British people are potentially avoiding air travel because of a hidden disability; we would like to get that number down to 0%.

On helping us to reach this goal, there is a piece of European legislation called regulation EC 1107/2008, which contains the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility—PRMs—when travelling by air. The aim of this regulation is to ensure that such people have the same opportunities for accessing air travel as non-disabled people, and that they have the same rights to free movement, freedom of choice, and non-discrimination. To ensure that that happens, airports and airlines are required to provide assistance that is appropriate to the needs of the passenger and that enables them to move through the airport while they travel. A person with reduced mobility is defined in the regulation as “any person whose mobility when using air transport is reduced due to any physical disability (sensory or locomotor, permanent or temporary), intellectual disability or impairment, or any other cause of disability, or age.”

The regulation does not differentiate between physical and non-physical conditions, so assistance should take into account the needs of the person who has requested it.

For passengers with a physical disability, assistance needs are quite often visible and straightforward to provide—for example, a person who uses a wheelchair will require a wheelchair and a person to push it. However, with hidden disabilities, the needs of passengers vary widely, and the provision of the service could require adaptability from the provider. Some passengers may need only information and reassurance, while others may require a one-to-one escort through the airport. This can make planning challenging for service providers. In 2015, the CAA engaged with airports on the provision of assistance to passengers with hidden disabilities and found a wide variation in practices and standards. While it was acknowledged by all that there was no “one size fits all” solution, it was concluded that airports would benefit from sharing best practice among themselves, which will help airports to standardise some practices and plan their service effectively.

Furthermore, it was concluded that it would be beneficial for the CAA to clarify what it views as the obligations under the PRM regulation. I am glad to say that the authority has been working hard on that issue and has engaged with a broad set of charities during the past year to develop guidance on the minimum expected standards and practices that all airports should adopt to comply with the regulation. The CAA has published that guidance for consultation, which is due to end in July.

Jim Shannon: I made some investigations before coming to the Chamber and understand that airline companies and airports have a legal obligation to ensure that every person with a hidden disability is looked after totally and absolutely. Is that the Minister's understanding as well?

Mr Goodwill: Transport is an international pastime and occupation, so there is a European regulation. As I have said, it applies not only to the physical disabilities of wheelchair users, the blind and people with sight disability, but to people with hidden disabilities. That is the whole point of the clarification that has been laid down, and the CAA is keen to ensure that airlines and airports discharge their obligations under the legislation.

The CAA guidance will ensure that a level of standardisation is adopted by all airports, which will bring huge benefits to this group of passengers. It sets standards not only for the actual assistance that is delivered, but for the information given to passengers before travelling and the level of training that staff are expected to be given.
The CAA has reported that the guidance has been welcomed by the airports and some of the obligations in it have already been implemented. For example, many airports—including Belfast City, Heathrow, Gatwick and Birmingham—have introduced guidance, in the form of videos, leaflets and pictures, that is specifically aimed at passengers with hidden disabilities. With that guidance, passengers and their carers can familiarise themselves with the processes beforehand, which has the potential to relieve the anxiety that some feel when facing an unknown environment. When I spoke at the Airport Operators Association dinner on 1 March, I made the issue the major theme of my comments and made a call for action from the airports.

Many airports already allow passengers with hidden disabilities to use fast-track security or are prepared to open separate security screening for those passengers upon request. Security screening has been identified in the past as one of the most stressful parts of the journey, which has the possibility of causing immense distress and anxiety.

There are other great examples of individual airports going above and beyond minimum obligations. For example, as we have heard, Gatwick airport has introduced discreet lanyards for passengers with hidden disabilities. The lanyards are a means for a person with hidden disability, such as dementia, to communicate their condition to the airport staff. That, combined with Gatwick’s commitment to provide appropriate training to all front-of-house staff, shows that there is willingness in the industry to encourage this group to travel more. More than 80% of Gatwick’s front-line staff have received dementia friends and dementia champions training, and that training is being delivered at one of this country’s biggest airports.

Gatwick is by no means the only example. Manchester airport already has special wristbands for autistic children. Norwich airport has signed an autism charter to become an autism-friendly airport. Virgin Atlantic is committed to considering the effects that long-haul flights might have on passengers with dementia, and easyJet has provided outstanding customer service to dementia sufferers, thanks to its commitment to staff receiving dementia awareness training as part of its special assistance training package.

The industry has truly embraced the challenge, and we want to see the good work spread across the sector. The UK can be proud to say that it leads in this area. We have recognised how the airport experience can feel intimidating for people with hidden disabilities. The UK and specifically the CAA, together with a few proactive UK airports, have been first to grasp that and to take action. Other European Union countries will surely follow our lead in due course.

Many of our country’s airports have reached out to the disabled charities to learn more about how they can make the experience better for people with hidden disabilities, and I strongly encourage the continuation and strengthening of this relationship. For example, the Alzheimer’s Society does a magnificent job in promoting awareness of dementia and could be an invaluable aid to the airports when they plan services.

Another group that I must mention for its substantial effort in tackling this issue is the air transport group, chaired by Ian Sherriff of Plymouth University, which is part of the Prime Minister’s rural dementia taskforce. The group, which was founded last year, has already shown remarkable commitment and speed in its task of promoting awareness in this field and encouraging travel.

Mr Goodwill: The air transport group has engaged with the CAA, the airports and the airlines, and is now looking at the wider tourism field. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport said, Plymouth University is funding a PhD student to research dementia and travel over a three-year period. A substantial amount of evidence is expected as a result of her work, and I would be delighted to meet her as part of the process. In addition to Plymouth, Exeter and Bournemouth Universities are also involved in the work of the group.

There truly is momentum behind this work and I am glad to see such progress being made. As I said, we are a leading nation in Europe in this field, but we need to keep the momentum going. The CAA’s guidance helps in setting the standards for airports and similar guidance is planned for the airlines in the near future. I encourage every operator in the industry to engage with dementia passengers and organisations, and to strive not for the base minimum, but for excellence beyond.

My hon. Friend mentioned the provision of a globally recognised card, which is a good idea. A pin badge might be even more discreet, while still being able to be seen. Indeed, people with dementia could be recognised in such a way and given special help not only in airports, but in the retail sector and in other aspects of our everyday life where it would be helpful to know, discreetly, if a person has dementia and may need a little more help if they appear confused. We certainly need to raise that idea through the European Union or the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which has an even wider reach.

As I stated at the beginning of my speech, there are hundreds of thousands of people with dementia in this country. Getting the assistance standards right, and raising awareness of what is available and what to expect when travelling, will unlock the huge potential that this group could bring to the industry. Encouraging dementia sufferers to travel in this way will make their lives and those of their carers, for whom a break from the routine can be a lifeline, that much richer, and that is worth fighting for. Once again, I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate and providing an opportunity to discuss this important and, to many, very personal issue.

Question put and agreed to.

7.2 pm

House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Government Estate

1. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): What progress his Department is making on the creation of a more modern and efficient government estate.

The Minister without Portfolio (Robert Halfon): My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that since 2015 the Government estate strategy has ensured that running costs have fallen by £750 million. We have raised some £1.8 billion in council receipts and reduced the estate size by nearly a quarter. This is a huge achievement and in terms of space it makes the UK Government one of the most efficient organisations in the world.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Minister for that reply and congratulate him and his team on the work they have done. Given that the estate has been reduced by nearly a quarter since 2010, is it not crucial that as much of this land as possible is used for new housing, especially given that quite a bit of it is going to be brownfield?

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend, as so often, hits the nail on the head. A huge Government programme has ensured that available public sector land is used to build more houses for our country.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): A 2010 report suggested that to end the London magnet we had to move more top civil servant jobs out of the capital and into the regions. How are the Government getting on with that aim?

Robert Halfon: The Government are getting on very well with it: the number of civil servant buildings in central London has gone down hugely. We have created hundreds of thousands of jobs all over the country—95,000 new jobs in the last year in the north of England alone—and what matters is what kinds of jobs we are creating and how many people are being employed.

2. Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What representations he has received on his Department’s boycott and divestment guidance.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): We have received a wide range of representations about boycotts in public procurement. The Government’s position is very clear: public sector organisations should not use procurement to run their own independent foreign policies.

Deidre Brock: Does the Minister agree that people who stand for election to local authorities and who then serve as councillors perform an important role in communities the length and breadth of these islands, and does he further agree that they should be trusted to make political judgments for themselves? Will the Government abandon the boycott and divestment guidance in favour of supporting local democracy?

Matthew Hancock: Yes, I think councillors do an excellent job at what councils are meant to do, but councils are not meant to set foreign policy, and attempts at local foreign policies that are discriminatory are potentially illegal, and we make that clear at every opportunity.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Was it wrong for my local authority to boycott South African goods in the 1970s?

Matthew Hancock: Where a national boycott is in place and where a national decision has been made, local authorities should of course follow that, but these decisions are rightly for the Foreign Office and not for local authorities; the country cannot be run by having hundreds of different foreign policies.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I think that, not for the first time, the Government are looking at this through the wrong end of the telescope. Rather than try to prevent local authorities from taking ethical and environmental considerations into account when making decisions, surely the Government should, as the Scottish Government do, encourage local authorities to do so—or does the Minister really believe that council tax payers’ money should be used to prop up oppressive regimes and support unlawful activity throughout the world?

Matthew Hancock: I find it surprising that the Scottish National party engages in and supports discrimination of this kind. We should trade with the world, except where a boycott decision has been made at a national level. The idea that we should discriminate against companies with which we otherwise have a good trading relationship is wrong.

Permanent Secretaries: Diversity

3. Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of diversity among permanent secretaries in the civil service.
Mr Letwin: The hon. Lady refers to a brief moment during which, because of appointments already in place and new appointments being made, there was a spike, and we would very much like to see that replicated on a long-term basis. We have appointed a range of women permanent secretaries in the past few months, and I am glad to be able to tell the hon. Lady that we are doing a great deal to ensure that the pool from which we draw the permanent secretaries—directors general—is improving significantly, in that 37% of our directors general are women. We are seeking to move that further forward, and we need to see this happening throughout the senior civil service.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): According to Leonard Cheshire Disability, only 4.5% of senior civil servants are disabled. What are the Government doing to ensure that disability is not impeding disabled people in the civil service from reaching the highest levels? Will the Minister review the Government’s policies and keep the House updated on his efforts to improve the employment prospects of disabled people in the civil service?

Mr Letwin: The hon. Lady is right. As a matter of fact, the situation is even slightly worse than she suggests. The percentage of disabled senior civil servants—or, at any rate, of senior civil servants who have registered themselves as disabled in staff surveys—is only 3.4%. That is much too low, and it reflects the fact that we have not yet been able to remove all the barriers that we need to remove. I am sitting next to the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who has shown that it is perfectly possible for someone who suffers from a significant disability to reach the highest level in politics, but we need that to be true throughout our public administration because we need to draw on talent from wherever it comes.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): As the Minister confirmed, since the Prime Minister gave himself the power to appoint, 80% of permanent secretaries are men. In the spirit of open government, will the Minister commit to publish the shortlists from which the Prime Minister has made appointments?

Mr Letwin: I will go back and talk to colleagues about the methods by which we publish what happens under that procedure. I would like to point out to the Opposition spokesman—[Laughter.] I would like to point out to the Opposition spokesperson that we draw permanent secretaries from the pool of directors general. If we are to draw on that talent, we have to encourage more women to be directors general. As I have said, I am glad that the percentage of women directors general is now up to 37%. We would like to get up to 50% or beyond, and as we do so we will have the talent from which to draw into the permanent secretary ranks, which is obviously where we want women of talent to end up.

Government Offices: London

4. David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): What progress his Department is making on reducing the number of Government offices in London. [905411]

The Minister without Portfolio (Robert Halfon): The Government’s direction of travel is ensuring value for money for the taxpayer and value for money overall. The Government Property Unit is working closely with the Departments to reduce the Government estate from around 800 buildings to closer to 200 by 2023. The number of Government offices in London has fallen from 181 in 2010 to just 54 today, and we will seek to reduce it to about 20 by 2025.

David Mackintosh: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, wherever possible, all taxpayer-funded bodies should consider relocating outside central London to save money? Will he write to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority with that suggestion?

Robert Halfon: If I did not know my hon. Friend better, I would think that he was bidding for IPSA’s headquarters to be located in Northampton South. All I will say to him is: be careful what you wish for. I note that Northamptonshire has led the way by being the first area in the country to announce plans to bring its police and fire services together in a shared estate.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Minister mentioned the value-for-money approach. Does he agree that it would be better if Government offices were spread across the United Kingdom? Given the value-for-money approach we take in Northern Ireland, would he consider Northern Ireland as a location?

Robert Halfon: Yes, my hon. Friend makes an important point. There is a policy on rebalancing the civil service between London and the regions across the United Kingdom. The civil service already has a significant presence across the United Kingdom, and he will know that many civil servants are employed in Northern Ireland. We are looking to extend this further and to create multi-occupancy offices in key locations around the country.

13. [905421] Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I am happy to make a bid for the relocation of Government offices. As my right hon. Friend will know, coastal communities have many advantages, but they face serious challenges. Does he agree that as the sunniest town in our fair United Kingdom, with a thriving cultural scene and buoyant chamber of commerce, Eastbourne might be just the place for such a relocation, as might East Sussex in general?
Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend, as a former teacher, is a brilliant MP for her area and a key component of compassionate Conservatism in Eastbourne. I note that Eastbourne chamber of commerce said the town is one of the 10 happiest places to stay in the UK, and it might be a good place for all of us to go after the European Union referendum—whatever the result.

Constituency Boundaries

5. Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): When he expects the Boundary Commission to publish its initial recommendations for new constituency boundaries.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): The conduct of the boundary review is, rightly, a matter for the independent Boundary Commissions. The Boundary Commissions for England and for Northern Ireland plan to publish initial recommendations this autumn, and the Boundary Commissions for Scotland and for Wales plan to do so later this year.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that the guidance given to the Boundary Commission is to split wards by polling districts so that we have equal-sized electorates for Members of this House elected in 2020?

John Penrose: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to state, first and foremost, the principle that all votes, no matter where in the country they are cast, should have equal weight, and that constituencies must therefore be more equal in size. Ward-splitting has for some time been part of the Boundary Commission’s work in other parts of the country, but I can confirm that it expects to be able to introduce it in constituencies in England as well.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The number of democratically elected Members of this place from Scotland will be cut by six, but are plans afoot to cut the number of unelected Lords, who are able to make laws affecting Scotland and the rest of the UK?

John Penrose: I think the hon. Lady was supporting the principle that votes should have equal weight no matter where they are cast in the country, and I welcome her support if my reading is correct. I cannot confirm plans to alter the size and composition of the Lords, although I understand that discussions at that end of the corridor are going on fairly continuously.

Mr Speaker: The supplementary was only tenuously related to the terms of the question, but I am in a generous mood.

10. Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I welcome the consultation period that will follow the Boundary Commission’s recommendations, but does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to ensure that people are aware of the consultations so that they can make their views known? What does he intend to do to publicise the consultations?

John Penrose: My hon. Friend is right: it is vital that people are aware of the consultation period. It is being advertised on the Boundary Commission website and will be advertised further to make sure that everybody can comment, but it is up to political parties from all parts of the House to make sure that their supporters and organisations are galvanised and submissions can be made.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): The number of registered voters has gone up massively since December 2015—in some constituencies, the equivalent of two extra wards have been added. Will the Minister therefore reassure us that he cannot possibly use the December figures to redraw the boundaries—or will his Government go back to using voter registration for their own political gain once this referendum is over?

John Penrose: I am intrigued that the hon. Lady thinks she knows what has happened to individual constituencies’ electoral rolls, because the final versions will not be published for another week or 10 days. Whatever the outcome of that publication, it cannot be right that we carry on with the existing political constituency boundaries, which are based on the electoral rolls from 2001 or, in some parts of the country, from 2000. They are shockingly out of date and we absolutely need to update them. I can, however, reassure her that there will be updates every five years, rather than every 10, and that constituency boundaries will be more up to date and accurate than they have been in the past.

Anti-Corruption Summit

7. Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Whether the agreements reached at the anti-corruption summit in May 2016 will be applied to other countries.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): This Government and this Prime Minister have taken a global lead on tackling the scourge of corruption. Each delegation at the anti-corruption summit signed up to the commitments set out in the communiqué. In addition, 42 countries and eight international organisations issued statements setting out further measures that they will take.

Mike Gapes: In April 2014, the Prime Minister said: “I believe that beneficial ownership and public access to a central register is key to improving the transparency of company ownership and vital to meeting the urgent challenges of illicit finance and tax evasion.” Will the Minister explain why the Government are no longer calling for public registers of beneficial ownership in the British overseas territories?

Matthew Hancock: We are calling for them. The Prime Minister was absolutely right then, and we are delivering on that now. Later this month we will publish the beneficial ownership register for the UK. All the overseas territories have signed up to beneficial ownership registers, and we urge them to make them public.

11. Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): In the run-up to the anti-corruption summit, leaders of charities and faith groups around the world were calling on the Prime Minister to insist on the same
levels of transparency in our overseas territories and Crown dependencies as we have here in mainland UK. Why did the Prime Minister ignore them? Was he unable or unwilling to stop the facilitation of corruption in our tax havens?

Matthew Hancock: We have made huge progress in ensuring that we have registers of beneficial ownership in the overseas territories. We are also publishing the beneficial ownership register for the UK. The progress that has been made in the overseas territories is the greatest under any Government in history, which perhaps is one reason Transparency International said that the summit had been a good day for anti-corruption.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): The Panama papers have shown how illicit finance robs the very poorest countries of the world. Malawi, for example, loses about $130 million a year through such finance. Will the Minister explain why the Malawan company Press Trust Overseas Ltd cannot have its tax affairs scrutinised because it is in the British Virgin Islands? Should not the summit have come to an agreement to force such overseas jurisdictions to publish central beneficial registers?

Matthew Hancock: If the hon. Gentleman cares so much about the matter, he might have congratulated us on the progress that we made at the summit. He will be delighted to know that the British Virgin Islands has signed up to have a beneficial ownership register and to share that information with the UK Government. We are making progress in tackling the scourge of corruption, about which previous Governments, including the one he supported, did too little.

Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

8. Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): It is important to begin by acknowledging that, thanks largely to my hon. Friend’s efforts, the social value Act came into force in January 2013. He can be proud that the Act has unlocked a range of public benefits from the procurement of goods and services. Lord Young reviewed progress in 2014 and reported in 2015. His findings inform our current work to quicken the pace of implementation. As part of that work, we will publish a paper this summer that will give examples of how central Government are driving forward the social value Act and what further actions we will take.

Chris White: The social value Act has been seen to benefit commissioners, service providers and the wider community. What progress has been made in ensuring that government, both local and national, applies the Act to their procurement processes more widely and consistently?

Mr Wilson: We reviewed central Government’s progress on the Act and found increasing awareness of it and a clear willingness and commitment to implement it. I will publish an appraisal of central Government’s commitments to the Act later in the summer, which will set out the steps being taken and the plans for the future. In preparing for that, I have invited a panel of external social value experts to review and critique current plans and practice. That process is helping to ensure that central Government’s aspirations for social value are being stretched.

Topical Questions

T1. [905438] Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): The Cabinet Office is responsible for efficiency and reform in government, transparency, civil society, the digital economy and cybersecurity to deliver the Government’s agenda.

Cat Smith: Will the Minister confirm that, whether appropriate in the Government’s view or not, it is still lawful for public bodies to refuse to award contracts to companies for reasons other than nationality, such as human right records, compliance with international law or a connection with trades such as the arms trade or fossil fuels?

Matthew Hancock: As I said earlier, the boycott of, and discrimination against, countries is potentially illegal. The guidance that we set out was designed to make it absolutely clear that these decisions on boycotts against countries need to be taken at a national level, and it is inappropriate for local authorities to try to set their own foreign policies.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): My hon. Friend is right that the National Citizen Service around the country and in his own constituency has made a huge difference. There were 467 people who went through it in 2015 in Kirklees, the local authority in which his constituency lies. We are determined to increase that number. There is a new marketing campaign, and I am glad to say that 8 million hours of volunteering have so far been contributed by National Citizen Service participants. I hope my hon. Friend will see in his constituency a proportion of that effect coming through in the next year.

T2. [905439] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What provisions are the Government putting in place to ensure that non-UK citizens of the EU living here will continue to enjoy the same rights after a possible Brexit vote as they do now?

Mr Letwin: The hon. Lady is asking a question about something that is a matter of hot debate as we go through the next week or so, and it highlights one of the issues that would need to be resolved and that is of very great complexity.
Matthew Hancock: Cyber-security is incredibly important, especially as we increasingly deliver digital government. The national cyber-security strategy ran up to 2016. The new strategy is underpinned by investment of £1.9 billion—almost double the funding—and we will publish the strategy later this year.

Mr Letwin: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in his implication: actually, the fact is—I see this day by day—that the Departments of State have functioned smoothly and effectively throughout this period, as have members of the Cabinet. I am glad to say that we intend to continue doing so to fulfil the manifesto commitments on which we were elected.

T4. Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): This Government have a responsibility to ensure that their citizens are safe online. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on what progress he is making in developing the 2016 national cyber-security strategy?

Matthew Hancock: Cyber-security is incredibly important, especially as we increasingly deliver digital government. The national cyber-security strategy ran up to 2016. The new strategy is underpinned by investment of £1.9 billion—almost double the funding—and we will publish the strategy later this year.

Mr Letwin: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in his implication: actually, the fact is—I see this day by day—that the Departments of State have functioned smoothly and effectively throughout this period, as have members of the Cabinet. I am glad to say that we intend to continue doing so to fulfil the manifesto commitments on which we were elected.

T5. Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The backward steps in gender inequality at the top of the civil service are unacceptable. Will the Minister release the gender breakdown of those who were shortlisted for the role of permanent secretary so that we can have further transparency on this important issue?

Mr Letwin: As I said to the House a few moments ago, we will take that serious suggestion away and come back with a view about whether it is possible to release those data without compromising individual sensitivities. I am absolutely with the hon. Lady that we need to see more women joining the ranks of the permanent secretaries, and as I mentioned to her, it is of great importance that the directors general are now much better distributed in a gender balance.

T6. Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): The National Citizen Service provides a real opportunity for young people in Cornwall, a part of the world that is quite deprived. What more can we do to ensure that young people have access to the service this summer?

Mr Letwin: My hon. Friend is right. There were 312 people in Cornwall who participated in the National Citizen Service last year. We want to see that number rise significantly. Already 486 people have signed up and we hope to see more come through during the coming year. We are spending £1 billion over the four years to increase the proportion of young people who can do National Citizen Service, which I think will have an enormous effect on, among other things, social cohesion—80% of those who went through National Citizen Service said at the end that they had a better view of people from other backgrounds than they had before they joined it. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: The Minister is offering serious thoughts in a cerebral manner on a very important topic, the National Citizen Service. I think he deserves a more attentive audience.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Given the surge in voter registration, how can the Minister possibly justify using such woefully inaccurate figures to redraw the electoral map of the United Kingdom?

Matthew Hancock: We just had this question a few minutes ago, and the answer is very clear: the alternative of using figures from 2001 or 2000 is completely unacceptable. We have, in fact, made the process more frequent, not less, and we now update the register for the purposes of writing the boundaries every five years, not every 10.

T8. Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps will the Secretary of State take after a resounding victory in the vote to stay in Europe next week to get all Departments working harmoniously and well again after the disruptions we have had over the last month?

Mr Letwin: As I said to the House a few moments ago, we will take that serious suggestion away and come back with a view about whether it is possible to release those data without compromising individual sensitivities. I am absolutely with the hon. Lady that we need to see more women joining the ranks of the permanent secretaries, and as I mentioned to her, it is of great importance that the directors general are now much better distributed in a gender balance.
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I concur and join with the Prime Minister in his remarks about the terrible deaths in Orlando. On Monday I joined a vigil of thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Soho, in London, to mourn the deaths of those 49 people. We say thank you to all those all over this country who attended vigils on Monday night to show their concern and their horror about what happened. Quite simply, we defeat such atrocities through our love and solidarity, and we need to send that message out.

Three years ago, there was a cross-party agreement for the implementation of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 and to proceed with Leveson 2 once criminal prosecutions were concluded. The Prime Minister will be aware that today there is a lobby of Parliament by the victims of phone hacking. He said a few years ago that “we all did too much cosying up to Rupert Murdoch”. Well, some of his Tory Brexit colleagues are certainly cosying up to Rupert Murdoch at the moment, but will he give a commitment today that he will meet the victims of press intrusion and assure them that he will keep his promise on this?

The Prime Minister: First, let me echo what the right hon. Gentleman said about the Orlando bombings. In terms of the Leveson issue, we said that we would make a decision about the second stage of this inquiry once the criminal investigations and prosecutions were out of the way. They are still continuing, so that is the situation there. I have met victims of press intrusion, and I am happy to do so again. Right now, people can accuse me of many things, but I think that cosying up to Rupert Murdoch probably is not one of them.

Jeremy Corbyn: My question was, “Will the Prime Minister meet the victims of phone hacking?” I hope he will, because they deserve it, and he promised that he would.

A major funder of the leave campaign has said: “If it were up to me, I’d privatisate the NHS.”

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has said: “If people have to pay for NHS services “they will value them more.”

Both he and the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) are members of a Government who have put the NHS into record deficit. These people are now masquerading as the saviours of the NHS—wolves in sheep’s clothing. Did not the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) get it right when she rejected the duplicity of this argument in the leave campaign and decided to join the remain campaign?

The Prime Minister: I was delighted with what my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said about changing her mind, which is a brave thing for politicians to do, and saying that she thought that the NHS would be safer if we remained inside a reformed European Union. I believe that very profoundly, because the key to a strong NHS is a strong economy. I think there cannot be any doubt, with nine out of 10 economists, the Governor of the Bank of England, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and all these other organisations saying that our economy will be stronger, and it is a strong economy that delivers a strong NHS.

Jeremy Corbyn: Last week, the Prime Minister gave a welcome commitment to the closing of the loophole in the posting of workers directive. We will hold him to that, but we are concerned about the exploitation of migrant workers and the undercutting of wages in this country as a result. On that issue, will he today commit to outlawing the practice of agencies that only advertise abroad for jobs that are, in reality, jobs in this country?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the right hon. Gentleman and I absolutely agree about the evils of modern slavery. That is why this Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, with all-party support. We have doubled the fines that can be put on companies for exploiting labour in this way. We have strengthened the Gangmasters Licensing Authority, which has commenced and carried out a number of prosecutions, including in the east of England, where I was yesterday. We will continue to take action on every level to make sure that people are paid the wages that they should be paid and that protections are there on the minimum wage, and now on the national living wage. All those measures are vitally important, and we will continue with all of them. I want people to get a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

Jeremy Corbyn: My question was about outlawing the practice of advertising by agencies only in other countries.

Tens of thousands of EU migrants work in our public services and do a fantastic job. Many people in Britain, also, are concerned about the impact of immigration on their local communities. Surely what communities need is practical solutions such as the migrant impact fund set up Gordon Brown when he was Prime Minister to deal with extra pressure on housing, schools, and hospitals. Will the Prime Minister now concede that it was a mistake to abolish that fund, and will he work with us to reinstate it as a matter of urgency to give support to those communities that are facing problems with school places and doctors’ surgeries?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In answer to the question about employment agencies that only advertise for overseas workers, we are looking at that to see—we have announced this already—if we can ban that practice, because we do not believe it is right. Of course, the answer to so many of these questions is to make sure that we are training, educating and employing British people and getting them the qualifications they need to take on the jobs that our economy is creating. Today’s unemployment figures are another reminder of that.

In terms of funds to help communities impacted by migration, we have a pledge in our manifesto that we are looking forward to bringing forward, which is a controlled migration fund to make sure that we put money into communities where there are pressures. Of course there are some pressures and we do need to address them, and I am happy that we will be able to work on a cross-party basis to do that. As I have said
many times, there are good ways of controlling migration, and one of them is the important rules we are bringing in so that people do not get instant access to our welfare system. There are bad ways of controlling immigration, and leaving the single market and wrecking our economy is certainly one of them.

Jeremy Corbyn: Today a flotilla of boats is due to come along the Thames campaigning on fishing quotas not going to the domestic UK fleet. I have been looking out of the window and I have not seen them come yet, but presumably they are on their way. The Prime Minister will be very well aware that reforms that were made three years ago actually put the power back into the hands of member states, and it is the UK Government who have given nearly two thirds of English and Welsh fishing quotas to three companies, thus excluding the small fishing communities along our coasts. Will the Prime Minister stop blaming Brussels on this and tell our small-scale and sustainable fishing communities what action he will take to allow them to continue their work, and indeed go further out in collecting fish?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for speaking about the reforms we carried through in the last Parliament; my hon. Friend the Gentlemen for speaking about the reforms we carried out in the last Parliament; my hon. Friend the Chancellor. Because of the micro-brewers health because of the duty cuts made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Because of the micro-brewers tax regime, we have a lot of craft ale coming through in the value of the UK fishing industry of something like 20%.

The point I would make is that we export every year about £1 billion-worth of fish to the EU. No country in the world has a trade agreement with the EU that does not involve tariffs—taxes—on the sale of its fish, so that market is open and making sure that we manage our fish stocks locally and appropriately are keeping that market open and making sure that we do not involve tariffs—taxes—on the sale of its fish, so that market is open and making sure that we manage our fish stocks locally and appropriately are very much part of our plan.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister’s Government still did hand quotas over to three very large companies at the expense of small communities around Britain. I hope that he will reflect on that.

With just eight days to go before the referendum, the Labour position is that we are going to be voting to remain because we believe it is the best way to protect families, protect jobs and protect public services. We would oppose any post-Brexit austerity Budget, just as we have opposed each austerity Budget put forward by this Government. Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to condemn the opportunism of 57 of his colleagues who are pro-leave—these are Members who backed the bedroom tax, backed cutting disability benefits and backed slashing care for the elderly—who have suddenly had a damascene conversion to the anti-austerity movement? Does he have any message for them at all?

The Prime Minister: There are very few times when the right hon. Gentleman and I are on the same side of an argument. For people watching at home, when the leader of the Labour party—and, indeed, almost all the Labour party—a Conservative Government, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, the official Ulster Unionists and the Scottish National party all say, “We have huge disagreements, but on this vital issue for the future of our country, the best option for Britain is to vote to remain in a reformed European Union,” that really says something.

The truth is this. This is a huge choice for our country, and choices have consequences. If we wake up on 24 June and find that we have remained in, our economy can continue to move forward. If we vote out, we disrupt our trade agreements, we drive up the cost of living, and the resulting trade gap means the economy can go into a tailspin and you see confidence in your country reduced. We can avoid all this by voting remain next week.

Q3. [905425] Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): Having recently undertaken a real ale tour of some of the constituency’s finest public houses, and having sampled some of the finest ales that anyone is likely to taste —many of them brewed locally in Derby North, which is recognised as the real ale capital of the UK—may I ask the Prime Minister to join me in acknowledging the virtues and massive benefits to local economies from small and medium-sized breweries up and down the country?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. Having spent last week at Shepherd Neame in Kent, and having spent yesterday at Greene King in Bury St Edmunds, I agree with her that a large quantity of real ale is one of the best ways to get through this gruelling referendum campaign, and I would recommend it to everybody. The British beer industry is in good health because of the duty cuts made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Because of the micro-brewers tax regime, we have a lot of craft ale coming through in our country. It is an industry in a good state. The brewers that I am talking to and going to see want the single market open and they want us to remain in.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): On Orlando and on the deaths in France, we on the SNP Benches join in the condolences that have been expressed by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

We are now only a week away from the biggest question that the UK has faced in a long time—continuing membership of the European Union. Exports of goods and services from the Scottish economy are massively important: hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on them. Meanwhile, our public services, including the NHS, are supported by many hard-working people from elsewhere in the European Union. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that if we want to protect jobs and if we want to protect our public services, we must vote to remain in the European Union?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the most important argument—there are many arguments people make, but this is the most important—is about the future of our
economy. It seems obvious to me: you can listen to the experts, or you can just make a common-sense argument. Today, we have full access to a market of 500 million people. For an economy such as Scotland’s, which is such a big exporting economy, there is no way we would get a better deal on the outside of the single market than we get on the inside, so if we left we would see our economy suffer, we would see jobs suffer and we would see people’s livelihoods suffer. That is just plain common sense. I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that for jobs and for livelihoods, we should remain in. There is a consequence for the public finances, because if our economy is doing less well, our public finances would be doing less well, and that would have consequences for Scotland, too.

**Angus Robertson:** May I raise that issue with the Prime Minister? Today, we have learned from a Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer and a former Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer that there would likely be £30 billion of cuts to public services or tax rises were there to be a Brexit vote. What impact would that have on public services in Scotland? Please can we learn now, before we vote, what impact that would have on the budget in Scotland, which pays for the NHS in Scotland, for our schools in Scotland, for local government and for all key public services? Is that not yet another reason why we must vote to remain in the European Union?

**The Prime Minister:** These figures are not based on what the Chancellor of the Exchequer is saying; they are based on what the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research are saying. They are talking about a £20 billion to £40 billion hole in our public finances if Brexit were to go ahead. Those organisations are often quoted across this House—many times against the Government—because they are respected for their independence. Clearly, if that is the impact on the public finances, decisions to cut public spending in the UK Budget do have an impact, through Barnett, on Scotland. To anyone who says, “Well, these warnings could of course be wrong, or they could be inaccurate”, I would make the point—it is perhaps an uncomfortable one for the right hon. Gentleman—that there were of course warnings about the oil price before the Scottish referendum, and it turned out actually to be worse than the experts warned.

**Q4.** **Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green): The number of children growing up in workless households has fallen by nearly half a million since 2010. Will the Prime Minister continue to tackle child poverty by focusing on rising wages, more jobs and a growing economy?

**The Prime Minister:** I would say very directly to my hon. Friend that I have done this job for six years and, working with the Home Secretary, I have seen how closely our intelligence and security services work with other services around the world. Of course we keep ourselves safe by investing in anti-terrorism policing and of course we keep ourselves safe by the way we work with the Americans and the “Five Eyes” partnership, but I am in no doubt that the increasing extent of information exchange and intelligence exchange that takes place through the European Union is of direct benefit to our country.

**Q2.** **Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley): Knowsley is expecting to receive £10 million in EU funding over the next three years. EU funding has helped attract businesses to the borough, including QVC, which created 2,500 jobs. Is it not the case that that important funding from the EU could be lost if we vote next week to leave the European Union?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. All the independent economic reports say very clearly that there is no financial saving from leaving the EU. The Institute for Fiscal Studies put it like this:

“We conclude that leaving the EU would not... leave more money to spend on the NHS. Rather it would leave us spending less on public services, or taxing more, or borrowing more.”

I would argue that there is a big dividend from remaining inside the EU, which we would start to feel next Friday, as companies would be able to see that Britain had made a decision, and the job creators, wealth creators and international investors would know that Britain meant business and they would invest in our country. There is no saving from leaving. That is what the experts agree.

**Q5.** **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant): The number of children growing up in workless households has fallen by nearly half a million since 2010. Will the Prime Minister continue to tackle child poverty by focusing on rising wages, more jobs and a growing economy?

**Q6.** **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath): Thomas and Elke Westen live and run their businesses in Kirskaldy, but, as Germans, they are denied a vote next week. They are hurt by the portrayal of immigrants in the EU debate. They leave for France on Sunday, and are considering leaving permanently if we exit the EU. Will the Prime Minister join my call for them and others in a similar situation to stay, as they are highly valued?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, there are many people who come to our country, work hard, make a contribution and help to build our communities. It is important to get the numbers into some sort of perspective. I think 5% of our population are EU nationals—Italians, Germans,
Poles, Spaniards and the rest of it—so if you stop 100 people in the street, only five will be EU nationals. It is just as the hon. Gentleman said. Look at our NHS—there are 50,000 EU nationals working as doctors, nurses and care assistants. Look at our care homes—there are 60,000 EU nationals helping to look after our elderly relatives with dementia and other conditions as they come towards the end of their lives. Yes, we need to make sure that people who come here work and make a contribution, but we should celebrate the contribution they make.

Q8. [905431] Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Given the Government’s recent enthusiasm for making forecasts and predictions, will the Prime Minister tell the House in which year we will meet our manifesto commitment to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands?

The Prime Minister: The last year for which EU migration was in balance—that is between the number of EU and British nationals leaving our shores to work in Europe and the number of EU nationals coming to live and work here—was as recently as 2008. Yes, we need to do more to control migration from outside the EU, and we are doing so, with the closure of bogus colleges and other measures. We are also doing more inside the EU, not least by saying that if people who come here do not get a job after six months, they have to leave, and that if they work, they have to contribute for four years before getting full access to the welfare system. Those are big changes. They are also sensible ways of controlling immigration. A non-sensible way would be pulling out of the single market, damaging jobs and our economy, and so having to explain to our constituents why we have a self-imposed recession.

Q7. [905430] Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Many in my constituency of Swansea East are already struggling to make ends meet. The World Trade Organisation says that if we leave the EU we could face major tariffs on trade, and would have to renegotiate more than 160 trade agreements. Does the Prime Minister agree that leaving the EU would hit hard-working families the most by raising the cost of living, and that it is too big a risk to take?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is right. It is always the poorest and those with the least who get hit hardest if an economy suffers a recession. There are two ways in which the cost of living could be impacted. She is absolutely right that if we leave the single market and go to World Trade Organisation rules, tariffs will be imposed on the goods we sell to Europe, which would make us suffer. Also, if the pound falls, as many independent experts forecast, the cost of living rises, the cost of the family shop rises and the cost of the family holiday rises. She is right that it is not worth the risk. We should not risk it—we should keep our country safe.

Q9. [905432] Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Following the Chancellor’s welcome announcement about the launch of the new Thames estuary 2050 growth commission, will the Prime Minister outline his hopes for how the commission’s focus will deliver the much-needed infrastructure and economic development that will allow north Kent to prosper, including in my wonderful constituency of Rochester and Strood?

The Prime Minister: I had always assumed that my hon. Friend was under 30, so I am shocked to get that news. He makes an important point. If we were to leave the EU, we would lose the seat around the table that sets the rules of the single market. Of course sometimes those rules can be annoying or burdensome, but at the end of the day those are the rules we have to meet. If we leave and have no say over those rules, we do not gain...
control, we lose it. That is a crucial argument, and it is why the majority of small businesses—as well as a very large majority of larger businesses—back staying in the EU.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I endorse the Prime Minister’s comments about the deaths in Orlando and Paris and associate the Social and Democratic Labour party with those remarks.

I assure the Prime Minister that the SDLP is fully behind him in his efforts to secure a remain vote. The Brexit campaigners have made securing our borders their resounding war cry, but when it comes to the only land border between the UK and the rest of the EU we are dismissed and told that nothing will change there. A return to customs posts, passport checks and a hard border will be a critical economic issue for Northern Ireland’s voters in eight days’ time. Will the Prime Minister now, once and for all, clarify this point and tell the people of Northern Ireland what will become of the border if the UK votes to leave the European Union?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about the Orlando shootings.

If we vote to stay in, we know what the situation is: we know that the common travel area works, we know it can continue and everyone can have confidence in that. If we were to leave—the leave campaigners want to make a big issue about our borders—we will have a land border between Britain outside the European Union and the Republic of Ireland inside the European Union. Therefore, you can only have new border controls between the Republic and Northern Ireland or, which I would regret hugely, you would have to have some sort of checks on people as they left Belfast or other parts of Northern Ireland to come to the rest of the United Kingdom. We can avoid these risks. There are so many risks here: risks to our children’s jobs, risks to our economic future, risks to our borders, risks to the unity of the United Kingdom. I say: avoid the risks and vote remain next Thursday.

Q11. Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Next week, I will be visiting 25 schools in my constituency to explain both sides of the EU referendum argument to those of our population who will be the most heavily impacted by a decision they cannot make. Does the Prime Minister have any words for these young people for the remain segment?

The Prime Minister: As I said at the CBI, of course Britain can survive outside the EU—but no one is questioning that. The question is: how are we going to do best? How are we going to create the most jobs and investment, how are we going to have the most opportunities for our children, how are we going to yield the greatest power in the world, how are we going to get things done? On all those issues—stronger, safer, better off—the arguments are on the remain side.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Approximately 11,000 of Marks & Spencer’s most loyal employees, many with over 14 years’ service, are about to get a serious pay cut. Cuts to Sunday pay, bank holiday pay and antisocial hours pay, all made on the back of the national living wage. I urge all companies to note that the national living wage is not just a pay cut, this is a big fat Marks & Spencer’s pay cut. Does the Prime Minister agree with his Chancellor that cutting take-home pay at M&S or anywhere else on the back of the national living wage is wrong? If so, will he move to close the loopholes that make this possible?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we want to see the national living wage feeding through into people having higher take-home pay, not lower take-home pay. We urge all companies to make sure that that is the case. I have not seen the information about Marks & Spencer, but it knows, like any retailer, that it needs to attract, retain and motivate the staff they have. It is absolutely crucial in retail, particularly with all the competition online, that it continues to do that, and it will not do that if it cuts people’s pay.

Q13. Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I agree with the Prime Minister on Europe when he said to the CBI on 9 November last year: “Some people seem to say that really Britain couldn’t survive, couldn’t do okay outside the European Union. I don’t think that is true...The argument isn’t whether Britain could survive outside the EU; of course it could.”

So if, as I hope, despite the panic-driven negativity from the remain camp in Downing Street, the British people vote next week to become a free and independent nation again, will my right hon. Friend join me in embracing the great optimism and opportunity for our country and our people that such a momentous decision would bring?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend’s hard work. What I would say is that, even if those people in our schools are not able to vote, this will affect their futures. I hope that, after being inspired by my hon. Friend, they will talk to their parents and their grandparents about wanting to grow up in a country with opportunity, and we are bound to have more opportunities if we remain in a reformed European Union with 27 other countries. I also think it goes to a point about what sort of country we want our children to grow up in; not just one of economic and job opportunities, but one where our country is able to effect change and get things done in the world. We do not diminish ourselves inside a European Union; we enhance the power of Britain and the greatness of our country.
The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman and I are often on opposing sides of arguments, but it says volumes about the breadth of the campaign to remain in a reformed EU that we have the Liberal Democrats as well as the Labour party, the Greens, the trade unions, business, voluntary bodies and so many others all coming from different perspectives but—crucially—all saying that our economy will be better off, and therefore families and our country will be better off, if we remain in. He is absolutely right about interest rates. The last thing that homeowners and homebuyers need—the last thing our country needs—is a hike in interest rates damaging our economy. I am glad he supports a long-term economic plan. Such a plan should include our remaining in a reformed EU.

Q14. [905437] Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on honouring our manifesto pledge and delivering this historic referendum. Unfortunately, however, we have heard some hysterical scaremongering during the debate, and there are those in this House and the other place who believe that if the British people decide to leave the EU, there should be a second referendum. Will he assure the House and the country that, whatever the result on 24 June, his Government will carry out the wishes of the British people—if the vote is to remain, we remain, but if it is to leave, which I hope it is, we leave?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to agree with my hon. Friend. “In” means we remain in a reformed EU; “out” means we come out. As the leave campaigners and others have said, “out” means out of the EU, out of the European single market, out of the Council of Ministers—out of all those things—and will then mean a process of delivering on it, which will take at least two years, and then delivering a trade deal, which could take as many as seven years. To anyone still in doubt—there are even Members in the House still thinking about how to vote—I would say: if you have not made up your mind yet, if you are still uncertain, just think about that decade of uncertainty for our economy and everything else, don’t risk it and vote remain.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The North Middlesex hospital accident and emergency unit is in complete meltdown. Will the Prime Minister commit to taking swift action to tackle this crisis?

The Prime Minister: I understand that this is a very busy accident and emergency unit: it received more than 13,600 patients through its doors in April alone. It manages, however, to carry out more than 40,000 operations and more than 62,000 diagnostic tests every year, and since 2010 the trust has recruited 120 more doctors and 280 more nurses, but the Health Secretary will continue to monitor the matter closely. This brings us back, however, to the core argument today: if we remain in, we will have a stronger economy, and then, yes, we will have to take the proceeds of that growth and continue to put them into the NHS, as I have always done as Prime Minister.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I am looking forward to the British people giving me the opportunity to vote against the vindictive emergency Budget. Will my right hon. Friend explain, if the Government are so strapped for cash, why they remain intent on spending £50 billion on HS2?

The Prime Minister: We will be strapped for cash, if we believe the Institute for Fiscal Studies or the National Institute of Economic and Social Research—both impeccably independent—who say that there would be a hole in our public finances of between £20 billion and £40 billion. You do not have to be an economic expert to see this: if the economy shrinks, and there are fewer jobs and lower wages, there will be less in tax receipts. If there is less in tax receipts, we will clearly need to make cuts, put up taxes or increase borrowing. It is a simple matter of mathematics. There is an easy way to avoid that situation—vote to stay in a reformed European Union next Thursday.
Points of Order

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. According to newspaper reports—[Interruption.]—

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the hon. Gentleman’s point of order, which I suspect might relate to topical matters.

Mr Bone: It does; it relates to Parliament, Sir. If there is going to be an emergency Budget, would it not have been appropriate for it to be announced first in this House and not through the media? It seems a great discourtesy, Sir.

Mr Speaker: We are in the realms of speculation here. If there were to be such a Budget, it would have to be delivered here and we would have been notified of it in advance. There is no such declared intention. There are all sorts of briefings, but to my knowledge, there is no such declared intention. If the Chancellor were here and wanted to comment on the matter, he could do so, but he is not, so I fear that he will not. If the Chancellor manifests himself during the course of today’s proceedings—there is quite an important debate taking place in the House today that relates to economic matters—the hon. Gentleman might choose to raise the matter with him. We shall have to await the development of events.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I shall save up the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for later. I call Mr David T. C. Davies.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You seem to have confirmed that you are not aware of any such Budget. That being the case, is it in order for members of the Government to be going around telling the press that there is such a Budget when it does not in fact exist?

Mr Speaker: It is always useful to have a bit of accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any published facts, the law and common sense. In those matters, the Chancellor’s movements, and I am bound to say that—on the whole—that is a considerable solace to me too.

Mr Chope: We are about to embark on a very important debate on the economic benefits of UK membership of the European Union. The shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer is going to lead the debate. Surely it is essential that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is in the House to answer the points that are made and to defend the ludicrous stance that he has been taking in the media. Why is the Chancellor of the Exchequer not here? What can this House do to require him to maintain its conventions and attend this debate?

Mr Speaker: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman, and to those who are attending our proceedings, is that who the Government field to respond to a debate is a matter for the Government. The hon. Gentleman will probably—on the whole—be relieved to know that the matters for which I am responsible do not include the Chancellor’s movements, and I am bound to say that—on the whole—that is a considerable solace to me too.

There will be people, and I get the impression that the hon. Gentleman is one of them, who will feel that it is somewhat discourteous if a very senior Minister who is responsible for the policy area in question is not present in the Chamber, but it is not against the rules of the House. I would hope that the Chancellor would have some interest in what Members think about the matter. That would be courteous, and it would show a degree of humility and respect, but beyond that, it is a matter for the Government to choose. I gather that the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will respond to the shadow Chancellor, and that is perfectly orderly.

Mr Speaker: It is of paramount importance that Ministers should give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

Last week, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that he had “secured two vital treaty changes”.—[Official Report, 8 June 2016, Vol. 611, c. 1184.] I subsequently sought a correction. Today, I received a letter from the Prime Minister stating that my letter to him was “misleading”. His reply flies in the face of the published facts, the law and common sense. In those
circumstances, Mr Speaker, will you take note of the fact that I am stating that I believe that there has been a breach of that resolution?

Mr Speaker: I do take note of what the hon. Gentleman tells me, and I take what he has said very seriously. He is an extremely long-serving and serious-minded Member of the House. However, I have already advised the hon. Gentleman—to whose representation I paid very close attention—that I do not think it proper or necessary for me to add anything to what has already been said on this matter. I would simply say to him, and to other Members, that although of course I have my own thoughts on these matters, I do seek wise professional counsel, which is impeccably independent and based on very great experience in the service of the House. That does not automatically mean that it is right, but it does mean that it is serious.

I think we must leave it there. I have, I think, very generously given the hon. Gentleman full opportunities to record this thoughts, and they are now recorded.

John McDonnell: I beg to move,

That this House believes that the UK needs to stay in the EU because it offers the best framework for trade, manufacturing, employment rights and cooperation to meet the challenges the UK faces in the world in the twenty-first century; and notes that tens of billions of pounds worth of investment and millions of jobs are linked to the UK’s membership of the EU, the biggest market in the world.

This is the last opportunity that the House will have to debate the issue of our membership of the European Union before our people vote in the referendum next week. It has been described as the most important decision for a generation, and it may well turn out to be so. We therefore have a responsibility to ensure that it is made on the basis of the fullest possible debate, which will be considered and, hopefully, calm.

We need to acknowledge, however, what many of our constituents have been telling us about the debate so far. It has not, as yet, risen to the occasion. On the doorstep, people repeat that they simply want the facts and our honest assessment of the consequences for them and our country of whether or not we remain in the European Union.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have finished this paragraph. I will be taking interventions, Mr Speaker, but I know that many Members wish to speak, so I shall try to limit the number of times that I give way.

On the doorstep people have simply asked for the facts, and I have to say many of them say they have been turned off by the exaggerated claims on both sides of the argument—put off by references to world war three on one side, and to comparisons of the European Union with the Third Reich on the other. “Project Fear” from both sides simply is not working. People will not be scared into the ballot box.

Sir Edward Leigh: I am most grateful to the shadow Chancellor for his courtesy in giving way, but does he understand that many of us believe that the real threat to our economy is not whether we stay in the EU or leave it; the real threat would be the implementation of the disastrous tax-and-spend policies that all his life he has advocated?

John McDonnell: I always find the hon. Gentleman’s interventions entertaining to say the least, but may I return to the subject of today’s debate?

Many people have seen this debate going on within the Westminster bubble among the Establishment. They do not feel involved, and many suspect that what they
are witnessing is an unseemly battle for the succession in the Conservative party rather than a considered debate about the future interests of our country.

Much of the media coverage of the internal Tory strife has drowned out other parties. Polling suggests that many of our own Labour supporters are unclear about Labour's position. So let people be absolutely clear: as the motion before us today unambiguously states, Labour is for remain. Today's motion spells it out. It is about jobs, investment, trade with our largest market and the protection of the employment rights of workers so they can secure the benefits of participation in that market, but for many of us it is also about creating another Europe—a Europe that is more democratic, that promotes social justice as well as prosperity, that is more equal and sustainable economically and environmentally. We must do nothing now that jeopardises our European future.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the shadow Chancellor share my concern about all those many cases where a UK manufacturing plant shut down and job losses have been very great, only to see new investment made in another EU country benefiting from specific and general grants and soft loans from the EU?

John McDonnell: My fear is that if we vote for Brexit we will cut ourselves off from the opportunity of financial support as well, and that many other companies will move out. It is only courteous to also congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his 65th birthday today.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the bubble in Westminster. Does he not think that over these next few days every Member of this House has got to tell people in our constituencies what leaving the EU would mean for them? In Huddersfield it would mean catastrophic loss of income into our university and catastrophic impact on manufacturing industry.

John McDonnell: I fully agree. It is clear that a large percentage of people have not made up their minds yet, and that there are others who can be influenced, and it is essential that they make this decision on concrete facts rather than exaggerated claims like those we have seen so far.

Let us be absolutely clear: this is about jobs. There are 3.5 million jobs directly dependent on Britain's membership of the EU. These will be put at risk as a result of a Tory Brexit. The traditionally Eurosceptic Treasury estimates that unemployment would rise following Britain's leaving the EU by between 520,000 and anything up to 820,000. EU member countries accounted for nearly half of the UK's stock of inward investment at £496 billion. This is far more than the US or any other single country.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Can the hon. Gentleman answer a question that those on the Government Benches have been unable to answer so far? Why should we spend over £10 billion a year net to the EU in order to have a £68 billion trade deficit with the EU, when anybody with even a modicum of common sense knows that we can have a £68 billion a year trade deficit with a declining part of the world's economy for nothing?

John McDonnell: The single market provides us with the largest market we have, and enables us to create long-term secure jobs. The benefits of our contribution come in the growing economy we have had over the years.

Several hon. Members rose—

John McDonnell: If I may press on—

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): May I intervene on this very point?

John McDonnell: Yes—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) intervenes, let me say that Members must not harangue the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). He is generously giving way, but people should not insist on intervening until it has been agreed. I call Mr Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies: I apologise for my Welsh mannerisms. May I simply put it to the shadow Chancellor that only two countries—Holland and Germany—have a trade surplus with the UK, while the other 26 have a deficit, and does he therefore agree that in the event of Brexit those countries would vote for tariffs to protect their own jobs and we would be turning our back on 44% of our trade?

John McDonnell: The concern, obviously, is that tariffs would be introduced, but also the negotiating period to establish a new trade deal will take, optimistically, as the Prime Minister has said, seven years, if not longer.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I want to pay tribute to the thoughtful way that the hon. Gentleman is saying this should not be “Project Fear”. May I ask him, therefore, to join those of us who agree that this panic punishment Budget that has been suggested is not the way we should treat people who choose to vote leave? Can he say that his side would not implement those punitive measures, including slashing the NHS budget?

John McDonnell: We have yet to see the details of this Budget proposed this morning, but let us make it absolutely clear: the Labour party is an anti-austerity party and we have voted consistently against austerity measures.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Is the shadow Chancellor aware that not only have we had the Chancellor's proposed emergency Budget, but we have a six-point plan from the Brexiteers including a Finance Bill, which sounds less like a campaign than a coup to take over the Government? Does the shadow Chancellor detect any enthusiasm in the country for replacing this extreme right-wing Government with an even more extreme right-wing Government?

John McDonnell: I will come on to that subsequently.

With regard to trade, the EU is Britain’s largest export market by a long way. Some 44% of UK exports go to the EU, worth £223 billion. That is more than double the value of exports to the US, and more than 10 times the value of exports to China. That just gives an idea of the scale of the impact of the EU on our economy. It is argued that withdrawal from the EU will
have no implications for jobs, investment and trade, almost as though things will just carry on as before. That flies in the face of experience of all other trade relationships. Access to the single market would have to be renegotiated. That would take at least two years, and more likely the seven to 10 years predicted by others. The climate of uncertainty created would undermine the critical factors investors and decision makers require when they invest for the long term: certainty, security and stability.

We have seen only this morning in Rolls-Royce the latest example of a company expressing its doubts about its long-term investment plans if Brexit goes ahead. We have also seen competitors across Europe welcoming with open arms those companies considering relocation if the decision goes to Brexit.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): In my constituency people on the doorsteps are talking to me about two things: the economy and immigration. Does my hon. Friend agree that leaving Europe would affect only one of those things—our economy, which will be negatively affected? Leaving will do nothing around immigration.

John McDonnell: I will come on to that later in my speech, but the evidence is clear: the impact on our economy overall will set us back a number of years. Brexit will undermine our economy and undermine the futures of our families and communities, while at the same time doing nothing with regard to migration overall.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) referring to the trade deficit, will the shadow Chancellor comment on the fact that our trade deficit in export of goods and services with the other 27 member states is now €67.8 billion and has gone up by £10 billion this year alone, but our trade surplus with the rest of the world is £31 billion, up by £7 billion in the same year? Germany, however, has a trade surplus with the rest of the EU of £81.8 billion. What kind of single market is that for us?

John McDonnell: I join the hon. Gentleman in his critique of Conservative economic policy over the past seven years, which has undermined our ability to export, but is he really proposing to impose tariffs against the rest of Europe, which would undermine free trade generally? If that is the case, he would be undergoing a damascene conversion to a planned economy, which would amaze me.

The Labour party places critical importance on employment rights because those rights enable ordinary workers to secure the benefits of the jobs, investment and trade that membership of the single market brings. To be frank, over the past 40 years, as trade unionists we have been promiscuous in where we have gone to bring here on zero-hours contracts. If we state it loud and clear here today that we are going to get rid of this Mike Ashley and thousands of others around Britain, we will set fire to this campaign.

John McDonnell: I wholeheartedly concur not only with the criticisms that my hon. Friend has levelled but with his solution, which is based on the development of employment rights that have been consistently undermined in recent decades in this country.

As I was saying, there is a well founded concern that withdrawal will put jobs, investment, trade and employment at risk. The unpredictability of the outcome of this leap in the dark has united virtually every economist and economic institution of any standing, from the International Monetary Fund and the OECD to the Bank of England and the Institute for Fiscal Studies, in expressing their concerns about the risk to the economy. In the past 72 hours, we have witnessed the reaction of the world markets to shifts in the polls pointing to a possible Brexit, with £100 billion knocked off the value of shares, and the value of the pound dropping. The Brexit campaign has done more damage to capitalism in four days than the Socialist Workers party did in 40 years. This comes at a time when our economy is extremely fragile. Six years of unnecessary austerity, the chaotic failure of the various fiscal rules adopted by this Government, and our record current account deficit have made our economy extremely vulnerable to even a minor shock. And as the markets have just demonstrated, leaving the EU would certainly not be interpreted as just a minor shock.

Let me turn to the issue of migration. I believe that the economic arguments for remaining are overpowering—

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I want to make an appeal to the hon. Gentleman and the Labour Party: please don’t go near immigration. You
have no credibility on that issue. You're all over the place. You've been bullied by the Tories, and raising immigration will only help the leave case.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have never been bullied by anybody, and I am not all “over the place” on this matter. The Speaker is keeping out of it. I am simply seeking to facilitate fair play, and I remind the hon. Gentleman of the correct parliamentary language.

John McDonnell: With the greatest respect, I ask the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) to listen to my speech before he comes to a judgment on this matter.

I believe that the economic arguments for remaining are overpowering, but the polls and the feedback from the doorstep confirm that immigration is a key motivating factor for some people in different parts of the country. Let me deal with some of the economic arguments around migration. I admit that I do not come to the debate on immigration completely objectively. I am the grandson of an Irish migrant. My grandfather's generation of Irish migrants and subsequent Irish migrants built many of this country’s roads, railways and homes. They staffed the factories while many Irish women were the nurses who formed the backbone of the NHS and the teachers who taught in our schools. They all contributed to making this country’s economy the fifth largest in the world. That is what migrants overwhelmingly do. Over the last decade, migrants from new EU member countries contributed £20 billion more in taxes than they used in public services and benefit payments. More than 52,000 EU migrants work in our NHS. With labour shortages reported in key sectors such as construction, it is migrant labour that helps to fill the gap. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors’ recent surveys show that a lack of skilled workers is already hurting the delivery of infrastructure projects.

Let us admit, however, that genuine concerns have been expressed about the impact of migration on wages and employment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) suggested. Those concerns should not be dismissed. Research presented by Oxford University’s Migration Observatory has demonstrated that migration has not had the impact of reducing wages except in a small proportion of the workforce: those at the lowest end of the pay scale. This has to be addressed, and that is why Labour is calling for greater protection for this group of workers. Yes, reforms are needed with regard to the free movement of labour, to introduce greater protection of wages and employment rights and to halt the undercutting of wages and employment conditions. In government, we will renegotiate to give effect to the free movement of labour.Migration cuts both ways: British people have been among the main beneficiaries of the free movement of labour and people across Europe, with 1.2 million UK citizens living permanently in other EU countries and a further 1 million living in another EU country for at least part of the year. I remember the “Auf Wiedersehen, Pet” generation, when British workers secured jobs across Europe when our own economy was in recession. The eurozone is slowly coming out of recession and will, once again, provide opportunities that our own people will want to take advantage of. Young people, especially, are now studying, working and settling in large numbers across Europe. The number of UK students studying in Europe through the Erasmus scheme has risen by 115% in less than a decade.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): As honorary president of Labour International, may I remind my hon. Friend that any overseas voters who have lived abroad for up to 15 years and wish to get a proxy vote in this referendum need to apply by 5 o’clock today?

John McDonnell: Nothing more than that eloquent statement needs to be said.

Migration cuts both ways: British people have been among the main beneficiaries of the free movement of labour and people across Europe, with 1.2 million UK citizens living permanently in other EU countries and a further 1 million living in another EU country for at least part of the year. I remember the “Auf Wiedersehen, Pet” generation, when British workers secured jobs across Europe when our own economy was in recession. The eurozone is slowly coming out of recession and will, once again, provide opportunities that our own people will want to take advantage of. Young people, especially, are now studying, working and settling in large numbers across Europe. The number of UK students studying in Europe through the Erasmus scheme has risen by 115% in less than a decade.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Does the shadow Chancellor agree that being an EU citizen in the United Kingdom might be an uncomfortable experience at the moment, particularly in the light of the language and tone being used by one of the leaders of the Brexit campaign, Nigel Farage? Does he also agree that if we were to remove those EU citizens and put in place the 50,000 cap proposed by Nigel Farage, we would see an exodus of people who work in our care homes, our hospitals and our schools? That would have a real impact on our ability to deliver public services. Is it not the case that we are an open and tolerant United Kingdom?

John McDonnell: I find some of the statements that have been made reprehensible and irresponsible, because they do not weigh up the impact of the policies being advocated on our public services and our economy.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I am listening to the debate and the contributions from across the Floor, and I am staggered, again, that people who come here to make a new life for themselves, uprooting their family to make a contribution to this country, are the scapegoats for the austerity measures of Government Members.

John McDonnell: Nothing more than that eloquent statement needs to be said.

Migration cuts both ways: British people have been among the main beneficiaries of the free movement of labour and people across Europe, with 1.2 million UK citizens living permanently in other EU countries and a further 1 million living in another EU country for at least part of the year. I remember the “Auf Wiedersehen, Pet” generation, when British workers secured jobs across Europe when our own economy was in recession. The eurozone is slowly coming out of recession and will, once again, provide opportunities that our own people will want to take advantage of. Young people, especially, are now studying, working and settling in large numbers across Europe. The number of UK students studying in Europe through the Erasmus scheme has risen by 115% in less than a decade.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): As honorary president of Labour International, may I remind my hon. Friend that any overseas voters who have lived abroad for up to 15 years and wish to get a proxy vote in this referendum need to apply by 5 o’clock today?

John McDonnell: Nothing more than that eloquent statement needs to be said.

Migration cuts both ways: British people have been among the main beneficiaries of the free movement of labour and people across Europe, with 1.2 million UK citizens living permanently in other EU countries and a further 1 million living in another EU country for at least part of the year. I remember the “Auf Wiedersehen, Pet” generation, when British workers secured jobs across Europe when our own economy was in recession. The eurozone is slowly coming out of recession and will, once again, provide opportunities that our own people will want to take advantage of. Young people, especially, are now studying, working and settling in large numbers across Europe. The number of UK students studying in Europe through the Erasmus scheme has risen by 115% in less than a decade.
Europe are predominantly those who have retired there. We import young working people and we export retired people, and we should remember that balance.

John McDonnell: That is an interesting point, and in this debate people have talked about our ageing population and just how much we need youth coming into this country to enable us to balance the population growth.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): We need to point out that one in five of the adult social care workforce in this country—230,000 people—was not born here. Greater London, in particular, is reliant on migrant care workers, with 60% of the adult social care workforce born abroad. Much of that sector would collapse without them, so those who talk about interfering with and restricting this have to remember that our care sector relies on these people.

John McDonnell: It is true to say that our care sector would collapse without the migrant labour we currently have, and that is a danger.

Much of the EU debate so far has dwelled on the past and immediate present, but as a country we need to look to the future. Many of the issues we face are transnational: climate change, tax evasion, tax avoidance and the refugee crisis. They cross country boundaries. The EU provides us with the vehicle to work in co-operation with our European neighbours to tackle these issues, but we have to recognise that people do care about what they see as a loss of sovereignty. A strong reform agenda is needed to ensure that where sovereignty has been pooled in decision making, there is democratic accountability. That means making decisions in the EU completely open and transparent, and ensuring that the Commission is effectively democratically accountable. It starts within the UK, by ensuring that we have more open and effective mechanisms for holding to account those Ministers and others who represent us in the EU decision-making process.

Britain takes the EU presidency shortly, which will enable us to lead the drive for reform. For the first time in a generation, there are parties and movements across Europe mobilising on an agenda of reform that we can share. There is the real and growing prospect now of a new European progressive coalition emerging that is willing to seize the agenda of the EU to end austerity, secure employment growth, tackle tax evasion and avoidance, confront climate change and of course co-operate to deal with the tragic humanitarian crisis of the refugees.

To conclude, in the overall debate on the EU I think I am where a great many British people are when it comes to making the decision next week. I did not vote to go into the Common Market, and I have been generally a Euro sceptic, critical of the frustrating bureaucracy of the EU. I am not a Europhile or a Europhobe. People like me are carefully balancing the prospects for my family, my community and my country. I think that, like me, many will take a pragmatic view that the leap in the dark of leaving Europe is a risk too far. For Labour supporters there is the added concern that needs to be taken into account: this would be a Tory Brexit. On 24 June, if Brexit goes through it will be a Tory Government who will be implementing withdrawal.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: If the right hon. Lady will let me, I will conclude.

It is likely, given the political fall-out from the campaign, that we would be talking about a Tory Government much further to the right than this one, with the UK Independence party yapping at their heels. I ask Labour supporters to ask themselves: do they really trust the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and the right hon. Members for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) with our jobs, public services and employment rights? It is a risk too far and it closes the door on a European future that we have the opportunity of decisively shaping in the next few years. I urge hon. Members to support the motion and our people to vote next week to remain. But I also want to assure our people that whatever the result the decision will be respected and that the Labour Party will listen to the people and respond to their concerns. We will seek to bind our country together and not let the extremes divide us.

1.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this crucial debate, Mr Speaker, and I consider that the subject matter falls perfectly well within my remit of foreign affairs.

As we approach the final stage of this campaign, it sometimes feels that we have lost sight of the key question that people are supposed to be answering in the polling booths a week tomorrow. That question is not, “Do we like the EU?”, or “Do we agree with everything it does?” It is not, “What message do you want to send the EU?” or even, “What message do you want to send the Government?” It is certainly not, “Is the EU perfect?” I would be the first to say loudly that it is not. This is a straightforward question that requires a clear-eyed, hard-headed analysis and response: “Are we safer, stronger and better off inside a reformed EU or outside it?” As Foreign Secretary, I know as well as anyone the frustrations of decision making by committee of 28 and the compromises that entails, but I also know that we are winning the arguments in Europe and are increasingly influential in shaping its future. I know, too, that we have greater global influence as a result of being a leading member of the world’s largest trading bloc.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman asked the question that we hear all too often: is the EU perfect or imperfect? The reality is that people complain that their council is imperfect. Unbelievably, some people in Scotland even complain that their Government are imperfect. A lot of people definitely complain that Westminster is imperfect. I find that a lot fewer people complain about the EU being imperfect, so can we stop saying that the EU is uniquely imperfect? There are imperfections at all levels of government, and to brand the EU in that way is a problem. The EU is a club for independent countries, which Westminster most certainly is not; it is a family of nations, which this is not.
Mr Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He certainly did not hear me claiming that the EU was uniquely imperfect. It is just another imperfect institution among very many, including our own Government, I am certain.

I know that we are safer because we work with other EU member states to tackle the threats of terrorism and organised crime, and I know that we are better off for being part of a market of more than 500 million consumers, with the combined economic weight of a quarter of the world’s GDP, when negotiating trade deals with the rest of the world. I want to dwell on that point, because it is fundamental. We said back in 2010 that our economic security and our national security are two sides of the same coin, and it remains true today. Without economic security, there is no national security. How could we be safer if we could not afford to invest in our nation’s security and defence? How could we be stronger and more influential if our economy was shrinking?

John Redwood: How can the Foreign Secretary say that we are more secure and better off? If we take the fishing industry, for example, the number of fishermen has halved since we joined the EU and the industry has been under a common fisheries policy that has driven us into import dependence on other countries.

Mr Hammond: I say that because I take a holistic view. I am looking at the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole, taking into account all the pluses and minuses of our EU membership—yes, there are negatives as well as positives—balancing those arguments and reaching a conclusion about the net benefit to this country of being a member of the European Union.

Mark Pritchard: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that there can be no economic security without national security. Will he tell the House how many of our NATO allies want the United Kingdom to leave the European Union? Many in the Brexit camp invoke how could we be stronger and more influential if our economy was shrinking?

Sir William Cash: The Foreign Secretary has just referred to the net benefit to the United Kingdom from being in the single market. Will he tell me how a net benefit is actually a UK trade deficit? According to the House of Commons Library and the Office for National Statistics, in our trade in goods and services with the other 27 member states, we had a deficit of no less than £67.8 billion in 2015, which was up £10 billion on the previous year and is escalating. How is that a net benefit?

Mr Hammond: I shall come to that in a minute, but my hon. Friend dwells like an old-fashioned mercantilist on the trade statistics alone. I suggest to him that there are wider issues at stake about the overall impact on our economy and the benefits of the growth, investment and dynamism that being part of a 500 million-strong market of very wealthy consumers delivers to us.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I have been very happy to campaign in a cross-party way to remain, but as the Foreign Secretary has criticised my party’s record in government, may I ask him whether his Government’s cuts, loaded on to the poorest parts of our country, have made too many people question whether they have anything to lose in the referendum? Their wages have been falling since the crash, which has damaged their confidence in our economy to deliver for them. Does he believe that, when we vote to remain, we need to see real action to help people in the poorest parts of this country?

Mr Hammond: Yes, but we will do that only by delivering a robust economy that is soundly based and can go forward in the future. The most effective way of doing that is by being part of the European Union.

Our membership of the EU gives us both the freedom to trade in the world’s largest single market—a market of more than 500 million consumers—without tariffs and the bureaucracy of customs barriers, and access to more than 50 other markets besides, through EU free trade agreements. The benefits of being in that single market are clear for us to see: 44% of Britain’s exports go to the EU. How much of that trade would be lost if we put up the shutters and renounced our EU membership? How many businesses and employees who depend on that trade would go to the wall? How long would it take to negotiate a new trade agreement with our European neighbours? What would the terms be? I am prepared to bet that they would be nothing like as favourable as the terms that we have on the inside.
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What assessment has the Foreign Secretary’s Department made of the length of time that it would take for the British Government to negotiate not only a trade deal with the European Union, but, as he mentioned, all the free trade deals that currently exist between the EU and other parts of the world, so that we can trade with the rest of the world?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, and he will have heard the Prime Minister talking about that very issue only a few moments ago. We can expect that it would take us at least two years to negotiate our exit from the European Union if that was what the British people decided on 23 June. Thereafter, we would have to negotiate a trade deal with the European Union, and then trade deals with the 53 other countries around the world with which the EU has free trade agreements.

There is a small technical hitch, to which I have drawn the House’s attention before: we do not have any trade negotiators, because for the past 40 years the European Union has conducted our trade negotiations for us. It is about not just time but the price that we would have to pay to negotiate that access to the single market from outside. From the evidence of others who have done that, the answer is clear. That price would involve our freedom of movement, acceptance of the entire body of EU regulation, and a whopping sub to boot—all the things that the leave campaign tell us we will escape from—with no say at all in how the rules are made. It would be the worst of all worlds.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): On the question of the trade deficit with the EU, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) mentioned a moment ago, does the Foreign Secretary agree that were we to exit the single market, the component of EU free trade that would be placed most at risk would be free trade in services, on which we enjoy a £20 billion trade surplus with the EU?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I want to address that important point later in my speech.

Any deal that we achieve with the European Union will almost certainly exclude free access to the market for services, which is something of a problem when services account for almost 80% of our economy.

Caroline Flint rose—

Geraint Davies rose—

Mr Hammond: Let me just make this point, then I will give way again.

By contrast, if we remain inside the EU, we can look forward to a huge dividend from an opening of the market in services over the coming years. The truth is that we have barely scratched the surface when it comes to the EU single market. The single market in goods is well developed, but in the sectors in which the UK is truly market-leading—financial, business, technical and professional services, the digital economy, the creative industries and energy—the potential remains huge, and the EU’s high-value market is the place to realise it.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen the warnings from Airbus about the threats to future investment in this country? I am talking about more than 6,000 jobs in Alyn and Deeside and 5,000 jobs in Bristol. Does he agree that the Brexit camp think that those are jobs that we can afford to lose?

Mr Hammond: That question has never been effectively answered—how many jobs are those advocating Britain’s exit from the European Union prepared to sacrifice on the altar of their notion of sovereignty? We have never had a straight answer to that question. What we do have is a range of independent estimates of what that number would be if we voted to leave next Thursday. I shall come to that in a moment.

It is because of the potential for the UK to open up the services market in the European Union that the deal the Prime Minister negotiated in February is so important. We now have a clear political commitment from all 27 other EU member states, plus the Commission, to accelerate the development of that market. These are the sectors in which the UK leads in Europe, and in which an expansion of the single market will disproportionately benefit the United Kingdom over the years ahead.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that that commitment to a proper completion of the single market in services, added to the completion of a capital markets union, places the United Kingdom in a unique position to develop its world-leading sector, and that it would be mad to walk away from that opportunity?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. That is what I hear from many of my European colleagues: we are about to move from one phase of European Union development into a new phase that is hugely beneficial to the United Kingdom, yet we are talking about walking away from it. Our financial services industry alone currently contributes more than 7% of UK GDP and employs more than 1 million people, two thirds of them outside London, but there is not yet a single market for financial services across the EU. The potential is huge.

A fully functioning digital single marketplace could be worth as much as £330 billion a year to the EU economy, with the UK again set to benefit more than any other country, as the leading digital economy in Europe. By the way, it would be a huge boon for Britain’s digital-savvy consumers, who would be able to shop freely across the digital single marketplace. Individuals are already feeling the benefits of last year’s EU agreement, led by the UK, to end mobile roaming charges, which it is estimated will save UK consumers around £350 million a year, and for years we have all been enjoying the budget airline boom created by EU regulations.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason why the markets had such a shock yesterday was the prospect of us leaving, based on a couple of polls? That £30 billion shock to our financial system hit not just capitalists but the pension funds of hard-working people, which deteriorated. If the prospect of Brexit caused that shock, what on earth would actual Brexit look like?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. We can regard what has been happening in the markets this week as a fore-tremor—a taste of what could be to come if the people of Britain vote to take a leap into the dark on 23 June.
A fully fledged energy union in gas and electricity markets could save £50 billion a year across the EU by 2030, with huge benefits for consumers through their energy bills, as well as making Europe safer from threats of energy blackmail. But it is not just intra-EU trade benefits that our membership delivers. As a member of the world’s largest economic bloc, we benefit directly from being party to EU trade agreements with more than 50 other countries, with terms far more favourable than any that we could have negotiated alone, because of the combined negotiating muscle of an economic bloc with a quarter of the world’s GDP.

Caroline Flint: Trade is one of the areas where size does matter. Will the Foreign Secretary comment on the attempts to strike a deal between Switzerland and China? We hear much about what the world might be like if we leave the EU. My understanding is that as part of the deal the Chinese are negotiating for full access to the Swiss market, but have told the Swiss that they will have to wait 15 years to get into the Chinese market.

Mr Hammond: The right hon. Lady is right. The deal on the table between Switzerland and China is deeply asymmetric and deeply unfavourable to the Swiss, but reflects the mismatch in scale between those two marketplaces. Being part of the world’s largest economic bloc allows us to stare squarely into the eyes of Chinese and American interlocutors when negotiating trade deals.

It is a well rehearsed and well understood fact that 44% of the UK’s exports go to the EU, but it is an underestimate because it addresses only exports to the EU. If we take into account the countries with which the EU has a free trade agreement—destinations for another £56 billion of British exports—the figure goes up to 56%, which does not take into account any of the countries with which the EU is negotiating free trade agreements. If we included them, we would be talking about more than 80% of UK exports going either to the EU or to countries with which the EU had trade agreements. At the very least, more than half of Britain’s exports would therefore be at risk if we left the European Union, and it could take a decade or more to put in place new deals with the EU 27 and the 53 other countries with which we have free trade agreements. It is not about choosing between growing our trade with the EU or with the rest of the globe—as the figures show, our EU membership is key to both.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Is not the central absurdity of talking about the EU deficit and the surplus with the rest of the world that our trade and lower investment would be felt directly by the British people: fewer jobs and higher unemployment. An estimated 3.3 million jobs in the UK—more than the EU 27 and the 53 other countries with which we have free trade agreements. At the very least, more than half of Britain’s exports would therefore be at risk if we left the European Union, and it could take a decade or more to put in place new deals with the EU 27 and the 53 other countries with which we have free trade agreements. It is not about choosing between growing our trade with the EU or with the rest of the globe—as the figures show, our EU membership is key to both.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. The world’s supply chain has globalised itself. If I am honest, when I listen to the arguments of some of our opponents in this debate, although framed in terms of hostility to the European Union, I sometimes wonder whether what I am hearing is hostility to the globalisation of our economy.

What is true for trade is also true for investment—the other side of the coin. The reality is that Britain benefits hugely as a platform for investment from both EU and non-EU countries, many of which see us as a gateway to the rest of the European Union. They come here because of our language, our skills, our flexible labour market and our domestic regulatory environment, but if I talk to foreign companies based in this country—I have lots of them in my constituency, and other Members will be in a similar position—and to others around the world thinking of making that investment decision, it is clear that the single most important factor in the decision making of most of them is our membership of the European Union. Our membership makes Britain a launch pad for doing business with the rest of Europe. Almost three in every four foreign investors cite our access to the European market as a principal reason for investment in the UK. If we lost that access, we would lose the investment. It is as simple as that.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware of Ernst and Young’s recent report showing that the UK continues to be the No. 1 destination for foreign direct investment in Europe, with the north-west seeing the biggest increase? Does he agree that a vote to remain would encourage yet further investment in the northern powerhouse and in other regions?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. Treasury analysis shows that the UK is the largest recipient of foreign direct investment in the EU, ahead of Germany and ahead of France. We get almost a fifth of total inward FDI into EU countries—20% of the investment, with less than 12% of the population. I remind the House that every pound of that investment creates jobs in the UK. It is why Australia is a disproportionately large investor here, it is why so many Indian firms use this country as a base, and it is why world leaders, such as President Obama, Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Modi, believe we would lose out if we voted to leave the EU.

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that that is particularly true of Japan and Japanese investment, on which this country relies for new nuclear power generation?

Mr Hammond: Not just for our new generation of nuclear power, but for a large part of our thriving car industry, which is built and based on our ability to export to the European Union. Japanese investment has transformed the economics of and labour relations in our car industry—it has done wonders for this country. It astonishes me that we would even contemplate undermining the basis on which that investment is made.

Chris Philp: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Hammond: I will just make a little progress if my hon. Friend will allow me.

If we left the EU, the practical consequences of lower trade and lower investment would be felt directly by the British people: fewer jobs and higher unemployment. An estimated 3.3 million jobs in the UK—more than...
one in every 10—are linked to exports to other EU countries, with 250,000 jobs in Scotland, a quarter of a million in the south-west, half a million in the Midlands, and 700,000 in the north. How secure will they be if we vote for Brexit next Thursday? How will the spectre of rising unemployment undermine consumer spending and sap business confidence—to blight, once again, those areas of the country that have been in this cycle all too often?

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Given the risks to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom that the Foreign Secretary is outlining, and given that the most recent poll shows support for leave in Scotland at only 32%, is he beginning to regret rejecting the SNP’s call for a four-nation lock on the referendum’s outcome?

**Mr Hammond:** No, I am not. This is a very important debate, but we have to use the power of persuasion to win it, not tricks. We have a week to make the case—openly and fairly. We need to let the British people decide, and then, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington said, whatever their decision and however much we may not like it, we have to accept it, abide by it and implement it, and that is exactly what we will do.

Over 100,000 British businesses export to the EU. The future of every one of them—and of every person who works for them—will be put on hold if next Thursday there is a vote to leave. Will they be able to maintain access to their markets? Will they face tariffs? Will their customers hedge their bets and take their business elsewhere, just in case? It is difficult to see how even the most upbeat Brexiteer could not see that we are likely to face months, years and perhaps a decade of confidence-sapping, investment-eroding, job-destroying uncertainty that will take this country back to the dark days of 2008, and I for one never want to go there again.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Rolls-Royce has a manufacturing facility in my constituency and has made the threat to jobs very clear. Unemployment has fallen 60% since 2010, but that improvement will be put at risk, as highlighted by a CBI report stating that the shock to our economy could cost 950,000 jobs. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that that risk is simply not worth taking?

**Mr Hammond:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is a risk we do not need to take, and it is a risk that it would be absurd to take. I just cannot believe that after all the grief and pain we have been through in this country to rebuild our economy following the disaster of 2008-09 we are seriously thinking about going back there. That astonishes me.

Economic experts have judged overwhelmingly from the evidence that Britain’s economy will be stronger and more resilient if we remain in the EU. The G7 Finance Ministers, nine out of 10 economists, and independent organisations such as the IMF, the World Bank, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the World Trade Organisation have expressed the view that the UK will be better off inside the EU.

And not just economists but more than 200 entrepreneurs—founders of household names such as Skype, lastminute.com and innocent drinks—agree. Rarely, if ever, can an issue have united the opinions of everyone from global institutions, through trade unions, to British businesses, large and small. The overwhelming weight of economic and business opinion is clear: Britain is better off in.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend nail from the Dispatch Box the canard that some on the exit side are peddling—that this is just a vehicle for another round of never-ending renegotiations? This is a serious, one-off decision. We will abide by the decision, and it has to be right for the future of our country.

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am happy to repeat what he says, as the Prime Minister did earlier. The British people will have their say; they will make their decision, and we will implement it. I do not believe that our 27 partners in the EU would say, “Oh, fine, let’s go through all this again,” even if we wanted to. This has to be the deciding point. It is make your mind up time. People have to look at the options bus: a future they know and can predict, with Britain in the European Union—a Britain that has created 2.5 million jobs over the last six years, and a Britain with a growth rate that has outstripped that of every other country in the European Union—or a leap in the dark.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Hammond:** I am going to make some progress now. I want to finish so that others can contribute.

What would be the consequences of a vote to leave? They would be: less trade, of course; lower investment; slower growth; and fewer jobs—less trade, because we would lose our access to the EU single market and to the free trade agreements the EU has; lower investment, because foreign businesses using the UK as a launchpad into the EU would go elsewhere, and UK businesses would be seeking to rebuild their markets, rather than investing for expansion; slower growth, because the economy would effectively be on hold for at least two years, and almost certainly very much longer, while we negotiated the terms of our exit from the EU; and fewer jobs, because, in a climate of such economic uncertainty, few companies would be hiring or expanding their workforce. Indeed, to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), the director general of the CBI, Carolyn Fairbairn, estimates that, if we left the EU, there would be almost a million fewer jobs in the UK by 2020 and that those under 34 would be hit the hardest.

Let us be clear: an exit negotiation with the EU will be far from the straightforward affair the leave camp is suggesting. We have general elections next year in France and Germany, and I can promise that every single vested interest in both those countries will be seeking to benefit from the British exit. We should expect no favours from those whom we have just snubbed. The Brexit campaign wants us to believe that we could negotiate a better deal for Britain from the outside than the one we actually secured from the inside at a time when the entire European Union was seeking to persuade us to stay. This is simple fantasy. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] It will not happen.
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): My right hon. Friend spoke about how companies that export to Europe would be badly affected by leaving the European Union. If we have a Brexit recession, not only will businesses that export to the EU be hit, but almost all businesses will be affected by the loss of investment in the UK and the loss of consumer income. Will not all businesses be affected?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am afraid that I can predict, on the basis of experience, what will happen. If we get a Brexit vote, markets will go into freefall, business confidence will collapse, business investment will freeze, and consumers will panic and stop spending, and that will have a massive effect across the width and breadth of our economy.

The United Kingdom is, and should remain, an outward-looking trading nation. If we want to remain prosperous, we must move up the value curve, not down it. Britain’s future has to be about higher skills, higher wages and higher investment, not the opposite.

The EU has many failings, and no one is pretending that the reforms negotiated by the Prime Minister should be the last word. If we remain on the inside, we can and should continue to influence the speed and direction of reform. If we step outside, we will continue to be affected by EU rules, but we will have no way of influencing them and no way of reforming the institutions.

The consequences of the decision the British people make on 23 June will reverberate down the generations. This is not a decision to be taken lightly; all our futures depend on it. Now is not the time for reckless risk-taking; it is time for cool, calculated consideration of the facts, the evidence and the expert opinion, and all point to the same conclusion: we are stronger, safer and better off inside a reformed European Union.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Once again, we find ourselves involved in a crucial referendum and a crucial debate that is fundamentally about more powers for this place, and, critically, more powers for Government Front Benchers. They may have denied 16 and 17-year-olds the vote, but let us not forget that this is about younger people, about the future, and about the kind of country that we want to see. Those Front Benchers may even have been reluctant to extend the deadline so that more young people could vote, yet fundamentally next week’s decision will impact on young people, and on our future, for far longer than it will impact on most people in this Chamber.

I hate to say it, but the Tory Brexites have fought an endlessly negative campaign founded on a cynical misrepresentation of the facts. I found that out for myself a few months ago when I appealed for us to avoid “Project Fear”, have a positive campaign, and give the benefit of the doubt to our opponents, only to find myself on a Vote Leave leaflet advocating for the side for which I was not advocating. That was cynical misrepresentation by those on that side, who fundamentally, instead of working in co-operation with other member states, want to launch a power grab for a Government who are the most right wing of recent times and could be about to become even more so.

In contrast to the Tory Brexit plans, the positive reason for staying in the European Union is one of co-operation between independent and sovereign member states. That co-operation makes us wealthier, with access to a single market of 500 million wealthy consumers. The EU is Scotland’s top export destination—42% of our exports go there, and more whisky is drunk in France in a month than cognac in a year. But that is not going to stop us exporting to the rest of the world. Scotland benefits from a huge diaspora in markets in the United States, Australia and elsewhere, and that will still be there—it is not going away. The European Union benefits us in that people can step from Scotland into a large EU market; we are very well placed for that. Critically, this is not just about big business: small businesses benefit almost more than any others. Many businesses in my constituency cannot afford lawyers in 28 capital cities around the European Union for all the different rules and regulations, so the EU fundamentally helps them, and makes us wealthier.

Geraint Davies: Brexites who say that Britain is the fifth largest economy in the world and that we are big enough to fend for ourselves forget that we are not the United States where California is nearly as big as us, we cannot be China or India, we would not want to be Japan, and France and Germany are part of the EU and locked into the biggest economy in the world. Does he agree that theirs is a ridiculous claim?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that I do agree. Just as Scotland is a medium-sized European state, so the UK is a medium-sized global state.

John Redwood: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the trade of a number of countries that are neither a member of the EU nor have any special arrangements with it has grown considerably faster than our trade with the EU from inside it?

Stephen Gethins: The right hon. Gentleman oddly suggests that our trade will grow more once we leave this enormous trading bloc, with all the benefits that come with it. Like all his colleagues in the leave campaign, he is failing to face up to facts.

The EU makes us healthier. We gain from healthcare across the European Union whereby citizens from the EU can benefit from our healthcare just as we benefit from theirs. There is research that makes us healthier. Scotland is currently taking the lead role on dementia research, involving 15 organisations in 11 member states. I am proud of the role that we play in that, just as other member states are contributing to our health through their research.

Dr Philippa Whitford rose—

Stephen Gethins: I give way to my hon. Friend, who will have something useful to say on that point.

Dr Whitford: I will do my best. We have had many health gains. Part of the reason we are in this debate is that for 40 years we have never talked about anything that we have gained—the cleaner air, the cleaner water, the cleaner beaches, and the fact that medicines are regulated across the EU through its regulation system. The European Medicines Agency is sitting right here in London. This morning I chaired a—
Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We have 50 speakers who want to get in. I want to get them all in, but I cannot do that with very long interventions; they have to be short and sweet and get to the point.

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the health aspects that we all benefit from in a large range of ways.

My hon. Friend also mentioned that the European Union makes us greener. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will join me in congratulating the Scottish Government, who have met their world-leading climate change targets four years ahead of schedule, with very little help from this place but plenty from co-operation with our European partners. We have worked together on the environment. She mentioned air quality. A number of years ago, complaints about acid rain affecting Germany’s forests led to air quality directives that are benefiting each and every one of us.

Barbara Keeley rose—

Stephen Gethins: I will make some progress.

Scotland’s renewables industry is thriving, with no thanks to this Government, but a huge amount of thanks to our co-operation with our European partners, which has created a huge amount of benefit.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con) rose—

Stephen Gethins: I will happily take an intervention from a Conservative Member—they are all helpfully badged.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can I help a little? I say to people who are going to speak very shortly and want to remain on the list: if you intervene, I am going to drop you down the list. Make your minds up—you cannot have it both ways at the expense of everybody else.

Mrs Murray: I will not intervene, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Stephen Gethins: Working with our partners has made us greener, and wealthier in terms of the industries in the sector.

Collaboration with our partners has made us smarter through our universities, not least the University of St Andrews, where I see the benefits daily. Since 2014, Scotland has received over £200 million from the EU science fund, and is set to gain £1.2 billion by 2020. The opportunities for collaboration and from the students that come here benefit us all and enrich our campuses.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Across the UK, nearly 11,500 EU students are contributing income to our universities, benefiting them greatly. Does my hon. Friend agree that collaborations such as the work on gravitational waves at Glasgow University could not have happened had we not been part of the EU family?

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about collaboration in our universities. I saw that for myself at the University of St Andrews when a French student showed me the creation of a black hole—although it is not true that that is what Vote Leave’s arguments all disappeared down.

I am someone who has benefited from freedom of movement within the EU. Through Erasmus, I was able to pick up skills and opportunities that I would not otherwise have had. I do not want to vote next week to take away from young people the opportunities that I, and other Members from across this House, have had. Freedom of movement often benefits local companies as well as enriching our society. The net contribution that has been made by EU migrants is significant. If we removed EU migrants from the UK, the Chancellor would have an even bigger black hole than the one he is talking about, with the imposition of even more austerity than at present.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): The students in our universities not only gain from what the European Union gives to them, but lever in some £80 billion of additional research spending, so they can help to educate more people.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. The £350 million figure that was splashed across Vote Leave’s bus did not last very long when subjected to scrutiny. It also did not take into account the huge range of benefits that we gain from membership of the European Union that go beyond that membership fee, as Vote Leave put it.

Freedom of movement—this is often lost—is a two-way process. There are 1.5 million UK citizens who benefit hugely from freedom of movement across the European Union. I often pose this question, but it is yet to be answered: what is the difference between an EU migrant and a UK ex-pat living in the European Union? They are exactly the same. I and others have been appalled by the language used by the Vote Leave campaign, not least about migration and refugees, because we benefit from working with our European partners on foreign policy.

President Obama has said that his worst foreign policy mistake was not dealing with the aftermath of Libya. The campaign in Libya had nothing to do with the EU; it had everything to do with this Government not dealing with it appropriately. And where is the biggest influx of refugees coming from? They are coming from the failed state of Libya. It was a UK foreign policy failure of the worst kind and it had nothing to do with the European Union.

On the issue of UK foreign policy disasters, Labour Members will be well aware that Chilcot will be published in a few weeks’ time. The European Union had nothing to do with the disaster in Iraq; it was another UK foreign policy disaster.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con) rose—

Stephen Gethins: I will make some progress.

Compare that with the EU as a soft power. It has made progress in stabilising south-east Europe and it could play a future role in the middle east and north Africa region and in dealing with the former Soviet Union. Europe can be a soft superpower and we need to be at the heart of that. As our partners in the EU have said, our membership of NATO and of the EU complement
[Stephen Gethins]
each other and have given us the longest period of peace, stability and prosperity in European history. We should not forget that.

The EU has also made us fairer. It protects us in so many ways, including through provisions for paid holidays and by giving parents—mums and dads—the right to parental leave. Just think of the draconian trade union laws that this lot here want to bring in: do we really want to be left to the mercy of a right-wing Conservative Government when it comes to social protections? Those social protections have been advanced through our membership of the European Union.

Last night, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is not here—which does not surprise me, given the going over he got from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond)—was reminded that he had previously said that “we could easily scrap the social chapter”. He is right—they could easily scrap the social chapter and all the benefits that go with it, because, when it comes down to it, this is a right-wing Tory power grab. The right-wing Tory foxes would be put in charge of the chicken coup of progressive politics in the United Kingdom.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The hon. Gentleman is confronting directly the supposedly leftist leave argument that ignores the fact that we would be plunged into Brexession and that pretends that there would not be more austerity or EUsterity in Europe. There would be a carnival of reaction, not just on the Conservative Benches, but across Europe, where right wing and neo-fascist parties would destroy rights in their countries, too.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. Frankly, we cannot trust the Tories with social protection or the environment, and we certainly cannot trust them with workers’ rights. This is a Tory excuse for more austerity, and that is what is coming if people vote to leave.

We often hear Vote Leave and Brexiteers talk about democracy and the EU, but it has a Council of 28 democratically elected Governments, as well as 28 commissioners who are appointed by those Governments and a Parliament that can sack them. They talk of a Tory Government here who were voted for by just one in four voters, and who experienced their worst election result in Scotland since 1865. They talk of democracy and a Tory victory in Scotland with a fifth of the vote, and an SNP defeat with just under half of the vote. They also talk up democracy as they eye up a seat in the affront to democracy that sits at the end of the corridor, the House of Lords. Do not be fooled by their appeals to democracy; they could learn a thing or two from Europe about democracy.

On independence, the EU is made up of 28 independent member states. Nobody questions the independence of Germany, France, Denmark or Finland. Mary Robinson has said that she believes that Ireland truly became independent only after it joined that European Union. My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) made a valuable point earlier when he said that the European Union is a club for independent countries but the Union of the UK is not. Not being independent here means areas having the poll tax, nuclear missiles on their soil, their fisheries being described as expendable and a Tory Government against the wishes of their people. That is not democratic.

I joined the SNP because I want to see Scotland in the world. The real isolation came from the Union and doing things through the prism of London. I started by saying that this is about our future, but let me reflect on the past. Scotland may be at the fringes of Europe geographically, but we sit at its heart politically. I am wearing the tie that commemorated the visit of Pope Benedict to Scotland, which was once called a filia specialis—a special daughter—of the Church. In 1218, the Pope tried to set out an archbishopric in St Andrews in my constituency, so even back then our European partners were protecting us from the worst excesses of this place. Even William Wallace’s first act was the letter of Lübeck and a letter to rejoin the Hanseatic League, the European Union of its day.

With our environmental commitment to a clean, green future, the excellence of our universities and our commitment to social progress, Scotland remains at the heart of Europe. I hope that the isolationist tendencies of Vote Leave and many in this place will not win out and that we vote to remain next week.

2.6 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Prosperity, not austerity, is what we want, and that will be so much easier to achieve when we cast off the shackles of the European Union. It is an institution renowned for its gross austerity and the damage it has done throughout great swathes of our continent, driving young people into unemployment, preventing school leavers from getting any job at all, and starving public services of cash.

Those policies have done terrible damage in Greece and in parts of Italy, Spain and Portugal. It is good that we have some freedom to distance ourselves from those policies, and we will have even more freedom when we take back control of our money, taxes and budgets.

It was bizarre to wake up this morning to press comments that there would need to be a post-Brexit-vote Budget. I am going to wait to see what the British public really want in a vote that is still to be decided, but the Government seem to have conceded defeat by saying that they would launch an austerity Budget if the British people dare to vote for their freedom and democracy. There is absolutely no need to do that, and I reassure the British people that there would be absolutely no chance of them getting such a Budget through the House of Commons. There is no enthusiasm for it from the SNP or the Labour party, and after Brexit many Conservative MPs will vote for lower taxes and more public spending, because that is what we will be able to afford as a result of the Brexit bonus, or dividend, when we get back the £10 billion a year that we send to the EU and currently do not get back.

Simon Hoare: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

John Redwood: No, I cannot. I have to be tight on time, because others wish to speak.

Those who want to remain so hate the idea that there is going to be a dividend, because they know that that money is taken away from us and is not used for the priorities of their electors and their local health and education services. Within the European Union, we are not legally allowed to get rid of VAT on fuel—a much
hated imposition that hits those on lower incomes far more than others—but we would be free to do so as soon as the British people vote to leave, if that is their wish.

The issue of our membership of the EU needs to be looked at over the longer term. All of the gloomy and bogus forecasts by those who wish to remain are based on the assumption that the single market is a precious and virtuous body to which we can belong, which has fuelled our prosperity and manufacturing growth so far, and which would no longer be available to us if we left. Of course, they are wrong on both counts. Our membership of the single market has not helped our manufacturing. When we leave, we will still have access to the single market, just as 165 other countries around the world have access to it daily without being members, without having to accept the freedom-of-movement provisions and without having to accept the taxes and the laws that are imposed on us on a wide range of issues that have nothing to do with trade whatsoever.

The single market, when it was introduced, did not accelerate our growth rate or our exports in manufacturing in any way. The Government did a very good long-term survey, which covered the period 1951 to 2007. They started in 1951, but the single market was introduced in ’71—it was necessary to leave out the bit immediately after the war, when there was a big demobilisation effect—and went up to 2007. The figures for manufacturing today are identical to those from 2007, because unfortunately we had a deep manufacturing recession in ’08-’09 and we are just about getting back to the ’07 levels. The survey showed that between 1951 and 1972, before we joined the European Union, we had manufacturing output growth of 4.4% per annum; and that since 1972, during the long period of time for which we have been in the thing, there has been absolutely no manufacturing growth at all.

If we look at individual sectors, we can see that prior to joining the European Union, our metals sector grew at 3% per annum, but it has declined at 6% per annum since we have been in the European Union. Our food and drink industry grew at 5.6% per annum before we joined, and it has fallen at 1% per annum ever since. Our textiles sector grew at 2.6% per annum when we were out of the EU, and it has fallen by 6% per annum since we joined. We used to have a 45 million tonne a year steel industry, thanks to massive national investment and the Labour Government of the ’60s, but it now produces only 11 million tonnes. We had a 400,000 tonne aluminium industry when we joined the EU, but we have only a 43,000 tonne industry left. We had a 20 million tonne cement industry when we joined the EU, but we have a 12 million tonne industry left. We had a 1 million tonne a year fishing industry when we joined the EU, and we have only a 600,000 tonne industry now.

Some of those industries, particularly the fishing industry, as my hon. Friend the Minister well knows, have been gravely damaged by our EU membership. EU rules in the common fisheries policy, and the quota allocations to other countries against the interests of our own fisherpeople, have caused the number of fishermen in our country to halve during our membership of the European Union. Our experience of manufacturing as a member of the European Union has been far from benign. High energy prices, rigged subsidies, arrangements that help other countries more than ours and a policy, quite often, of providing subsidy, grant and cheap loans to manufacturers literally to transfer plants from Britain to other continental countries have been part of the background to the dreadful erosion of our manufacturing.

It is fair to look at manufacturing because, as I think remain campaigners always say, there is no full single market in services. The single market was completed in goods by 1992. We have experienced that single market since 1992, and it has not made any beneficial difference whatsoever to our manufacturing. The deep-set decline that has characterised our period of membership of the European Union was not turned around by the introduction of those single market measures. Fortunately, our services have not yet been damaged by the growing regulation within the EU, but the evidence from what happened to manufacturing is not encouraging when we look at what might happen to our services. There have already been many cases in which the City of London, defending its interests as a financial services provider, has found itself at variance with incoming European rules. The matter is settled by qualified majority vote, so being around the table is of no use to us because we get outvoted. If we dare to take it further, we get European Court judgments against us for our alleged infringement of the rules.

Several hon. Members rose—

John Redwood: Mr Deputy Speaker, I know that you are very keen that I keep these remarks very short. This is an important case that does not get heard in the House, so for once I will not be able to take interventions.

The position is quite simple. Outside the European Union we will continue to trade fully with it, as we do today. We who want to leave the European Union are not proposing a wholesale removal of rules and regulations. One of the genuine benefits of the single market, as has been pointed out, is that there are common rules and regulations for trading with all countries. The great news is that we will get the benefit of that whether we are in or out. The Americans, who have grown their trade with the EU more quickly than we have done from within, get the benefit of that part of the single market because they have to supply only to one specification, just as we do from within. Many of the common rules and standards are informed by global ones, but we have been kicked off the global bodies by the European Union. Outside the European Union we would have the advantage of getting back our seat, vote and voice on the global bodies, so we would have more influence at the top table in return for no longer being part of the EU.

For prosperity not austerity, for control of our own taxes, for spending our own money, for providing growth by spending that extra money, and for trading freely with Europe without all the restrictions, controls and arguments, vote leave.

2.15 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I am grateful to be following the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) because he is widely considered to be one of the more erudite spokesmen for the Brexit campaign. I waited with bated breath for a cogent, coherent and practical economic analysis of why Britain’s economy would thrive out of the single market. Instead we got this curious mix of fantasy and naivety, which I never thought I would hear expressed in such a way.
I would like to make three points. First, the right hon. Gentleman’s diagnosis of the British economy and its relationship to its European economic hinterland is based on a backward-looking view that belongs to an era of gunboat diplomacy, tariff wars and 19th-century economic rivalry. As Margaret Thatcher and Lord Cockfield, the inventor of the single market, recognised, modern trade is not about taxes, levies and tariffs; it is about the rules, the standards, the norms, the qualifications and the regulations that assist or impede trade. What possible control would we gain by being outside the room in which those rules are made but none the less, as the right hon. Gentleman has just admitted, abiding by them? That would be a catastrophic loss of sovereignty and control.

Sir William Cash: As usual, the right hon. Gentleman is off beam. He is completely incapable of getting anything on the European Union right. Decisions are taken in the Council of Ministers, as he well knows, largely behind closed doors by COREPER. Those decisions are not made in the manner he suggests.

Mr Clegg: Being called “off beam” by the hon. Gentleman is quite something. He and I share a passion for Sheffield, however, so I shall put that aside for a minute. In the economy of this country, 78% of GDP is generated by services. Services are barely affected by taxes, tariffs and levies, but British lawyers, British engineers, British architects and British creative industries trying to sell their wares, as they successfully do—we are a services economy superpower in Europe—are affected by precisely the rules that are thrashed out in Brussels, in discussions that we would be excluded from if we left the European Union.

As the right hon. Member for Wokingham acknowledged, the completion of the single market in services is, indeed, a work in progress. We are the chief author and architect of the success in that area. Why on earth would anyone walk away from the construction of a building of which they were the chief architect and the chief beneficiary? A 7% increase in our GDP is the calculated improvement in the economic performance of this country if we complete the single market in services, but the Brexit camp want to walk away from that.

John Redwood: Why was there no improvement in manufacturing activity with the single market?

Mr Clegg: Dare I say it, but even by the fairly specious standard of the statistics bandied about by both sides in this campaign, the way the right hon. Gentleman used statistics was spectacularly misleading. From listening to the Brexit campaign, people would think that the club we have been a member of for 43 years has been the fount of all misery. How come we are still an independent, free and broadly speaking prosperous nation if we have been a member of it for over four decades? I simply think that that applies to his example.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: I will, if I may, make a little progress.

The second point, which is completely omitted by the analysis of Brexit campaigners, is our current account deficit. To be fair, the Government are very silent on that as well, for the very good reason that it is shockingly large. We now have a current account deficit which, at 7% of GDP, is historically and internationally very high and, in my view, unsustainable by historical standards in the long run. As the Governor of the Bank of England has said, if a country runs such a huge, unprecedented current deficit, it has to rely, as he put it, on the “kindness of strangers”.

James Cartlidge: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: If I may finish this point, I will then give way.

The only way in which that current account deficit is sustainable is if strangers from elsewhere in the world invest in assets in this country—in property, infrastructure, the financial services sector, factories and companies. It is on those investors, and on the kindness of those strangers, as Mark Carney has said, that the sustainability of the ballooning current account deficit relies. What will those strangers think after next Thursday, when they do not even know whether our country will survive at all? The United Kingdom may not persist because Scotland may trigger a second referendum, and see the United Kingdom fall.

Ian Blackford: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: May I just finish this point?

What will those strangers say as they see year after year of grinding political, constitutional and economic uncertainty? Why would they continue to invest in UK plc? And if they suddenly pull out their money, I tell you what will happen: the pound will plummet; inflation and prices for ordinary people will go up; and we will be caught in an economic whirlwind that, irresponsibly, these people want to inflict on millions of our citizens. It is a scandalous position to take.

Ian Blackford: The right hon. Gentleman is making some very powerful points. May I remind the House that we are still living with the consequences of the financial crisis in 2007 and 2008? We have the answer to the question he is asking: the stock market has fallen by £80 billion in the past few days as investors recognise the risk to this country if we have a Brexit vote next week. That is the start of the tsunami that he is talking about. Why would we risk the prosperity of the United Kingdom and, indeed, of Europe by taking such a rash action?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Interventions must be short to give everybody a chance to speak.

Mr Clegg: I played a role, somewhat thanklessly as it turned out, for five years in the coalition Government—as did my party, although it is not abundantly represented today on the Bench next to me—to try and provide the political stability that the country needed to recover
from the cardiac arrest that occurred in 2008. I think it was the right thing to do. A country cannot recover from that kind of trauma if there is constant constitutional and political instability, yet that is what the Brexit camp want willfully to inflict on this place and on this country. It is astonishing that they want to drag us back into the furnace of that economic disaster from which we are still escaping right now.

My third and final point is that, unlike, I think, every other Member of the House, I actually worked in a relatively lowly manner—in a previous incarnation, before I went into politics—as an international trade negotiator. I was part of the EU trade negotiation team that sought to settle the terms of China’s accession to the World Trade Organisation. I spent months haggling with hard-nosed Russian trade negotiators about the overflight rights paid by British Airways and European airlines for flying over Siberia. I have spent a lot of time with a lot of international trade negotiators, and I know that they are very unsentimental folk. It is almost laughable simply to state it, but the idea is that we could pull out of the world’s largest economic bloc and then say to these unsentimental folk, who have driven such a hard bargain with that bloc of 500 million people, that we want not just the same but better deals and a better set of conditions on behalf of an economy of only 60 million people. Who do the Brexit camp think these negotiators are? They are not stupid or naive: they will just snigger.

I have looked in vain—I scoured the internet this morning—for the apparently many freedom-loving nations that will cut such favourable deals with us as we depart into this world of milk and honey in which, effortlessly, people will give us concessions that they did not give to a bloc of 500 million people. Can we find anyone? Have the Indians said, “Yes, sure, we’ll give you what you want”? Have the Americans, Canadians or Australians said that? Has anyone said it? Not a single country anywhere in the world has said that it will give better terms of trade to the United Kingdom on its own than to the European Union.

So please, if we do one thing between now and next Thursday, by all means let us trash it out between those who want us to remain in the European Union, flawed though it is and reformed though it must be, and those who want us to go out, but let us not do so on the basis of these falsehoods, this misleading nonsense, this naïveté and fantasy, which would do this great country a terrible disservice.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is a great pleasure—a nostalgic pleasure—to follow the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). He reiterated the fears he first enunciated in relation to our leaving the exchange rate mechanism, and those fears proved to be wrong. He next enunciated those fears in relation to our not joining the euro, and they proved the reverse of the truth. It is nostalgic to hear these sentiments again. It is even more of a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam, who has experience of successfully negotiating an international trade deal and of introducing, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, the single market programme into this country.

We have that experience, and I want to apply it to some of the arguments because on this issue, as on most issues, I find that when we in politics do not have that experience, we simply adopt the most plausible argument that supports our case. By and large, that is what happens on matters of trade and economics in this House, because there is so little experience of them. In a way, I am a member of an endangered species as one of the few Members who has such experience.

Let me first take the very idea that trade agreements are necessary and essential for trade. I hate to say this, because I have a vested interest in claiming to have experience of these things, but trade agreements are less important than people imagine. That is particularly the case for agreements between developed countries, largely because of the success of the Uruguay round, which brought down tariffs between developed countries to negligible levels. The average WTO tariff that would apply to British exports to the EU, in the almost inconceivable circumstance of our having no free trade agreement with it, would be 2.4%. It is better not to have it and I would rather not have it, but compared with the movements in the exchange rate, it is negligible or much less important than it is made out to be. The only important trade deals are those with fast-growing markets in Asia, Latin America and Europe that still have high tariff levels, and we ought to be looking to negotiate trade deals with those markets.

Bob Stewart: I entirely agree with everything my right hon. Friend has said. We have not so far discussed the fact that people want our market just as much as we want their market. It takes two to tango in any trade deal, and trade deals will go on regardless.

Mr Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Trade deals take place because they are in the mutual interests of both parties; they are not military conflicts. They take place between two parties, like trade itself.

A very plausible but incorrect argument is that trade agreements always take a long time. When the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was asked whether Ministers had done any study of trade agreements, he sidestepped the question. A freedom of information request has actually revealed that neither the Treasury nor the Government have done any study of the trade agreements about which they talk so knowledgeably. However, such studies have been done. I refer to the study by Professor Moser of the Centre of European Union Studies in Salzburg of every single trade agreement in the past 20 years. There are 88 of them. They took an average of 28 months, but the time for each varied greatly. The deals that took a long time were those that involved lots of countries, which certainly concurs with my experience. Of course, by definition any EU treaty involves 28 countries and takes a long time, because all 28 have vetoes. A lot of EU treaties are being held up now, but bilateral treaties take less than that average of 28 months. We should not start deluding people into thinking that it will take a long time to negotiate bilateral deals with countries that already have bilateral deals with Switzerland, for example.
[Mr Lilley]

The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam asked rhetorically whether anyone was queueing up for trade deals with us. Well, look not for what they say but what they do. Switzerland has trade deals with countries whose total GDP is four times that of the countries with which the EU has trade deals. Chile has trade deals with countries whose collective GDP is even bigger. Switzerland has a trade deal with China. We are told that it is a bad deal for Switzerland, but clearly the Swiss did not think so. The Swiss published the details of the deal online; Members can look at it themselves. By the time the EU even gets around to negotiating a trade deal with China—which by the way will never succeed because the EU will always insist on human rights terms the Chinese will not accept—the Swiss will have zero tariffs on the vast majority of their exports to China.

Mark Pritchard: My right hon. Friend is a distinguished former Trade Secretary so knows what he is on about. We come from different sides of the debate on this issue, but does he—with all his experience and wisdom, and all his contacts both in the Commonwealth and the European Union—accept this point? Brexiteers invoke the Commonwealth leaders as wanting to do business with Britain whether we are in or out of Europe. Is it not the case that Commonwealth leaders want a trade deal with the whole of Europe, not just with the United Kingdom?

Mr Lilley: They probably want trade deals with whoever they can negotiate sensible ones with, if they are sensible. They will not say that it is either/or; they will want a trade deal with us, because we are the fifth biggest economy in the world, and they will probably also want a trade deal with the EU. They will find, however, that that deal takes a very long time because all 28 countries will have to agree to it first.

It is often suggested that the EU will get better deals because it is bigger. Actually, not only is it more complicated to do those deals with lots of countries, and so takes longer, but the result is worse and less comprehensive, because there are 28 times as many exceptions and exclusions. They are even less likely to be in the UK’s interests, as we can see from what has happened so far. A third of the trade deals that the EU has negotiated with other countries do not include services. As has been repeatedly stated, services are very important to this country, but they are less important to the rest of the EU, so it does not bother to include them in the deals. Switzerland also attaches great importance to exporting services, so more than 90% of its trade deals include them—as of course would ours if we were independent and making our own deals.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned Switzerland quite often. Switzerland is part of the European economic area, but still locates its banking services in London so as to access the rest of the European Union through passporting agreements. Does he have a solution to that difficulty?

Mr Lilley: Switzerland moved its banking centres to London post big bang and before the single market. I negotiated the second banking directive, which introduced passporting for banks. I was very proud of it, and subsequently wanted to make a speech saying what a wonderful thing it was, and how wonderful the single market programme was, so I asked my officials to find examples of banks and other businesses that were doing things that were made possible by the single market programme and that sort of passporting. They could not find a single one. Nearly all banks trade through subsidiaries, so do not take advantage of passporting, which allows operation through a branch rather than a subsidiary, regulated by the British financial authorities rather than those in the country in which they operate. I will perhaps come on to other aspects of the passporting issue if time permits.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I always listen very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. He has made a very strong point about the difficulties in negotiating with a large trading bloc of 27 nations, including the time it would take. Why then does he feel that it would be possible, in short measure, for the UK to re-establish its trading relations with an EU of which we were no longer a part? He has made a very compelling case for why it would not be.

Mr Lilley: That is a very good point that I was going to come on to. It takes quite a long time for the EU to negotiate a trade deal with Canada, for example, because each country has tariffs against the other, and different product specifications and so on. Each has to trade off, say, a cut in tariffs on steel against one in tariffs on leather goods. We can see how that could take a long time, particularly if there is not much enthusiasm for it. We would start negotiating with the rest of the EU with zero tariffs on both sides and with common product standards. Zero to zero can be negotiated in a fairly short space of time, I would have thought, compared with the time needed when 10,000 different tariff lines are involved, as in other tariff agreements. It should not take long to negotiate a continuing free trade deal, with good will on both sides.

Barry Gardiner: rose—

Mr Lilley: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman has burned his boats.

Another myth, which I am afraid has been proffered by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, is that we will need to renegotiate trade agreements with all the countries with which the EU currently has trade agreements. That is not the case. There is an accepted principle in international law called the principle of continuity: if a political unit splits into parts—as the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia did, for example—the component parts continue with the same agreement unless one party objects to it. There is absolutely no reason to suppose that the countries with which we are currently party to free trade agreements will want to end those agreements when we leave. For example, when the Soviet Union broke up it was not a member of the WTO, so had traded under separate trade agreements with other countries. Those trade agreements migrated by agreement, so that within weeks even America had migrated its agreement to Russia and other successor states. There is absolutely no reason—

Mr MacNeil: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?
Mr Lilley: I am sorry, but I am under pressure to finish.

I will say one final word, on the single market. It is often talked about as some arcane inner sanctum. It is simply the European market. It is like the American single market. We have no agreement with the American single market, and are not members of it; none the less, America is our biggest trading partner nationally in the world. The introduction of the single market consisted simply of standardising the product specification, so that instead of having to have 28 different ranges of refrigerator, lawn mower or whatever, we have one.

That is very sensible. It is also just as much of an advantage to an exporter from outside the EU exporting refrigerators or lawn mowers to it as it is to member states within it. In fact, others outside the EU have taken more advantage of it than we have, and their exports have gone up more than ours, perhaps because they have to bear the burden of EU regulations only on those aspects of their activities carried out within the EU, not on 100% of their firms. That is another aspect of the benefits we would get from leaving, along with our ability to negotiate free trade agreements with the fast growing but protected markets of the world on which our children's futures will depend.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. After the next speech there will be a five-minute limit.

2.39 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), and he has added to my “Heinz 57 Varieties” for what the future of our trading arrangements might be if we leave the European Union. Like the Foreign Secretary, he was right when he said that few people say they love the EU, but many, like me, passionately love our country, and believe that Britain is a strong country, one of the world’s great nations, and a force for good. Our status as the fifth largest economic power is not undermined by 40 years of EU membership; rather, it has been sustained and enhanced by it.

The leave campaign has no credible answers to the question of what we gain economically by leaving the EU, and those voters who have not yet decided how to vote, often raise their concerns about the uncertain place that Britain may occupy after 23 June if we leave. I do not believe that that uncertainty is a price worth paying. Unless the Governor of the Bank of England and almost every independent economic forecaster are wrong, the UK will lose business, trade, jobs and investment if we leave, landing the Government with lower tax revenues. That means less money for our hospitals and schools. Even Brexit campaigners acknowledge that there will be an economic shock, while they plan to spend fantasy money 10 times over.

I appreciate how difficult it is for my constituents, and many others, to see the wood for the trees. Some of the claims and counter-claims from both sides have not helped, but my first concern is not for the wealthy, because they will survive whatever the outcome. The leave campaign likes to suggest that remaining in the EU is only in the interests of big corporate companies, the wealthy and the establishment. I suppose that as MPs we are all part of the “establishment”, but if I were not an MP, I would not be—none of my family are. It is thanks to that background, wanting the best for my constituents and living in Doncaster for nearly 20 years, that I am so concerned that ordinary families might pay the price should we leave the EU.

When I was a child, only the well-off could fly abroad. Today, we have cheap air travel and we can stay in touch with home without a £300 phone bill. We have guaranteed paid holidays that we are able to enjoy, and if we fall ill our European health insurance card guarantees access to health treatment anywhere in the EU. People are helped to afford those holidays because their shopping and other bills are cheaper, and more jobs are available because of our EU membership. I do not want people to exist just to work—through the opportunity to work I want them to enjoy life too. In Yorkshire, 250,000 jobs are directly linked to the EU. Siemens is investing £160 million in offshore wind manufacturing, creating 1,000 jobs on our east coast. Siemens and BAe Systems, along with many small and medium-sized businesses in Yorkshire, believe that it is in the interests of our region and country to stay in the EU. We must protect those jobs, rights and benefits, and the enjoyment that we get from them.

The previous Labour Government signed up to the social chapter, ensuring that every worker won the right to four weeks’ paid holiday. We added bank holidays on top—a good example of how we can improve workers’ rights through the EU as a sovereign nation. We forget this because it is so long ago, but 7 million more people gained paid holidays or enhanced their holidays as a result of that change. Voting to leave the EU could put at risk hard-won rights, because we know that some of the biggest cheerleaders for Brexit see protections for ordinary British workers as red tape to be binned.

Some people will use immigration as a reason to leave the EU, but they do not want to tackle the exploitation of foreign workers that affects British workers too. Immigration has become the issue on which those who want to leave the EU place the blame, but the failure is not the European Union’s—it is ours. I have spoken out about people’s insecurities about jobs, housing and public services in the future, especially in parts of Britain such as Don Valley where we do not live in metropolitan cities. For some Labour voters and others, the benefits of globalisation seem to have passed their town by; and for many, work has become way too insecure. Those people are not racist; they want fairness, and they want the benefits of immigration to employers and to the tax take of the Treasury to be matched by a greater amount of that tax supporting communities that have additional pressures on housing, schools and health services. We need openly to discuss the benefits of migration, including the many businesses and jobs that European migrants have created in Britain, but we must not ignore it when it causes problems. Is it perception or reality that Brits are not getting the jobs filled by European migrants? Are Brits being turned down or are they not applying? Is that happening in some sectors, and why?

Barbara Keeley: As I said earlier, a large number—230,000—of those who work in the adult social care workforce were not born in the UK, and that sector has a 5% vacancy rate because people are not applying because of the poor terms and conditions. That partly answers my right hon. Friend’s question, but is she as
concerned as I am that the care sector, which is already in crisis, could collapse if there are further restrictions on those who come to work here?

Caroline Flint: My hon. Friend is right, and in Yorkshire alone more than 2,000 EU migrants work in health and social care. Sometimes we must consider the nature of the work going on, and ask why those insecure, poorly paid sectors are using migrant workers. Those workers are being exploited, and that does not do much for the users of those services either.

James Cartlidge: Is the right hon. Lady aware that the Labour Government introduced tier 3 in 2008, which was for unskilled migration from outside the EU? That has been closed ever since, with the official reason that we get those unskilled workers from the EU. Will she speculate on where we will get unskilled workers from in future, when the Poles, Lithuanians and so on no longer come here to do the jobs that we struggle to fill with UK workers?

Caroline Flint: I will not speculate, but we need a future where work in social care is not poorly paid, because we are doing a disservice to social care workers, and to the elderly people and other independent adults who rely on them. That is the challenge, and we as a country must take ownership of that and not blame the EU for all the problems on our doorstep.

There is fraud and people who are paid off the books, but that happens with British people who work illegally too, sometimes with bad employers or organised criminal networks behind them calling the shots. Many more people come here because of the work available and because English is the international language. Change is not as easy for some as for others, and leaving the EU will not solve that. The coalition Government were wrong to abolish the migration impacts fund, and it is right that freedom of movement should mean freedom to work, with people putting in before they take out. It is good news that the much maligned European Court of Justice has ruled that it is right for EU member states to be able to withhold benefits.

Let us be honest. Young Brits today do not queue up to pick crops or work in social care. The greatest deceit by the leave campaign is that the UK can keep all the access to the EU single market, but not allow EU workers to work here. If we restrict EU workers who are allowed to work here, why would the 1.6 million Brits who work or live in Europe not face similar restrictions?

Mr Lilley rose—

Caroline Flint: I will not give way because I have already done so twice.

Non-members of the EU do not get better deals. Why would the EU offer Britain a deal that is better than that of any of the other 27 members? That would be a recipe for every country to leave. Most of all, we must not let members of the leave campaign claim that they are more patriotic than those who want to remain in the EU. I love Britain, and we will continue to be a strong, proud nation, but we are stronger and better-off as members of the European Union.
Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). It is evident that those who got it wrong are trying yet again to mislead people.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, not least because we might have the opportunity to get answers to some important questions. He will be aware that when the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) was asked about the impact on the economy in GDP of Brexit, his answer was, “We don’t know.” He will also be aware that when Diane James, a UKIP MEP, was asked whether visas would be required, the answer was, “We don’t know.” Given that the answer to every question posed to the leave campaign is, “We don’t know”, perhaps the hon. Gentleman could answer these questions now.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We need to have short interventions, not speeches. That was longer than five minutes!

Sir William Cash: I can say that I do know. I know because I look at the facts as they are now. The facts I have just given demonstrate that inside the single market we run a monumental trade deficit, while we have an enormous and growing trade surplus with the rest of the world. That surplus is the future. That is the vision. That is the means by which we will get jobs and ensure the future of our children and our grandchildren.

To conclude, it is very simple: this is about who governs us. If we get this wrong, we will not be able to organise and establish a democracy in this country, which is what people fought and died for in not just one world war but two.

Tom Tugendhat: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir William Cash: I will give way one last time.

Tom Tugendhat: I appreciate the loss that my hon. Friend’s family suffered in the second world war. My family suffered too, and I have had the privilege to wear the Queen’s uniform and fight for the peace we enjoy today. When I see the division and the spreading of hatred and virulent anti-foreign messages by some people in our country, I wonder whether they are really talking about peace or just stirring the pot.

Sir William Cash: I simply say to my hon. Friend that there is one person who has never, ever done that: me.

Tom Tugendhat indicated assent.

Sir William Cash: I am glad my hon. Friend acknowledges that. I do believe in peace. I do believe in good relations. What really troubles me, however, is that they are completely impossible to justify. It has become a kind of dictatorship behind closed doors. We in this House make our decisions based on speeches and votes that are made in public and reported. We are held accountable. That is not the case in the European Union. If we give that up on 23 June, I say to my hon. Friend and to all hon. Members that they will live to regret it. This is about democracy above all else.

2.55 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I want to bring the debate to the local level and address some of the concerns that ordinary people are grappling with in making a decision on what to do on the EU. Many people in my constituency over the past few weeks have said to me that they feel angry. They feel that their city has suffered most because of the global recession and the downturn after the banking crisis. We have seen a lot of cuts to our public services. We have had the botched NHS reorganisation and people are having to wait longer in A&E. People have concerns about immigration, and the slogans the Government use about the northern powerhouse are not followed through with any action.

What worries me is the idea being put about that leaving the EU is some kind of panacea, and that somehow, magically, all those issues will suddenly disappear on 23 June if people vote to leave the EU. There are four very clear, self-interested reasons why my city of Hull, a proud trading city, should vote to remain in the EU. They are based on the economic benefits of being in the EU.

First, Siemens recently invested £310 million in building a wind turbine manufacturing factory in Hull. One thousand jobs will serve the work that DONG is doing in the largest offshore wind turbine farm off the east coast, creating another 2,000 jobs. Siemens states: “Siemens believes that being part of the EU is good for UK jobs and prosperity and we have concerns about the possible effects of a vote to leave. We see the main benefits of EU membership as: tariff-free access to the UK’s biggest export market; a common set of rules between 28 countries that reduce business costs; and access for British businesses and universities to EU-wide innovation and research initiatives, which are helping to shape the industries of the future. These advantages help to make Britain a better place to do business, not just for Siemens, but for companies across our supply chain and beyond.”

Secondly, caravans are manufactured in east Yorkshire. The Sunday Times HSBC International Track 200 found that exports to Holland and Germany had increased by 21% in the past year, because their market is open and available to us.

Thirdly, on pharmaceuticals, Hull is the home of Smith & Nephew and Reckitt Benckiser. Deloitte has said that if we leave the EU there is a real risk to the UK pharmaceutical industry. At the moment, we have access to £8.5 billion of research, which would not be open to us if we left. We also have access to the innovative medicines initiative, which again will not be open to us if we leave the EU.

Fourthly, I want to say something about the university. Hull University employs 2,500 staff, with 1,000 in academic and research posts. It has received £12 million of direct EU funding in recent years, which is part of the £200 million of EU-funded research available to British universities. The vice-chancellor of Hull University states: “There is a huge value in being at the EU table. If you are in the club, you get the chance to shape the research programme. If we weren’t in the club, we wouldn’t have that opportunity.”

In the end, in this referendum, the power is with the people, not Members of Parliament, but the last thing my constituents need is a home-grown, self-inflicted recession and years of uncertainty and instability, and we know that the effect of recession will be felt much more strongly in places such as Hull than in Surrey
Heath or Uxbridge. The UK will struggle to renegotiate a trading relationship with the EU, and I am sure we will find we still have to contribute to the EU budget and accept the free movement of labour—an issue about which many people have genuine concerns—while having no say in shaping the EU’s future direction on that and many other issues. Whatever happens on 23 June, I will keep fighting for Hull, exactly as I have done up to now. I ask that Hull electors bear in mind the fact that if they choose to leave the EU, it will make the task of standing up for the city even harder.

3 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I want to make a short contribution about the effect of the EU on the economic viability of our fishing industry and to congratulate the fishermen who have taken part in the flotilla on the Thames today to make sure we hear where they stand.

Our fishing industry is a ghost of its former self. Before we joined the EU, we had a successful, viable fishing industry all around the coast. I remember seeing fishing boats in south-east Cornwall moored three or four deep along the quayside. I do not see that today. Although fishing is no longer the largest employer in Looe—tourism is—people come to traditional fishing towns and expect to see fish being landed. A highlight they often mention is tasting fish and chips from one of the award-winning restaurants or buying fresh catch from fishmongers such as Pengelly’s in Looe. Where would tourism be without our fishing?

In 1971, just before we joined the EU, we had a thriving fishing industry bringing home millions of tonnes of fish and directly employing over 21,000 people. Last year, it caught about 600,000 tonnes and employed under 12,000 fishermen. According to a report co-ordinated by the New Economics Foundation, there was a 12% fall under 12,000 fishermen. According to a report co-ordinated by the New Economics Foundation, there was a 12% fall in the number of fishermen between 2003 and 2013. My late husband, Neil, was one such fisherman. He was forced to fish alone on his boat as a result of economic pressures arising from reducing quotas while still trying to meet the costs of increasing insurance, harbour dues and landing charges, not to mention repair costs and gear replacement.

The report attributes the decreasing employment to a decline in the number of vessels owing to the forced scrapping imposed by successive Governments to meet the artificial targets from the European Commission and to vessels investing in new technology—the latter might be true for larger vessels, operating with several deckhands, but is certainly not the case for small fishermen like Neil. It was a simple economic decision taken because he often could not land and sell the fish that swam into his net. The report also says that the trend of declining numbers of fishing vessels and fishermen is likely to continue.

The report does not mention the declining fish quotas that the EU sets each year. Haddock is just one example. The UK gets 10% of the total allowable catch, while France gets 70%, and the same applies to many other species in many other areas. Would we invest it all? That is effectively what fishermen in Looe are being forced to do today because of the quota share-out agreed by the EU in 1983 known as “relative stability”.

Bob Stewart: Everyone in the House knows the sad story of my hon. Friend’s husband. How much increased capacity would the fishermen of Looe get were we to leave the EU?

Mrs Murray: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I will come to it in a moment.

I will not get into arguments with those who want to remain, further sacrifice this great industry and abandon the economic wellbeing of our coastal fishing towns, which would be disproportionately affected. I cannot say that Neil died as a result of the common fisheries policy, but I can say that it contributed to the economic pressure he felt when deciding to fish alone. We talked about it and decided that it was better that he work alone in less rough water than work in storms to provide for two families.

I say we throw our fishermen a lifeline. Our Fisheries Minister has been to Brussels and seen for himself how little he can deliver through horse trading in the Council of Ministers over proposals put forward by the unelected European Commission. I say, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), that if we vote to leave, the Minister could make the decisions that apply to fishermen in the UK’s 200-mile median line limit.

As someone who has lived and breathed the UK fishing industry for 30 years, I say there are no economic benefits to UK fishermen from EU membership. About 92% of UK fishermen are calling for the UK to leave. I say we throw them a lifeline, vote to leave and take back control of our 200-mile line—80% of the total EU pond. We would not necessarily have to say to member states, “You can’t come and fish in our waters”, but it would be on our terms, not those arising from horse trading among 28 states sitting around the EU table debating proposals from the unelected, appointed, bureaucratic European Commission in Brussels.

3.7 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Back in 1979, I was among the first elected Members of the European Parliament, and I supported withdrawal from the Common Market. Those were the days of wine lakes and butter mountains and an out-of-control common agricultural policy subsidising overproduction and dumping on world markets. It was some years before the development of the social chapter introduced legislation on workers’ rights and equality, and there was no European environment policy.

After several years working with colleagues from all the other countries in the European Parliament, I came to a different conclusion. On 19 February 1982, I wrote an article in the New Statesman headed, “Why I changed my mind on the Common Market”. This year, I have written another article, again in the New Statesman, explaining why I still support remaining in the EU. The arguments I made then are still true. Then, as now, our socialist and social democratic colleagues in the European Parliament urge us to remain and work with them for a better future for jobs, security and workers’ rights.
One of the concerns I had then was about European action to save the steel industry. Today we are still battling to save the steel industry, particularly in Wales, but it is important for workers in multinational companies to have information about management plans for closures or mergers, and European legislation has helped to improve these rights to information. While none of us would claim that the EU is perfect—and it is not unlike in that—peace, jobs, workers’ and consumers’ rights, the European social model and the environment are safer if we stand together as constructive members of the EU.

My party has always been a party of internationalists, but Brexiters would swiftly make a bonfire of hard-won rights if we left. They consider four weeks’ holiday, maternity and paternity leave, equality and health and safety legislation, temporary workers’ rights and much more to be so much red tape to be dispensed with. Standing up to globalisation alone is a pipe dream; it requires nations to co-operate. Likewise, the pressures of immigration will not fade if we go it alone. We live in difficult times when many people are feeling discontented. To help combat that, the way forward for Britain is to continue to work with the EU for more reforms.

We see reforming and modernising the EU in solidarity with continental socialists and social democrats as an ongoing process. Do those who advocate developing hundreds of individual trade deals with countries large and small really expect to achieve more than can be achieved as part of the world’s largest trading bloc? Would the Brexiteers achieve better terms in the TTIP negotiations than the EU can with strong pressure from directly elected MPs in the European Parliament and strong member states to ensure protection from rampant multinationals? I doubt it. We in Britain benefit enormously from European co-operation funding for research, regional development, cultural projects and, yes, agricultural support, as well as from peace and free trade. The EU has always been at the forefront of working to protect human rights in the world.

In Wales, EU countries buy 41% of our exports, which is worth £5 billion a year to us. Companies invest here precisely because we are in the EU, giving them direct access to the largest single market in the world. If we leave, we would soon see our big firms switching their investment to continental Europe, with the loss of thousands of jobs here.

In 2016, I still believe that we are better together. Those who will be celebrating if we leave, we dare to descend into a pseudo-referendum about sovereignty; what we do to influence our neighbours; and what we do to advance our national interest. Because we are a vibrant, ambitious and decent society, we have to do that within the European Union, as I will explain. It is about the future; it is not some blast to the past. It means this country thinking about what we do for our people beyond today.

Let us take trade; we have heard a lot about it today. We export twice as much to the Netherlands as we do to China. That is a fact. Why does it matter and what does the European Union provide for us? It provides a huge pool of wealth. It is the world’s largest single market, not just in its activity but in its value. It is nearly twice the size of China, yet some are thinking of leaving it. That would be madness, because the people we trade with most are the people who are most like us and who will benefit most from us as well. That is the trade argument.

Then we come to investment. In my constituency—and I bet in most other Members’ constituencies—there are examples of powerful intervention from the European Union through investors. That matters, and 48% of our foreign direct investment comes from the European Union. What does that equal? It equals jobs and it equals rising wages and opportunities for our young people.

That brings me on to the issue of our universities and young people’s opportunities to develop careers after they have been to university, not to mention the importance of opportunities for young people who do not want to go to university. The fact remains that the opportunities open to them by moving around Europe are immense, and it is vibrant for them and great for our economy. Do we want our young people to be stuck here when others are thriving somewhere else?

That brings me on to migration. It is a two-way street. We must remember that. There are just as many people coming here to help us with our skills as there are people going from here to there to make money for this economy. There are nearly 2 million Britons working or living in the European Union, benefiting from the opportunities with which being in the single market provides them.

Mark Pritchard: Does my hon. Friend agree that the majority of EU citizens coming to this country come here to work hard, pay their taxes and better their and their families’ lives—and that the majority are not here to scrounge?

Neil Carmichael: Absolutely. Some factories in my constituency could not do as much as they do without the sort of skills that they can get from the European Union. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a fantastic speech. Does he agree that in some quarters, this referendum has been allowed to descend into a pseudo-referendum about immigration and that for the remain side to win, we need to show leadership over the next week and bring forward a positive case for remaining in Europe; and that we should shoot the right-wing Brexit fox that is scaremongering about immigration?

Mr Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I was coming on to leadership, but I will tackle the issue now. The European Union has benefited from
Britain’s membership countless times in the past. It was the British Government who drove through the single market. It was the British Government who ensured that a country like Poland could come into Europe and benefit from all its opportunities. We should not forget that when I was born, that country was based within the empire of the Soviet Union—a place where liberal democracy was non-existent and where growth and economic opportunity could not take place. Yet we have managed to get that country into a position of being totally democratic and absolutely robust in its economy. That drives a coach and horses through the argument of anyone who says that being in the European Union is somehow undemocratic or a challenge to democracy. The reality is that, when Britain shows leadership, as we have in the past, it has been good for Europe and, obviously, also good for us.

When we win this referendum campaign—I certainly hope that we do—we need to focus on the positive case. It is not a question of sniping from the sidelines; we need to get involved, set the agenda, work with our allies and ensure that the people we represent can continue to benefit from the good things that the European Union has brought.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: On that point, will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Carmichael: I am afraid not. I am running out of time.

All organisations need to be reformed. The other day, I was told to move my car for a reason that I have still not understood. This House needs to reform; all organisations need reform—and the European Union is no exception. The key thing is that we are the ones to drive those reforms. We are the ones who should be constructing the alliances to push through the kind of Europe that we want—one that is competitive, that recognises freedom and that is at the heart of promoting liberal democracy, not just within the EU but beyond it.

The question of international impact must also be borne in mind. Europe is the world’s largest single market, but it is also a place of huge influence in the world. We in Britain want to be part of that. We want to shape and develop that influence. That is why every single US President has told us, in one way or another, that we should be a member of the European Union. That is why every single Commonwealth leader has told us that we should be in the European Union. The only two country leaders that I can think of who are casting some doubt on this matter are those of North Korea and the Russian Federation. If that is the supporter group of the leave campaign, I am staying!

It is essential to make the positive case. We must do so not from an apologetic position or as a result of some tepid hope; we should do so out of ambition for our country and our young people. They need to know what we really believe—that by participating internationally with a clear agenda and a determination to turn away from narrow-mindedness and the concerns of little groups of people, we can instead think big and be big. With that drive behind us, this country has the capacity for an exciting future ahead.
We have built a new hospital in Whitehaven and a new health centre in Cleator Moor, and we are improving and expanding the health service in the cottage hospitals in Millom and Keswick, but enormous challenges remain. At the heart of our NHS difficulties are the policies of the Conservative Government, who deprive our community of the necessary resources, investment and recruitment. It is absolutely clear that the economic damage that would be done to our country if we left the EU would be felt throughout the NHS in Cumbria. Make no mistake: an already intolerable situation would become worse. The Conservative Government would have every excuse it could ever want to cut, slash and burn local health services in a way that we have never seen before.

As for our economic future, I have spent more than 10 years on the project to build a new nuclear power station at Moorside, in my community. That has involved writing new nuclear policy with the No. 10 policy unit in 2005, ensuring that my community was chosen as a new nuclear development site—which was never automatic—and attracting NuGen to our area as a power station developer. The project represents the single largest private sector investment that my community has ever seen—more than £20 billion—and thousands of jobs. That is investment that we need, want, deserve and have earned.

I want my constituents to think long and hard about this during the time that remains before the referendum. The United States is pleading with us to stay in the European Union, the Japanese are pleading with us to stay, and France is pleading with us to stay. NuGen, the company that is responsible for the investment in that project, is a consortium of American, Japanese and French companies. I urge my constituents to “do the math”. Brexit would undoubtedly increase the risks to the project, not just because of the financial turmoil that it would create, but because of the damage that it would do to the EU and France in particular. There are potentially profound implications for the Hinkley Point C project as well. So I say to my constituents, “Stick with our plan, stay on course with our project, do not squander more than a decade of work, and do not risk our future.”

Then there is the security issue. Brexit would undoubtedly make us less safe and less secure. With the United Kingdom out of the European Union and with the EU shrinking, contracting and weaker as a result, we will cause profound damage to NATO. What message will that send to an increasingly belligerent and expansionist Russia? Brexit could give no greater encouragement to Vladimir Putin. This is not “Project Fear”, but “Project Fact”. When I went to Chicago recently as part of the delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, we were told by the former United States ambassador to NATO that Brexit represented “the greatest threat to the security of the United States, the European Union and the NATO area.”

Finally, let me deal with the environment. My constituency takes an uncommon pride in its natural environment: we have England’s highest mountain and lake, and some of the best beaches in the country. The European Union has helped to deliver massive improvements in our natural habitats, all of which are visited by thousands of tourists from the EU who contribute to our economy every year. Moreover, the EU paid attention to the Sellafield clean-up before the United Kingdom did.

My constituency is special, my constituents are special and we are creating something special. A vote for Brexit would threaten it all.

3.26 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): A few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) made a passionate and magnificent speech in support of our membership of the European Union. He and I have been on the same side on this matter for many years, and I endorse every word that he said.

Let me begin by referring, like the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed), to matters that particularly affect my constituents. The largest employment sector in Bromley and Chislehurst, in Greater London, is its business and financial services sector. According to the Office for National Statistics business and employment survey, 32.4% of my constituents and their families work in that sector. It is critical to their local economy—and that is leaving aside all the jobs in the supply chain that result from the income that it provides. It is crucial to the London economy, which benefits the whole of the United Kingdom. Leaving the European Union would, without question, damage the interests of the financial services industry, in which Britain is a world leader. This is an issue in which I have taken some interest in my capacity as secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on wholesale financial markets and services.

We have a winner here, and we have an opportunity not just to make it survive, but to make it better and stronger in a reformed European Union. That is why, when I intervened on the Foreign Secretary’s speech, I wanted to stress the importance of the Prime Minister’s renegotiation achievements. There were two key achievements. First, there was the commitment that British financial firms based here in the UK, and therefore outside the eurozone—of which we will never be members—we will never be subject to its internal governance rules or their bail-outs—will none the less have the significant advantage of being able to trade freely within the eurozone and the rest of the single market. That puts us in a unique position which no other free trade agreement replicates.

If we add to that the commitment in that renegotiation to completion of the capital markets union, that gives us a double opportunity to push forward in this area, at which we excel. It would be lunacy to walk away from that opportunity. Of course the Prime Minister is right to say we could survive outside the EU; London and the financial services industry, and my constituents, would survive, but I believe there is a real risk that they would be impoverished and I see nothing patriotic in running the risk of impoverishing my constituents or the people of this country.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and makes an important point about patriotism. Does he agree that key to Britain’s national security is our economic security, and at a time when as a nation we are still borrowing as a nation more than the entire defence budget we need every single penny of public revenue to ensure our economy is strong, our finances are strong and our country is strong?
Robert Neill: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The economic interest is a national strategic interest of the United Kingdom. It is a damaging thing to this country for anyone to put that at risk; there is nothing patriotic in that.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): So far I can agree with what the hon. Gentleman says, but some of us can remember the 1975 referendum, and the reality is that the options put to us by those who want to opt out were looked at then—trading with EFTA and the Commonwealth countries. The reasons why Harold Wilson thought we should go into Europe are there for all to see.

Robert Neill: I would not like to speculate as to the motives of those who, sometimes from genuine belief, but maybe sometimes from cynicism, want this country to leave the EU. The hon. Gentleman is right, however, that the issue was debated then. He and I can remember it—we both voted in that referendum, I suspect. Of course the EU needs reform, as everybody has said, but any businessperson will tell us, “You don’t walk away from a major market that you’re in just because it isn’t perfect; you stay in there, you negotiate your trade and you make the market work better for you.” That is basic common sense, and frankly I am amazed and mystified that some people who really ought to know better cannot get that.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Robert Neill: I have been generous in giving way so far and I am conscious that others want to speak. I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me, because I know he will speak later.

Given the position that we have of that double success for the City of London, it would be a tragedy—a criminal thing, virtually—for this country to turn away. The financial services industry, as well as being a key UK asset and part of our national strategic interest, is not just about people in the City of London and those working in banks, insurance and offices. A successful financial services sector affects every family in this country. It affects the pensions of millions of people, whatever their income situation or previous position in life. To put that at risk is not to damage just that industry, but to damage the whole population of this country. It damages the revenue stream, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) just said, that underpins our public services. I am sorry to have to say this to some of my friends who I know genuinely believe otherwise, but it will be a profoundly unpatriotic thing to leave the EU.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Robert Neill: One last time.

Victoria Prentis: My hon. Friend is making a passionate speech about various areas of the economy. Has he considered how leaving the EU might affect manufacturing industries, including a company in my constituency that has today told me that it has written to its employees to implore them to vote to remain?

Robert Neill: I am sure my hon. Friend is right. I too have manufacturers in my constituency. Every sector of the British economy will be damaged by Brexit. Uncertainty damages business. Economic uncertainty damages business and so does legal uncertainty, which, as a final point, makes me all the more amazed to see some people who ought to know better suggesting that somehow we could introduce some emergency legislation to circumvent the rules laid down in article 50 of the treaty were this country, regretfully, to decide to leave. That would be a breach of law. It would involve the UK being suspended from the EU, losing the protections the EU gives to our businesses and turning 200 years of British constitutional practice, whereby this country has never unilaterally abrogated a treaty we have entered into, on its head.

It would be a scandal to ask this House to do that, and I say now that I, for one, would never vote for it. But I want to make sure first of all that we never get into that situation. We need to make the positive case for why this country is better economically, socially and, I suggest, morally for being in the European Union—because ultimately we are a broader-minded, a broader-looking, a happier, a more diverse nation as a result of our membership, and I do not want the likes of the vile creature who leads UKIP to drag this country backwards.

3.34 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to support the motion because, first, coming out of the EU defies all the logic of our emerging global economy. If we look around the world, we see that the emerging global economic superpowers are China—which might well overtake the USA as the major economic power in the world in the next 20 years—and Brazil. As the former Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, I visited Brazil and China to see how our businesses were faring in those countries. Some were doing very well. JCB had opened a joint venture company in Brazil and GKN had a joint venture company in China. The reason they were opening those companies was that the tariff barriers were too high for them to export from their British manufacturing bases into those markets.

We must be realistic about this. If we were to come out of the EU and try to expand our exports to those countries, we would be expanding into countries that are, quite justifiably and understandably, ruthlessly self-interested in what they need to do to develop their own standard of living. The idea that, on coming out of the EU, we could somehow make up for the deficit in our exports to the EU by expanding our trade into those developing countries is, frankly, a fantasy. The fact is that there is nothing we could do afterwards that we are not doing now, and there would be no compensatory boost in exports to those countries after coming out of the EU.

My constituency in the west midlands offers a supreme example of the benefits of globalisation and the international movement of capital. If we go back 10 or 15 years, the car industry—which for donkey’s years had been in the maintenance of low manufacturing—was in a terrible state. Since then, however, there has been investment in the motor industry there, which has been mirrored in other parts of the country.
Mr Jim Cunningham: My hon. Friend mentioned the motorcar industry. Twenty to 25 years ago, Coventry companies such as Massey Ferguson, British Leyland and Standard were household names. That is why it is vital that we remain in Europe, in order to further develop the recovery of manufacturing in the west midlands.

Mr Bailey: Absolutely. My hon. Friend’s experience echoes my own on the other side of the midlands economy.

The fact is that investment, particularly by Tata in Jaguar Land Rover, has transformed the manufacturing economy in my constituency and the surrounding constituencies. We now have the new i54 development, which is a supreme example of what new investment in modern motor manufacturing can do. As a result of that, the local supply chain has been rejuvenated.

We have problems, however. My constituency has more foundries than any other in the country, and they form a vital part of the supply chain that underpins our ability to produce high quality cars and superb manufacturing exports, but they have skills shortages and an ageing workforce. However, they have been helped by the recruitment of skilled workers from eastern Europe through the EU. The companies involved tell me that without those workers, their ability to meet the demands placed on them by the cutting-edge technology that we are producing to expand our manufacturing exports would be hampered and jeopardised. 

James Cartlidge: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the policy of vote leave is that, when we leave the EU, we will stop all unskilled migration into this country? Does he think that that is even remotely credible?

Mr Bailey: No. Unfortunately, however, I do not have time to address all the issues that would arise from the leave campaign’s immigration policy, or lack of it. I need to focus on the relevance of these arguments to my constituency.

The fact is that without those workers, our ability to sustain this country’s cutting-edge manufacturing capacity would be lost. I would be the first to agree that we should be pioneering better skills, apprenticeships and so on, and I am glad that the industry is looking at that, but it does not have the capacity to recruit those workers at the moment. If those in the leave campaign were to carry out the promises they have made on migration, there would be a real prospect that those companies would be starved of the skills they need, and it could well lead to unemployment among the long-standing indigenous population who have worked in those industries.

As I do have a few moments left, I will address some of the wider issues raised by those in the leave campaign’s migration policy. Andrew Neil got out of Nigel Farage eventually the idea that they would try to reduce net migration figures to 50,000. They then deploy a seductive argument that if they stopped migration from Europe, they could have more from the non-EU countries, which I think is a pitch to our ethnic minority population, without it having an impact on our skills base in this country. The fact is that the sort of figures being quoted by the leave campaign, and by Nigel Farage in particular, would mean there would be no way we could recruit the levels of staff needed both for the manufacturing industries, which we have in my constituency, and the service industries, particularly the care industry, which have been highlighted by one or two Members today. Those in the leave campaign are raising a particular issue to try to inflame local public opinion, but then peddling only a bogus solution. We have one week to expose that and demonstrate to people that their interests are within the EU and in sustaining our current economic and manufacturing base.

3.41 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. Over the next few days we will make the final arguments on the question that will decide the future of not only our country, but our continent. We will be asking ourselves not only who we are, but what we wish to become. Whatever answer the people of the United Kingdom give us, it will be for us here in this House to apply that decision in the best interests of our whole nation. Like many on these Benches, I have made my views known. I have spoken out for what I believe in and for what I believe to be in the best interests of my community in west Kent and the whole nation. I have fought for this country and despite some of the comments I have heard, I will not be silenced when speaking in its interest.

I recognise that today, no matter what we say, it is no longer Parliament that is sovereign—it is the people, as it rightly should be. Whatever is decided in the ballot next week, that decision will be final—50% plus one vote will carry the day. To argue otherwise would be to threaten the fabric of our political settlement and undermine the legitimacy of this House. I urge all Members to remember that in the days after the referendum and not to question the integrity or intelligence of the British people in having expressed their opinion. What may follow is less certain, but, as we used to say, it will be our job to receive our orders, gain height, turn to the right and carry on.

Of course that does not mean we have to wait to be ready. On the contrary, we should be thinking, even now, about what an in vote or an out vote would mean for Britain.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The EU’s bureaucracy and regulations have reduced the number of fishing boats in Portavogie in my constituency from 130 to 70. Six major processing factories have closed in Portavogie and jobs have been lost—young people are drifting away from the sea. The EU has devastated the fishing sector in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we want to ensure the re-emergence of the fishing sector in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we have to be out of the EU? For that to happen, we have to vote no and leave Europe.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman speaks well for his constituency, but the Member who represents Menai may talk about Menai Oysters and Mussels, which sells most of its catch to Europe and would probably wish to stay in the EU. Even in one industry, there is no single answer, and it is worth listening to the debate of the whole House and to all the people of this United Kingdom, rather than just one pressure group. Of course that does not mean that we have to wait to be ready. As I said earlier, we need to get ready.
[Tom Tugendhat]

The change in the stock market over the past few days has shown that Europe affects not only the fishing industry—for the better in some ways and for the worse in others—but investment in our entire island. Today, people are looking at us and wondering what the future holds.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con) rose—

Tom Tugendhat: I wish to make some progress.

People are understandably concerned that the factors that led them to put money into our businesses may not last. The interconnected market, the skills base and the global trading agreements are not as permanent as they once thought; they are not even as permanent as they looked a few days ago. The implications and the consequences for us are very severe. Some have begun to doubt us, but they are wrong. Britain is a powerful and growing economy, and despite the undoubted hiatus that would follow a Brexit, we will recover. Indeed, for the markets, we will once again become a safe haven, but only by comparison with our neighbours. The implication that the Europe Union could disintegrate is worrying.

Let us be under no illusion as to why the option to leave the EU is bad for Britain. It is not, as some have sadly claimed, because Britain is too small. It is not because we cannot survive in a globalised world—it is clear that we are better connected and better integrated with the global economy than many other nations. No, it is because we are the economic leaders of a continent of more than 500 million people who are crying out for that very leadership and the very reforms that we offer.

Oliver Colville: Will my hon. Friend give way.

Tom Tugendhat: I will make a little progress if I may.

It is worth remembering that this House has shaped the leadership of Europe. We have already achieved two very significant reforms. First, Britain, under the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, steered the competing economies of Europe into a single market. She achieved that against pressure from many other member states. She did so to extend what Britain needed then and what it needs now: economic relationships that endure across the continent. The result was a huge boost to the economy. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wekingham (John Redwood), who is no longer in his place, for what he did as a member of the Cabinet that took us into the single market. I also recognise the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is also not in his place, as he helped us to achieve the lowest debt levels in a century.

Secondly, we have extended the boundaries of European co-operation to the borders of Russia. This may seem obvious now, but when I was growing up during the cold war, the challenge of uniting a continent seemed extraordinary. Now so obviously one nation and at peace with her neighbours, Germany was not always so, and many opposed the unity that was achieved. The inclusion of Estonia—I had the privilege of serving with Estonian troops in Afghanistan—Lithuania and Latvia shows what inclusion can achieve in the service of peace.

Simon Hoare: I know that my hon. Friend is a busy man, so I do not know whether he has seen General Smith’s comments in today’s media about the importance of and need for co-operation and partnership. It is a compelling case that underlines the point that my hon. Friend is making.

Tom Tugendhat: General Smith is one of the great strategists of our generation. His book “The Utility of Force” is well worth reading.

Britain played an essential role, but it did so not just for ourselves or for others. It did so because shared wealth is good for us all. We prosper when our partners prosper, we are strengthened when our friends are strong, and we achieve peace when our friends are at peace. Therefore, whether we stay or go, we must have a plan.

Our allies around the world—in the middle east, South America, the far east and the United States of America—have invested fortunes through our markets, billions in our industries, and decades in our friendship. They need to know that our promises count and mean something. They need to know that our agreements will endure. They need to know that if we vote out, we are not turning our back on the world, because it will look to them as though we are.

Whatever happens, I urge Her Majesty’s Government to commit to investing heavily in the Foreign Office over the next few years, because the trouble that we have caused our friends and allies in this very debate and the doubt that we have sown across the world are so serious that our markets are struggling, and we need messengers of hope and praise to go to our friends’ capitals to reassure them. Too often we have ignored our allies, and too often we have laughed at our friends. We must move on. I have heard many people talk about patriotism today. I say that I am a patriot, but this is my land here and it extends beyond the sea and beyond the cliffs. This is our continent and we must lead it.

3.49 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): History shows what happens when this country turns its back and stops engaging with Europe. That is why most of the world and many experts are asking us to remain where we are. Those who say that we must look to the world as well as to the EU are correct and I agree with them, but we should do that as part of the biggest and richest single market in the world. If the rest of the world is telling us that we can best deal with the rest of the world by being in the EU, we should listen. The USA, China, India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the whole Commonwealth have said that we should remain where we are. Not one country has come out and asked us to leave the EU. Only Russia and North Korea might want us to do that.

World economic forums such as the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation all say the same. Unite, the GMB, the CBI and the National Farmers Union say we should remain where we are. NATO says we should remain where we are, as do universities and 90% of scientists. The Royal
College of Midwives says the same thing. Even the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says, “Stay where you are.” If the coalition telling us to remain when it knows that its business model for the northern powerhouse—local birdwatcher, we should listen to what they have to say.

I want to say a few words about the north-east of England and the con that the leave campaign is perpetrating on people not just in the north-east, but across the country. The north-east is a net beneficiary of EU grants and subsidies that help to train our young people for work and fund small businesses, our universities and agriculture, helping our economy to grow. Even the Chancellor of the Exchequer said on Monday that leaving the EU would put the northern powerhouse at risk. Between now and 2020 the north-east is due to receive about £800 million from the European Union.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the north-east of England has benefited tremendously from inward investment, of which the most successful recent example is Hitachi in County Durham? I pay tribute to him for his role in securing 700 well-paid jobs building trains not just for the UK market, but for Europe.

Phil Wilson: My hon. Friend agree that the north-east of England has benefited tremendously from inward investment, of which the most successful recent example is Hitachi in County Durham? I pay tribute to him for his role in securing 700 well-paid jobs building trains not just for the UK market, but for Europe.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): My constituency, like that of my hon. Friend, benefits tremendously from European social fund money. Does he agree that it is not credible for the leave campaign simply to say one day, “We will replace that money,” without any sense of where it will get it from?

Phil Wilson: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I shall expand on during my speech.

The leave campaign says that it will pick up the tab after 23 June if we vote to come out of the EU. I say to the people in the north-east, “Don’t listen to those people. They can’t do it. It’s the biggest con ever.” First and foremost, they are not the Government. Secondly, they cannot contribute to the EU many times over. Thirdly, the people making those comments are Conservative politicians who for years said that there was no money available, but they have now suddenly discovered a magic money tree. Like all things to do with magic, it is an illusion. Don’t fall for it. It is what it is—an illusion.

The leave campaign is spraying spending commitments around as if there were no tomorrow. Perhaps if we leave the EU, there will be no tomorrow. The campaign’s analysis shows the figures involved. It has committed to building more hospitals, providing more school places, more spending on science, regional airports, improving railways, more housing, more this, more that, and the list goes on and on. The cost is over £100 billion—£100 billion it does not have. So now we know: as of today, we can honestly say that the campaigners who want to leave the EU are perpetrating the biggest con trick ever on the north-east. I say to the people of the north-east, “Don’t be conned by the leave campaign’s fantasy economics.”

I must admit that I fear for the future of our region, where I have lived all my life, if we do leave the EU. Over 50% of the north-east’s trade is with Europe, and that provides more than 100,000 jobs. Those two facts alone should make people think twice about leaving. If they do think twice, and if uncertainty sets in, they should vote to remain. They should not be conned into believing that a land of milk and honey awaits us on 24 June, the day after the referendum, because it does not.

I want to say this to the people of the north-east: “Do you really believe that the people who want to leave, such as the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who gave us the bedroom tax and food banks, and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, who said that the NHS needs to be dismantled, have the best interests of the north-east, and especially Labour voters, at heart?” I do not believe they do. They are very well off, and they will remain well off whether we vote to remain or to leave. I say to the people of the north-east: don’t be conned—vote to remain.

3.55 pm

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I enter the debate with a certain amount of trepidation, especially after the powerful speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat).

The reason I will be voting to remain is that, frankly, I do not trust the Germans and the French to run Europe without us there to keep a close eye on them. Over the last 16 years—as the parliamentary candidate for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport and, more recently, as its Member of Parliament—I have always sought to take a realistic Euro-view. I am not Euro-suicidal; we should make sure that this thing works for us and that we get as much as we can out of it. However, if there is a downturn in our economy, which appears likely should we come out, any action on the issue I have campaigned on for the last 16 years—the improvement of the railways and roads down to the south-west—will be put off for another 10 or 15 years, which would be a personal disaster.

The debate on our membership of the European Union is very similar to previous debates, such as those on the corn laws and imperial preference. Thank goodness our country eventually found a way through those issues, but it unfortunately had to get involved in a few world wars in the process. I am keen to ensure that that does not happen again, especially as my relatives have fought in every world war and probably every other war—we have been here for a long time.

Our job in Europe is to maintain the balance of power. That is utterly crucial. When we have walked away from Europe, we have had to pay with an enormous amount of blood and an enormous amount of treasure. I received a briefing the other day from one of the more renowned journalists in this country, who told me that America is now looking less at Europe—it sees Russia
as a regional, rather than a world, issue—and that it is much more important in the Pacific. If we come out of Europe, therefore, we will be Billy No Mates, and I do not want that to happen.

Earlier this year, during the recess, I spent a few days in Norway with the Royal Marines, seeing for myself some of the issues they have to deal with. I got involved in trying to build shelter, light a fire and kill a chicken—I did not do that—and it was all rather difficult. However, I also learned how important the Baltic states are for this country, and we must continue engaging in Europe because I am afraid that that issue is going to be very big. I would also add that the Americans are not interested in putting money into NATO; they are seeking to take it out, and the moment we decide to walk away from all of that, we will find ourselves having to spend more money.

Tom Tugendhat: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the Republican candidate for the United States presidency has declared NATO obsolete?

Oliver Colvile: Absolutely. I find that utterly stunning. That is why we want to remain.

Babcock, which runs the dockyard in my constituency and employs 5,000 people, has written to The Times very firmly in support of remaining. I have a boat manufacturer that is very worried about what would happen should we come out, because it thinks that the French and the Greeks will seek to protect their own boat-building industries and that it will therefore have to pay a significant surcharge. We would end up seeing the university and students in my constituency very badly damaged. We have a global reputation for marine science engineering research, and I do not wish to jettison that.

The claimant count has come down to below 4% in an extremely deprived constituency. It is rather unique to have a Conservative Member of Parliament representing an inner-city seat that has an 11-year life expectancy difference between the northern and western parts and around Devonport. It is very important that we continue to be able to invest in changing these kinds of things.

The Prime Minister has done exactly the right thing in seeking to make sure that he got the best possible deal out of the Europeans. We have to remember that if by some chance it was decided that we should become much more integrated in the European Union, we would have another referendum. I hope that will horrify all Conservative Members, because we have had enough of that. I am campaigning for remain not just because of the economic benefits, but because we are a privileged to serve. I say that because the central argument made by those who want us to leave the EU is that Britain will achieve more, and have more power and control, if we vote for Brexit. I could not disagree more. In a world that is more connected than ever before, real control—the power to shape our destiny, tackle challenges, and seize opportunities rather than be left to the mercy of events—comes from working with our neighbours and allies to get the best for the British people.

President Obama says that the nations that wield influence most effectively do it through the collective action that today’s challenges demand. He is right. Being a member of the EU gives Britain more influence and power, not less: the power to sell our goods in a single market of 500 million people; according to rules that we help decide, and to reach better trade agreements as part of a bigger bloc of 28 countries; the power to tackle cross-border terrorism and crime; and to act together when the rule of international law is threatened on our doorstep, as we did with the sanctions regime we imposed following Russian aggression in Ukraine; and the power to address serious, long-term global challenges such as climate change, using our influence to secure a better deal within the EU and using the EU’s influence to get a better deal with the rest of the world. Cutting ourselves off from our neighbours and allies in Europe and attempting to go it alone would diminish Britain’s power, not increase it, and give us less control in shaping our future, not more.

While I care passionately about Britain’s influence and role in the world, in the end this referendum will come down to the central question of our economy and whether we will be better off in or out of the EU. Not a single serious or credible organisation thinks that we would be more prosperous out. The TUC and the CBI are united on this: jobs, investment and wages will be hit, and businesses and workers will suffer. The Institute for Fiscal Studies warns that our economy will shrink if we leave the EU. The costs would far outweigh the money that we would get back by no longer being a member, and we would require an additional £20 billion to £40 billion of borrowing or spending cuts on top of what is already planned.

I am campaigning for remain not just because of the risks of a Brexit vote but because of the opportunities for British businesses, workers and young people to build a better future if we remain in the EU. Membership has already benefited this country hugely, attracting crucial investment from companies such as Nissan, Siemens, Hitachi, Toyota and Jaguar Land Rover, which has brought decent jobs and training for young people in the areas that need them most.

Businesses in my constituency, such as the IT company Rock Hall and the energy efficiency company BillSaveUK, tell me that they have real potential to expand and grow their businesses in future, particularly as the single market in digital services is completed and new trade deals open up markets in areas such as clean energy. I desperately need such companies to expand and thrive so that more of my constituents can get decent jobs in the modern manufacturing industries of the future.

Many of the students I meet tell me that they are passionate about us remaining in the EU. Our great University of Leicester has benefited hugely from EU
investment in its new Centre for Medicine, which is doing world-leading research on heart disease and training the doctors of the future. Being part of the EU enables my local students to live, learn and study in other countries. They are terrified that, if we leave the EU, their job prospects will be worse.

Like me, those students are astonished that people who back Brexit, such as Aaron Banks, say that even if there is an impact on our economy, it is a “price worth paying”. But who will end up paying the price? Not Mr Banks, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) or the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). It will be those who always suffer in an economic downturn—the poor, the vulnerable and the low paid. Jobs will be lost and incomes will be hit, and families will be left struggling to cope with the consequences. Slower growth and lower tax receipts will reduce funding for the public services we all rely on, and for what? The mirage of greater self-control. That is why I am passionate about us voting to remain in the EU—so that we do not put our communities at risk and so that we can seize the opportunities of the future.

4.7 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), who rightly made the positive case for staying in the European Union and, most importantly, asked who will pay the price if we leave.

I want my constituency and my country to be prosperous, peaceful and proud of being British. That is why I will vote to remain on 23 June. I could make the security case, or a case about the sort of country that I want us to be, but today’s debate is about the economic benefits of European Union membership, so I will focus on that. Being in the European Union brings investment and jobs to the UK. It is not perfect—no relationship is—but being in the EU is good for our economy, which is good for our country.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently joined me in my constituency on a visit to the UK’s oldest brewery, Shepherd Neame. It has been expanding successfully since the recession, thanks to our strong and stable economy in the European Union, but that is not something that it, or we, should take for granted. Like many businesses, Shepherd Neame is worried about the risk that we will leave the EU, and I am worried because it is the largest employer in my constituency. If it struggles, jobs will be lost.

There is no doubt—almost everybody agrees about this, including those who are campaigning for us to leave the EU—that there will be a recession if we vote to leave. That will result in the loss of thousands of jobs. I have heard some on the leave side of the argument suggest that the loss of those jobs perhaps does not matter, and that they see it as a sacrifice that might be worth making. But jobs really do matter; they mean livelihoods and the income needed to pay the mortgage, rent and bills and to buy children’s shoes. I could go on. It may sound obvious, but I really am shocked at how dismissive some of those arguing to leave are. It may sound obvious, but I really am shocked at how dismissive some of those arguing to leave are.

I think about what the economic squeeze that we will experience—whether it lasts five years, 10 years or longer—will mean for today’s school leavers. A generation of school leavers was hit hard by the last recession, and we cannot have another lost generation as a result of a decision to leave the European Union.

Some Members have argued that a vote to leave could boost trade with non-European countries, but that is highly uncertain and, I would say, unlikely. Our largest export market outside the EU is the US. We exported £84 billion of goods to the US in 2014, but that is dwarfed by the more than £150 billion of goods and services that we exported to EU countries. Some Members have argued that if we leave, exports to India, Australia or Canada should increase, but the value of our exports to each of those countries is less than £10 billion per annum, and that would not change overnight.

Some time ago, before I became an MP, my day job was negotiating deals for AOL Time Warner, which at the time was the largest internet provider in the world. One thing I learned as a deal negotiator was that size matters for bargaining power. To those who say that the UK would somehow get better deals if we left the EU, I make the point that the EU is a much larger market and so has greater bargaining power in negotiations with other countries. I do not think we can be remotely confident, however great we are as a country or however good we are at negotiating, that we would be able to negotiate better trade deals with other countries than we can as part of the EU.

I am conscious of time, so I will move on quickly. The NHS is the reason why I became a Member of Parliament. Since my time doing the deals that I mentioned, I have worked mainly with hospitals and the NHS. I know just how difficult things are for the NHS at the moment. If we are to be able to afford the costs of care for our society as we live longer and demand more from the NHS, we need a strong economy. A vote to leave would damage not only our economy and prosperity but our international reputation. We are respected abroad for our values, our integrity and our collective conscience, and many countries seek to emulate our democratic system. Leaving the EU sends the wrong message. It suggests that when things get tricky, we walk away. That is not the sort of nation that I want us to be. We must be an optimistic country playing an influential role in the world, and that means being in the EU and leading from the front.

4.12 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): As part of Labour’s in campaign, I spoke to a woman on the phone last night. She was not sure how she was going to vote, and she did not know who to believe. She said that she just wanted the facts, so that is where I begin. We must be absolutely clear: globalisation is happening, and it is not going away. With democracy in eastern Europe and the opening up of China and India, capital, goods and people move freely across borders like never before, creating opportunities but also causing disruption. The globally connected economy means that problems in the American mortgage market can trigger a recession that spreads around the globe in hours.

That is the modern world. For us in Britain, each generation must answer this question: although we accept free trade because of the opportunities it offers, what rules are required to make the market fair? The global economy offers the UK huge potential. We have advanced service sectors, and our creative economy has boomed.
[Alison McGovern]

Nowhere is that more obvious than in our capital, which is perhaps the most globalised city in the world, but go to Manchester or Liverpool and the story is the same.

We must be honest about globalisation. Although it creates opportunity for many, it causes others disruption and dislocation. Jobs are created, but jobs are also lost. Capital movement can grow the economy, but capital hiding—offshore and untaxed—hits our public services. How do we get maximum gains from this changing world, and how do we minimise the disadvantage? That is the real question to be answered by the EU referendum.

Amid all the misinformation in this debate, there is a deep dishonesty about the campaign to leave the European Union—or perhaps I should say the two campaigns, because there are two completely contradictory arguments up and running at the same time. On one hand, we are told that we must leave so that we can stop the disruptive effects of globalisation, close the borders, introduce protectionism and give British workers preferential treatment.

Oliver Colville: Does the hon. Lady recognise that the Brexit campaign has also led people up to the top of the hill in relation to immigration and could be doing enormous damage to community relations?

Alison McGovern: I could not have put it better. Those who are feeling the sharp end of globalisation are presented with a particular suggestion about that as a solution, but as the hon. Gentleman says, it is nothing of the sort. It would sabotage the British economy, destroy even more jobs and reduce revenue for public services.

On the other hand, there is the other set of leavers—the people who think the problem with the EU is, as we heard earlier, that it shuts us off from globalisation. They say we should leave Europe and face the world, embrace non-EU immigration and let the market rip. Even if we ignore the difficulty of facing the world when we no trade deals, that is not an attractive option. It would mean even more churn in the British economy, even more losers from globalisation and an even greater sense of dislocation.

Those are therefore two bad options and a false choice for Britain, but there is one even bigger deceit: the lie that we can have both those things at once. That is not true, because people are either up for free trade and taking part in the world, working with others to make markets work, or they want to shut Britain off from the world. By allowing that confusion, the leave campaign is misleading people. This dishonesty, which is put across as plain speaking, is about telling low-paid workers that there is an easy remedy for their woes when, in reality, the medicine will only make the patient sicker.

I agree with the Brexit lot on one thing: it is time for plain speaking. The truth is that the world economy has globalised, which brings big opportunities but also brings disruption and loss to many people. We will solve that not by running a siege economy or letting the market rip, but by staying in the single market and taking advantage of the opportunities that will come in the next few decades as we properly integrate services and energy into that market, which is where we stand to benefit. Given that the EU is the market for 47% of our exports, we should help eurozone countries make the economic reforms they need so that they can buy more of our goods, not just leave them to fail.

As we know, co-operation is key to how we maximise our success and central to minimising the negative effects of globalisation. It is only through co-operation in the EU that we will make sure there is no race to the bottom on working conditions. For a low-paid worker, Brexit will mean worse conditions and worse career progression. For a higher-paid worker, Brexit will mean fewer opportunities, less trade, worse pay progression and higher taxes. For a pensioner, Brexit will mean less money to invest in the pensions system. Even pro-Brexit economists acknowledge that there will be a short-term hit.

I have talked about the long term, but let me take a moment to consider the short term. Brexit will mean a recession, as if we needed another recession after the horrors of 2008. Unlike in 2008, however, we would not have a Government willing to work with others around the world to solve the crisis; we would have a recession under the most right-wing Government in living memory, and we would have a closed economy that would make all of us, but especially those with the least, poorer.

This is the question on the ballot paper next week. It is a choice between prosperity in the EU and austerity out of it; between influence in the EU and irrelevance out of it; and between facing up to the modern world economy and making it work for Britain, and pretending that we can solve our problems by quitting, which we will not. Let us vote remain.

4.18 pm

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I believe it is in our national security interest to remain in the European Union, and, indeed, that is in the national security interests of the United States and of our allies in Europe. At a time when there are many conflicts around the world and when the world is very unstable, with an aggressive Russia and a belligerent North Korea, the very last thing we want is a fragmentation of the European Union, ambiguity in foreign policy or a weakening of the European Union and of the strength we draw from one another.

There has been a lot of debate about whether NATO or the European Union is the cornerstone of our national security, but I would argue that both have become such a cornerstone. I do not resile from the fact that NATO is a major cornerstone of our national security. However, I ask Brexiteers this: if the UK were to leave the European Union, is it more likely that France and Germany would fast-track EU defence structures? My answer is yes. If that is the case, is it likely to undermine NATO? Again, my answer is yes. In my view, in the medium term we would see EU defence structures compete with NATO rather than complement it. That makes me very concerned indeed.

We also hear, on counter-terrorism, that our so-called open borders endanger our cities and towns and those who live in this country. But the majority of counter-terrorism challenges in this country are home grown. The majority of those involved in the awful and egregious attacks in Brussels and Paris were EU citizens. It is completely misleading to suggest that remaining in the
European Union increases our likelihood of suffering a terrorist attack. We could be attacked at any time. I pay tribute to our intelligence services, our armed forces and police.

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall), I co-wrote a motion on having a European referendum that went against the Conservative Prime Minister and Government. We are where we are, and I make no apology for having played a key part in that, because it is right that, after 41 years, the British people are re-enfranchised on the European question. Nevertheless, I served on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly for five years and on the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy for four years and, after serious reflection, I have come to the view that, on balance, for national security reasons we should remain in the European Union.

We have rightly heard a lot about the economic impacts of withdrawal from the European Union. I have absolutely no doubt that there would be a massive shock for our economy. If there was a £30 billion or £40 billion hit, yes, there would be further public sector cuts and tax rises. That would be bad for Britain, which today is leading the economies of Europe and indeed has the fastest growing economy in the G7. But without national security, we cannot have economic security, and without economic security we cannot have national security, because we will not have the funds to pay for our defence and our intelligence agencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) quite rightly called for an expansion of the Foreign Office—both the Secret Intelligence Service and the mainstream Foreign Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) put his finger right on it: do we want to put up the white flag and surrender all that we have worked for in Europe to France and Germany? They are close allies, but occasionally on foreign policy they can be eccentric, to put it politely. Diplomacy is a key part of national security. Are we going to surrender the diplomacy of the European Union to some of the more eccentric play of France and Germany? Would we have the robust and tough sanctions on Russia over Ukraine if it had not been for the Prime Minister’s and Foreign Secretary’s robust representations in Brussels and around the capitals of Europe to make sure that Russia paid for its aggression? If Russia were not paying for that aggression through sanctions, would there be aggression in the Baltic states?

I am not a Europhile. I am not passionate about Europe. I love the United Kingdom. That is why I believe that, on balance, the best prospect for a safer, more secure and more prosperous United Kingdom is to remain in the European Union.

4.23 pm

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): The forthcoming referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union will say a great deal about how we, the British people, see ourselves as a nation. Are we a nation at peace with ourselves, internationalist in outlook, confident of our place in the world and comfortable in the belief that by working closely with others we can govern our peoples to the benefit of everyone? Or are we fearful of the outside world, feeling that the European Union is doing Europe to us rather than us being a part of Europe, and fearing the threat of immigration, because the concept of free movement of European citizens has been conflated with free movement of refugees, economic migrants and legal or illegal migrants from outside the European Union?

We face a whole host of problems: illegal migration, people trafficking, drug smuggling, terrorism, environmental pollution to our rivers and seas, and so on, and none of those things respect national boundaries. Working together in the most successful multinational organisation that the world has ever seen, with its own single market, is a solution to our problems, not a problem in itself. Yes, we have our differences with our European neighbours, but they are settled on conference tables in places such as Brussels, Strasbourg, London, Berlin and Paris; not by bloody wars on European soil as they were for hundreds of years—indeed, in the last century, those problems escalated into two world wars and resulted in the deaths of millions of people.

The real response is for Britain to admit that those problems are also our problems. We cannot shut ourselves off politically and economically from the rest of Europe, and we must recognise the geographical and political fact that we are part of a union of nations that share common interests, values and goals, and that our neighbours’ problems will soon become our own unless we work with them to help solve them. If we did not already have the European Union, we would have had to create something similar to deal with those problems, and many others.

History, solidarity, and common sense are good reasons for staying in the EU, but let me be a little more hard-headed and talk in terms of costs and benefits—I have said little about the benefits of the EU and many of the things that we take for granted. The anti-Europeans and xenophobes who say that Europe is a threat totally disregard decades of successful membership that have contributed to making Britain the world’s fifth largest economy. Yes, we could “survive” and “manage” outside the European Union, but at what price? The benefit of being a member of the largest single market in the world has a cost, which is why we pay contributions for membership as we would when joining any club. We do so because we accept that the benefits outweigh the costs.

Let us consider what the UK’s largest business organisation, the CBI, has said, as well as the UK’s largest workers’ organisation, the TUC. We have access to a $16.6 trillion a year single market of 500 million people, which is a key benefit. The single market goes beyond a standard free trade agreement. The EU has eliminated tariff barriers and customs procedures within its borders, and it has taken strides towards removing non-tariff barriers, such as goods regulations, across the board. The UK’s contribution is a small net cost, relative to the benefits, of around €7.3 billion, or 0.4% of GDP. It is clear that the UK’s largest business organisation is in favour of our remaining in the EU.

The TUC general secretary, Frances O’Grady, says: “Working people have a huge stake in the referendum because workers’ rights are on the line. It’s the EU that guarantees workers their rights to paid holidays, parental leave, equal treatment for part-timers, and much more…These rights can’t be taken for granted…and without the back-up of EU laws, unscrupulous employers will have free rein to cut many of their workers’ hard-won benefits and protections.”

Without remaining in the EU those protections could well disappear. Vote remain.
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Preston (Mr Hendrick), and I agreed with most of what he said.

When we started this process, if I had been split down the middle I was 49% for leave, and 51% for remain. Today, I am 127% in favour of remain—don’t worry, I haven’t got my figures from the leave campaign. Two reasons have got me to that position. The first is just looking at some of the facts. I am a south-west Member of Parliament. In the first quarter of this year, we exported goods worth £9.7 billion from the south-west to the EU. Some 64% of all exports from the south-west go to the EU. In my constituency, 5,249 jobs are reckoned to be dependent on trade with and membership of the EU—one of the highest, if not the highest, in the county. On a conservative estimate, 45,000 jobs will be at risk in my region were we to leave.

The average take-home pay in North Dorset, leafy and beautiful as it is, is £16,500. It would be a dereliction of my duty to vote in any way other than to protect and to preserve that. I am not one of those ideologues who wishes to sacrifice, on some altar of so-called sovereignty, the livelihoods of my constituents. Sovereignty as an abstract does not pay the mortgage, does not pay the rent, does not pay the bills and does not put food on the table. I would not be able to look my constituents in the eye and say, “But don’t worry, we’re free and all the rest of it, so we can starve in our own independence.” What a marvellous, marvellous legacy to leave!

Mrs Sheryll Murray: I relied on fisheries to pay my mortgage and put food on my table for my children. Will my hon. Friend look me in the eye and say he is happy to sacrifice an industry for the EU ideal?

Simon Hoare: In the first instance I would not say that our fishing sector has been sacrificed, but I have to think about agriculture. We are all absolutely right to look at this issue from the perspective of our constituents. Agriculture, in particular the dairy sector in North Dorset, would not be able to survive without the continued, guaranteed, politically colour-blind support the EU provides to British agriculture.

There are two specific things I would like to say. The first relates to the absolute lack of clarity and united vision from the leave campaign: Albania, Norway, the World Trade Organisation, something like the North American Free Trade Agreement, we can stand alone, imperial preference, let’s bring back the corn laws—whatever it might happen to be! Somehow or other we have an arrogance, which I think was probably the death of a lot of our industries some years ago, that we have a right to sell to the rest of the world, in particular Europe, on terms to our satisfaction, and that they should feel jolly grateful that they are allowed to buy our product. The global marketplace does not work like that anymore. We have to earn our living.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is this not the big contradiction of the leave offer from some? They claim that we can be in the European Free Trade Association, but that would mean signing up to every single EU rule and regulation, which we would not be able to change. The only way to change EU rules and regulations is to be a member of the European Union.

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is either the longest suicide note in history or the worst-written business plan I have ever come across. I go home to the bank manager and say, “I’ve got a fantastic wheeze. I’m going to put at risk 42% of my almost-guaranteed sales and leap in the dark to see if I can grow a few other markets.” We can actually do both, but it seems to me to be an act of the highest folly to endanger tariff-free access to the world’s largest free trading area. That would be a dereliction of our duty.

For those who slather and get frightfully excited when their erogenous zones of sovereignty are being tickled—not, in the cases of some, the most attractive prospect I can think of—let us recall and put it on the record that they keep saying that this sovereign House of Parliament must take the decisions. That is absolutely right. We are accountable to our constituents and if, after five years, they do not like what we have done they can jolly well kick us out. If we had a vote of this sovereign Parliament this afternoon, 74% of us would vote to remain—across party, across regions and across country. It is a telling sign of the clear merits and benefits of UK plc doing that traditionally British thing of fighting for our interests, championing our businesses, speaking up for our people and making sure we get the best deal possible.

I want to mention the other 60-odd per cent. of the reason I am voting to remain. I had prayed that we would not have a rerun of the debate in Russia in 1870s and 1880s and in Germany in the late 1830s and ‘40s. Our infrastructure is under pressure. Well, we can solve that—it is a sovereign job of this place and our local councils—but, no, we will blame the Jew, the Ugandan—anybody but ourselves; we will blame them for taking our jobs, our houses, our places on the hospital waiting list, forgetting that in constituencies such as mine, 65% of people are retired and that we have a falling birth rate. We need these young people coming in to work in our services. Regrettably, we are hearing that bitter, twisted, mealy-mouthed, acid-riven debate about immigration. I do not want any part of it. There is a strong, positive narrative, about how we need that new blood and talent coming to our shores. When we go to Spain and set up a business, we call ourselves expats; when they come here, we see them as a drain. Not in my name or the name of this party! We will be voting to remain.

4.36 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, you, like many of us, might have seen a front-page splash in The Times last week trumpeting the support for Brexit from Lord Anthony Bamford of JCB, the iconic digger maker based in my county of Staffordshire. I was intrigued by the story, mainly because it smacked a little of desperation. It was, as it is called in the trade, old news, because anyone reading The Sentinel newspaper in Staffordshire would have known that when the good lord came out all of a year ago.

Anthony Bamford is part of just a small smattering of industrialists on the Brexit side that includes a maverick knight of the realm, Sir James Dyson, who makes those costly, complicated hoovers—in Malaysia. In reality, their views are not reflective of the large majority of British businesses, investors or economists. Our membership of the EU has been vital to our attracting much needed investment here. Nissan, Toyota and Honda from Japan
made that clear very early on, when they urged the UK to remain, and the likes of BMW, Volkswagen, Bosch and Siemens from Germany have since joined them.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Did my hon. Friend see the story in the *Financial Times* today pointing out that both Sir James Dyson and Anthony Bamford had been caught breaking competition laws by the European Commission, and suggesting that that was their motivation?

**Paul Farrelly**: I cannot speak for their personal motivation, but I am sure that they are speaking for themselves personally rather than for their own businesses.

German companies here employ 500,000 people. Along with the Japanese, they have made the UK car industry today the most successful in our country's history — along with Tata of India, of course, with its investment in Jaguar Land Rover. Tata, too, cannot fathom why Britain would want to leave the world's biggest single market. In this debate, their voices deserve to be heard and listened to, not silenced through intimidation, as was the intention at the beginning of the leave campaign. Then, of course, there are the voices of great British companies — household names such as Rolls-Royce, one of our biggest exporters. My grandad built Spitfire engines at Crewe for Rolls-Royce, and today the company, patriotically, urged its staff to vote remain.

It is not just multinationals that are emphatically in favour of our remaining in the EU. This spring, like other colleagues on the Opposition Benches, I carried out a survey of about 1,000 predominantly small businesses in my constituency, and we had a good response. Some 80% were in favour of remaining. Some wanted reforms, but they firmly believed that we should stay in, to reform from within. The response to our survey reflected the balance within the wider membership of Staffordshire's chamber of commerce and the views of the British Ceramic Confederation — the industry from which my area of the potteries takes its name. This — particularly for us — vital export-led industry wants us firmly to stay in because it is in its and the country's interests. It recognises that it is better to have one rule book, rather than 28 different ones for each country in the EU.

Let me take a local example of the new economy. One of our most passionate supporters of the remain campaign is bet365, which is now the world's biggest online gaming company and the owner of Stoke City football club, which I must of course mention. In little more than 15 years, the Coates family has built that business up into the biggest private sector employer in North Staffordshire, with more than 3,500 highly skilled staff. It is one of the UK’s biggest business success stories of the last decade. Frankly, bet365 can only dream of one rule book, rather than 28 different ones for each country in the EU.

**Mr Jim Cunningham**: Earlier on, my hon. Friend probably heard me mention the reasons why two Prime Ministers of two different parties wanted to enter Europe, but a third who was not exactly friendly to Europe should be borne in mind — Margaret Thatcher. Why did she sign up to the single market if alternatives were available? This is what led to the free movement of labour, the proposal for a central bank and, most importantly, the euro. This shows that some of these Brexit people were the very ones who signed up to support the EU.

**Paul Farrelly**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Margaret Thatcher knew exactly which side the country's bread was buttered on, as did John Major, whose Government were held to ransom by many of the people who are campaigning for Brexit this time, and who will no doubt make the life of the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) a misery after this referendum, when we will hopefully vote to stay in. The businesses that I have mentioned, locally and nationally, will not benefit — and neither will the wider British economy — by us stomping out truculently and bad-temperedly next Thursday.

If I had more time, I would talk in greater detail about the benefits of EU membership to the NHS and higher education. I have a whole campus, Keele University, in Newcastle-under-Lyme which, together with our NHS, now has one of the country's leading medical schools. Its position is shortly to be boosted by a £20 million new research facility for drugs and medical treatments, £13 million of which will come from the EU. In all, the university, the NHS and therefore our local economy are due to gain £30 million-worth of EU funding for research and education over the next few years. It is right to point out the risk of losing it if we vote to leave. The EU has been pivotal in securing other rights that are too often taken for granted — equal rights for agency workers, minimum paid holidays, maternity pay and indeed equality of pay across the board.

To conclude, I firmly believe that having this referendum was a reckless and unnecessary gamble with our country's future. It was a tactical exercise in party management, which has seen the governing Conservative party fall apart over the issue. The right hon. Member for Witney, through two general elections and two referendums so far, has in many respects been the luckiest of Prime Ministers. I hope that his luck holds next Thursday. The decision we face next week is about much more than jobs, investment and prosperity. It is about learning the correct lessons from history. The past has shown that Britain has an important role at the heart of Europe. That engagement and co-operation make our continent more progressive, more outward-looking and more stable. Next Thursday, the right lesson to learn from history is to vote remain.

4.43 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great privilege to be called to speak in this historic debate. I will vote remain for one fundamental reason. I am a father of four small children, and the last thing I want is for them to grow up in a country with less opportunity than I have had the great privilege to enjoy. What an opportunity it is. If we vote to leave, this country will not go to the dogs; it will rather be a case of an opportunity cost and an opportunity missed. Alone in the world, we are the only major nation on earth that enjoys unfettered access to the European single market in a currency over which there is no existential doubt.
I was passionately opposed to membership of the exchange rate mechanism and the European Union, but I believe that to be a major nation in the EU but outside the straitjacket of the eurozone is to be in an incredible position; and that position has been strengthened greatly by the Prime Minister’s renegotiation. Some say that it was not a fundamental renegotiation, but the securing of the one key point that the EU cannot discriminate against countries that do not use the euro means that our platform of prosperity is now secure. I believe that, by voting to remain, we can build on that in four vital strategic economic areas.

First and foremost, we will restore our reputation as a safe haven and a sound and stable country in which to invest. This referendum, like the referendum in Scotland, puts that at risk by threatening huge uncertainty. If we vote to remain, while those two constitutional issues will not go away, to the people who matter—

Stephen Gethins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Cartlidge: I should be delighted.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the independence referendum in Scotland. At least he will concede that the Scottish Government provided a 650-page White Paper saying what they would do in the event of an independent Scotland. I have seen squat from the vote leave campaign.

James Cartlidge: I do not need to add very much to that, but the point that I am making is in no way intended to incite the Scottish National party. I am simply saying that I believe we will restore our international reputation as a sound and stable nation by putting those two constitutional issues not to bed but to the margins, in the eyes of the investors and the people who matter most.

My second point concerns the terms of trade. Last year I was standing on the platform at Marks Tey station, on the main line into Liverpool Street, with a member of my Conservative association. A goods train passed, travelling from the Felixstowe direction towards London, and therefore its load was obviously from China. There was a container on every single wagon. A few minutes later, a chap looked at me with dismay when another goods train went in the opposite direction, with not a single container on it. I reassured him by saying, “Don’t worry; that’s what we mean by ‘invisible exports.’” [Laughter] But actually, that is the key point. Because a few minutes later, on the same platform, herds of commuters—including many from my constituency—boarded the train to Liverpool Street, not to go and make widgets to be sent back to China, but to sell the insurance, to negotiate professional services, to do the finance.

That is where our comparative advantage lies. Trade is about comparative advantage—doing what you do best. If we leave, there is no way in which we can have a say in the attempt to complete the single market in services. I believe that if we stay, we will achieve that, and you cannot put a value on what that will add to our economy, given our expertise in the service sector.

My third point is about inward investment. I find it absolutely astonishing that we keep hearing from Brexit campaigners about the deficit in European trade compared with trade with the rest of the world. Only one group of companies is doing all that trade, and most of those—the ones that are making the biggest dent in exports—are foreign companies: Japanese car makers, American banks, and French pharmaceutical firms such as Sanofi, based in Haverhill, which I visited recently. Its biggest export market is, by far, the United States of America, but it is based here in the United Kingdom because we have access to the single market. To pretend that European trade and global trade are somehow separate is complete nonsense.

I believe that if we vote to remain, we will drive inward investment far higher, and therefore drive our exports. Instead of worrying about trade figures as some negotiating stance, let us look at them as we should, and conclude that we need to do better—and one way of doing that is to vote to remain, to show that this country is open again for business from around the world.

My fourth point relates to what is said about the future of the eurozone. Those who want to leave the European Union say, “The glass is half empty: we should leave because the eurozone will collapse,” and so on. Our flexible position means that if the eurozone gets into trouble, that will simply reinforce our unique status in that we alone, as a big country, have unfettered access and are not in the euro. If the eurozone strengthens, that will massively boost our exports and help with our trade deficit. We cannot lose, provided we play our cards right.

I would make one final, fundamental point. There are those who say that in this referendum on neither basis are we voting for the status quo, and they are right. If we vote to remain it will not be the status quo, because we will have made up our mind: after all these years of being held back by this interminable debate about whether to be in or out, if we decide as a country to remain, we are deciding to get stuck in in Europe, representing this country. I believe we will then have to stand tall, proud and prosperous in this great continent on behalf of this great country, and the only way to do that is to do the patriotic thing and vote to remain in the EU.

4.49 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): This afternoon I want to focus on why it is important for Croydon North that Britain remains a member of the European Union. Croydon North is part of an outer London borough, but it has many of the features of an inner-city area: an extremely diverse population, high levels of youth unemployment—particularly, sadly, in the black community—and too much poor quality housing, particularly in the private rented sector, but it also has a very enterprising and ambitious population.

Croydon is at a crossroads. The Labour council elected two years ago has announced a massive £5 billion regeneration project for the town centre that will affect the whole borough. It will reshape the retail centre around a new Westfield-Hammerson’s shopping mall, including thousands of new homes, thousands of new jobs, new education and leisure facilities, and a growing new tech hub. Being a 15-minute train journey from
Gatwick in one direction and central London in the other. Croydon is ideally placed to take advantage of being part of the world’s biggest trading bloc.

The future looks bright for Croydon, but a big question-mark hangs over it all, and that is the threat of Brexit in next week’s referendum. The investors Croydon hopes to attract will think again if Croydon is outside the European Union. They do not want trade barriers blocking their access to Europe and they will think twice about investing in an economy that is going backwards into recession.

If we tried to stay in the single market without EU membership, we would be subject to EU rules and freedom of movement, like Norway and Switzerland are, but without the veto we currently have: the same circumstances, but no voice.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): That is the one argument that people on my street just are not aware of. They think we can have a trade agreement with the EU and still lower the immigration from EU countries. It simply is not true, because we would have to sign up to the same freedom of movement. We need to get that message out.

Mr Reed: That is absolutely true. I am sure my hon. Friend is doing as much as she can in her constituency, and I am going to be doing as much as I can in mine.

We would become weaker, not more powerful, if we left the EU. We would lose control over our destiny, not gain it. The Governor of the Bank of England has warned that a vote to leave the EU could trigger a recession, and nine out of 10 economists agree with him that Brexit would damage the economy. A vote to leave next Thursday would be the first time a country had voluntarily chosen to throw its economy into recession, and that would mean more job losses, lower tax revenues, a growing deficit, more cuts in public services like health and education, rising interest rates to prop up the pound and, because of that, higher mortgages. And it is not the wealthy élite that will suffer; it is ordinary people in places like Croydon North.

Immigration has helped London’s economy to grow, and it has benefited Croydon immensely. Where there are pressures because of immigration, like housing or the NHS, those are not the fault of immigrants, who put in more than they take out; they are the fault of a Tory Government who are underfunding our health service and selling off social housing. We cannot allow immigrants to be scapegoated for the failures of this Conservative Government.

Too many people in Croydon work long hours for low pay in insecure jobs. Their lives would become harder still without the employment protection that comes from our membership of the EU. Pro-Brexit Tories have already made it clear that they cannot wait to leave the EU so that they can cut workers’ rights in half. That is exactly what one of them has said they want to do. They want to remove rights for part-time workers and parents, increase working hours, and reduce paid leave. It was the European social chapter that triggered the Tory revolt on Europe, not because they want to protect British workers, but because they want to exploit British workers.

Chris Stephens: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the independent legal opinion of Michael Ford, QC, who has said that in the event of a Tory Brexit, the damage would go much further and affect collective consultation, collective bargaining and the rights of part-time workers? He also believes that TUPE rights, which apply to outsourcing, would go.

Mr Reed: I was not aware of that particular opinion, but I am keen to learn more about it. It does not surprise me, however, because that is what many commentators are saying about the implications of a Tory Brexit for workers’ rights, jobs and the prosperity of ordinary people in this country.

For that reason, and all the others that we have heard this afternoon, I am confident that voters in Croydon North will vote next week to remain part of the European Union. The EU is an organisation that needs reform to make it more accountable, but we need to hear the concerns being expressed by people of good will and use them to make the EU work better. We cannot cut ourselves adrift and leave ourselves subject to an EU that we can no longer influence because we are isolated on the outside. Croydon is better off in Europe, and Britain is better off in Europe. I will be voting to remain next Thursday.

4.55 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Like many others in the House, I am a firm supporter of our membership of the European Union, and I was campaigning on this issue even before the general election. I support our membership not simply out of fear about what would happen if we left, even though there remain serious questions that the leave camp need to answer; my support stems from the positive contribution we can make to the organisation and the benefits we get from being a member.

We are the fifth largest economy in the world, as the leavers continue to remind us, and the second biggest in Europe. Long-term forecasts from the OECD suggest that our economy will overtake Germany’s in the early 2030s, but that will happen only if we carry on along the same trajectory that we are now on. It would certainly not happen if we were to leave the EU. Why, when we enjoy such a prominent position in the world, and when we have the potential to champion the ideals that have made our country great, would we want to walk away from providing leadership, just at a time when Europe is crying out for it? People wishing to leave the EU say that our values need to be defended, and I agree, but I say that our values are also worth exporting. And exports—and, indeed, the economy—are among the most important reasons we should remain.

As a single market, the EU remains our biggest trading partner. A company can set itself up in the UK from anywhere in the world and instantly have access to 500 million consumers. The virtue of our membership attracts some of the best talent from around the world and encourages new businesses to set up here, investing in the UK and creating jobs. The UK market for goods and services is the second-least regulated in the OECD, second only to that of the Netherlands. Surely that is proof that the EU is not making us less competitive for investment.

We attract world-leading companies because of our access to the single market, but the EU is also a vast scientific and academic network that our own universities
and companies can draw on. Portsmouth is home to several international companies that depend on free access to European markets. It is also home to one of the most rapidly developing universities in Europe, and I believe that, in Portsmouth, our interests are best served by remaining in the European Union.

The United Kingdom is the gateway to the EU for other countries, including all the major and developing economies of the world, but particularly for the Commonwealth. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, has said:

“As far as India is concerned, if there is an entry point for us to the European Union that is the UK, that is Great Britain.”

Our membership of the EU is one of the factors that binds the Commonwealth together. We did not abandon the Commonwealth or leave it behind when we joined the European Economic Community; we provided the simplest and most straightforward route for our Commonwealth partners to get most benefit from it.

Our links with some of the most powerful emerging economies are enriched by our membership of the EU, not jeopardised by it. There are many other benefits that our membership brings to the UK and to the rest of Europe, but the overarching theme is one of stability. The equal partnerships between us and our neighbours have supported a period of peace and stability that is unprecedented in our history. We have had 70 years of peace following 1,000 years of war. That has to be worth fighting for. I hope we will vote to remain on the 23rd, not out of fear but out of confidence in our ability to shape the future of the continent, where Britain already plays a leading role.

4.59 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): This debate has consumed us in this Chamber for the best part of the year, at times compromising our ability to scrutinise and properly review other matters of public policy. It has also been raking for months in the communities outside, yet the most dispiriting thing about this process for me is that I find so many people who say now that they are less well-informed than they were at the beginning of the discussion. The reason for that is all to do with the manner in which the debate has been conducted. Not only has it been incessantly negative, but it has traded in glib soundbites and tried to pander to prejudice, rather than illuminate, educate and inform people so that they can make a proper decision.

I therefore hope in the limited time available to explode some of the worst myths and misrepresentations that have been put about, the first of which relates to sovereignty. Next Thursday, we will be part of the European Union and the people of this country will vote on whether to continue that relationship. In that moment, sovereignty will lie with the people of the United Kingdom. Nothing they can do next Thursday will change that situation, so no matter what the result is, in one, two or five years’ time or never the people of the UK can choose to review the decision they make next Thursday. Nothing is forever, and government must always be with the consent of the people. Therefore, when those in the leave campaign say that the choice next Thursday is between retaining sovereignty here and giving it away, that is not a half truth or a misrepresentation—it is a lie.

The next point is to do with the money. We have talked about how much we contribute and how much we get back. It is a fact, and we need to tell people, that we are net contributors to the European Union, but we need to explain why that is and where that money goes. The bulk of that money goes to support social and economic development programmes in European member states that are less prosperous than we are. That is not a result of charitable donations by philanthropists in the Cabinet; it is a strategy to try to develop the economy across the continent so that in years to come the people who live in southern and eastern Europe will have the economy, the support and the money to be able to buy the goods and services we offer in this country. It is about a continental approach to economic development.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): Is it not also much better to invest in these countries so that we can trade with them and build democratic structures than to send young men and women out there to die on battlefields, as we have done on this continent for centuries?

Tommy Sheppard: I could not agree more. I also want to tackle the question of democracy, because the leave campaigners have suggested that this is about an unelected, unaccountable European bureaucracy versus—I guess—the exemplar of democratic participation that we apparently have in this country. That also is untrue. There are three institutions in the European Union: the Parliament, which is directly elected by the people; the Council of Ministers, which is composed of elected Ministers from the national Governments; and a third institution made up of appointed Commissioners—but they are appointed by elected national Governments. So when people say that the European Union is undemocratic, that is also not a mistruth—it is a lie.

I now wish to speak to some colleagues on the left who have joined the leave campaign, some of whom are in my party. I regret what they have done because they have given the veneer of political breadth to a campaign that is fundamentally reactionary in its nature, and I hope they will reconsider. When we come across glib phrases such as “a bosses’ Europe” or “a bosses’ club”, we should take a moment to try to understand what is happening. Anyone who has a materialist view of philosophy knows that we make our own history. Therefore, the institutions that govern us are not divine, and are not inherently one thing or another; they are created by us. It is a fact that every European Union treaty there has been has been a reflection of the political balance of power in the continent at that time. In the 1980s we made great advances in workers’ rights because the social democratic parties and the left parties were in the ascendancy, much to the chagrin of Margaret Thatcher at the time. In recent years, that has not been the case and some treaties have been more pro-corporate, but that is because, my friends, the left is not in the ascendancy in Europe. What those who believe in a progressive Europe fear to do is link up, as the shadow Chancellor said, with other forces across the continent and explain that a different form of Europe is possible. I believe we can do that.

Finally, let me talk about this issue of migration and public services. I have been an MP for over a year. In that time, I have tried to help more than 1,200 people. Invariably, most of them have problems with public services: they want to move up the housing ladder, they
want their benefits reinstated, and they are worried about the NHS waiting lists. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of people among that 1,200 whom are citizens of other European countries. Most of them are young, working couples who are trying hard to build up their families and to build a better future for themselves—by the way, in doing so, they are making Edinburgh one of the most vibrant capitals in Europe.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way during such an impassioned and informative speech. Does he agree that it is deeply regrettable that, for far too much of the debate on immigration, too many people on both sides of the House have concentrated on the supposed negative side of immigration rather than following the example of the Scottish Government and talking much more forcefully about the massive benefits that immigration can bring to all our communities?

**Tommy Sheppard**: Absolutely. In my experience, the people in Edinburgh East who are migrants from other EU countries, many of whom are here temporarily and do not intend to settle here, put less of a strain per capita on our public services than the population on average. A way to tackle that is to have a system of funding our public services based on population, so that if migrants go to a particular area, more money is put into the public services in that area. That is probably the fairest way to do it.

I greatly resent the way that some people have tried to turn this into a referendum on immigration. That is what it has become in some places, and I find that not only distasteful but disreputable. What I say to those people who may be seduced by those arguments is that when they see ruthless right-wing employers, who would if they could pay their workers nothing, complain about low pay, do not believe them. When they see right-wing politicians waxing lyrical about an NHS that they have made their career trying to underfund and destroy, do not believe them. Do not be seduced by this right-wing reactionary rhetoric, and vote to remain next Thursday.

5.7 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): It is a great honour to follow my hon. Friend for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has said as much. He talks about the Nike swoosh, or the dip, that would happen. We are talking about not a graphic but a direct impact on people’s pockets and on Treasury revenues.

As for what happens in the medium term, there is more debate. A vast majority of economists have said that being part of the European Union would be better for our economy in the medium and long term, but I accept that there are a wide range of views on that. How much that would cost—how much we would gain, or not gain—is more difficult to say. One thing is absolutely clear: those who claim that we will thrive outside the European Union in a way that we do not inside are profoundly mistaken.

Economically, there are two areas in which we suffer the most. The first is our failure to export enough, which we have spoken about time and again, and the second is our productivity. Neither has anything to do with our membership of the European Union, and both have everything to do with ourselves. Germany and France have considerably higher productivity levels than us, as does the United States. Germany is quite capable of exporting three or four times as much to China as we can, from within the European Union. I fully agree that there are aspects of regulation and so on where we might do better if we controlled them entirely ourselves, but those are minor points—mere pinpricks—compared with the responsibility on our shoulders to improve our productivity and exports. We can do that whether we are inside or outside the European Union. Coming out of the EU is no panacea.

It is clear that where we will suffer if we leave is in inward investment. I have spoken to inward investors in my constituency on whom thousands of jobs depend, and they say they want us in and that it is very important. As the Foreign Secretary said earlier, with our current account deficit as it is, a reduction in foreign investment would be dangerous. I have not had investors coming to me and saying, “I’ve been waiting for you to leave the European Union so that I can invest in Stafford.” That has never happened.

On co-operation and Britain’s place in the world, I am unashamed about the need to work together. There are many challenges in this world, and putting ourselves on the outside is not the way forward. We must not underestimate the importance of good relations with our neighbours, even if they come through difficult meetings in the European Union week in, week out and month in, month out. The other bodies of which we are a member, such as the United Nations, are no substitute. They meet infrequently and are much bigger bodies.

Who wants us out? Do our best friends? Do the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada—those with whom we have the strongest personal and political ties? Absolutely not.

**Mr MacNeil**: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good speech, which plays into the idea of getting some sort of independence from the European Union. It strikes me that there is a misunderstanding among some people in the debate about the referendum. The EU is not a country, it is an intergovernmental organisation. That fundamental point has been misunderstood by people who imagine that they are leaving some country. They are not. They are leaving an almost global body, and that is the mistake that many of the exiters make.
Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman is right. The EU is a body of proud sovereign countries that take their independence extremely seriously. The east European countries did not throw off the Soviet yoke to get a yoke from Brussels.

When it comes to stability, prosperity, co-operation with others and the United Kingdom’s place in the world, I firmly believe that we are better in, so I shall be voting to remain.

5.12 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and to return to the topic of my maiden speech barely a year ago, as this country prepares to take what will undoubtedly be the biggest decision of our lifetime, which will determine the direction and destiny of our nation not just in the coming days, weeks, months and years but over the course of this century.

Global power is shifting from the western economies that dominated the 20th century to the emerging giants of the 21st century. Powers are pivoting away from nation states toward global corporations, and in that context the only question that should be on people’s minds is how they cast their vote next week is which route and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and opportunity in a rapidly changing and globalised world.

Globalisation is an unstoppable process. It brings many possibilities and many opportunities for our constituents and for our country, and it also brings challenges. The question for any Government, whether our Government or Governments around the world, is how to shape globalisation to serve the best interests of their people, how to mitigate its challenges and how to make the most of the possibilities. How on earth can our Government or Governments around the world, is only one answer to that question if people want a future for our country that provides economic security, national security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic choice, and which choice will deliver prosperity, security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century.

Lucy Allan: Does the hon. Gentleman also think that we should trust the voice of the people?

Wes Streeting: I absolutely do. I voted to give the people a choice, and I will abide by their decision next week.

I say directly to my constituents that they have an enormous responsibility resting on their shoulders. Every day since I was elected to Parliament last year—on a slim majority and against the odds—I have said that I will put their interests first. They may not always agree with me, but they will always know where I stand. Every day, in every vote, the only question in my mind is, what is best for my constituency and my country? Now, my constituents face that choice in a vote that is more important than any that Members of Parliament will take part in during this Session.

Where does our country’s future lie? Leading Europe or leaving Europe? As far as I am concerned, there is only one answer to that question if people want a future for our country that provides economic security, national security and the ability to take on the big issues and global challenges facing us in this century. That is why I urge my constituents to make the progressive, the pragmatic and the patriotic choice to remain in the European Union.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. We are getting slightly tight on time. If Members do not take so many interventions, there will be no need to lower the time limit. However, if they continue to take interventions, I am afraid there will be. For now it is fine, as long as people keep to a minimum of interventions.
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased to follow the impassioned words of the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting).

I want to start my speech in this historic debate by asking a question: have we been prosperous for the last 40 years? Yes, we certainly have. We have become the fifth greatest economy in the world, and that is while being part of the European Union, and not despite being part of it. Our economy has grown by 65% during that time. That time has also been peaceful, as my hon. Friend give way?

Ministry of Cake, based in Taunton, is a £30 million business employing 300 people and the largest dessert maker in the EU. You have probably eaten some of its cakes, Madam Deputy Speaker, as it supplies coffee chains here and right across the EU. The managing director says that his UK bestseller is chocolate fudge cake, but the market in the UK is saturated, so he now needs to get 25% of his trade from the EU. He therefore needs us to stay in, because it is the best place to get trade from. We share E numbers, standards and clear labelling, and we have a free market, and he has access to all the labour in that market. He could not operate without the migrant labour force in Taunton. Nor could another great business in Wellington—K. S. Coles, the vegetable packers, run by Ken Coles. He employs 70 labourers in the winter, mostly migrants, and hundreds more in the summer, to pick beans, peas and strawberries. I do not know whether you like mashed swede, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I do. The company is not only the largest supplier of swedes to our supermarkets in this country but the second largest supplier of swedes to Germany, so it exports right across the EU and needs us to stay in for the sake of that trade.

On all those grounds, we need to remain within the EU. It is a no-brainer. As we have heard, we already have the best possible deal. We have no euro, we have free trade, we have 300 million people we can access, we have a rebate, and we have a veto on laws. What more could we want?

The subjects of agriculture and the environment are close to my heart and important in my rural constituency. The CAP is vital to our agricultural industry. The £20 billion of funding that the industry gets to keep the environment in good shape is absolutely priceless. It not only keeps the rural economy going but keeps people on the land and gives us low-priced food. If we leave the EU, the price of food will rise, mark my words. We have high welfare standards that we have to keep to, so our food will be expensive to produce and we will be flooded with cheap food from Europe. Our farmers therefore need us to stay in.

On the environment, birds do not stop at the boundaries of countries, and we share the water and the air, so we are much better off within the EU. The framework of EU legislation made us clean up our beaches and water. Our beaches, in particular, are vital for our tourist industry in the south-west. There is a direct spin-off between the environmental benefits of being in Europe and the economic benefits, both of which are absolutely clear.

The EU is not perfect, but let us be at the table fighting to improve it, especially through our presidency. Let us be sure that there is some of that chocolate fudge cake at the EU table.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It was really good to hear the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) make the case for the EU in terms of the economy, agriculture and the environment.

It is very easy for me to support this motion on behalf of the people of North Tyneside and, I hope, the wider community of the north-east, because over the years our region has received billions of pounds in investment from Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) said, our region is entitled to more European funds than any other English region, and in the next five years it is due to receive £726 million in European funding. The single market has been hugely significant for business development in the north-east, with more than half our exports going to the EU and 160,000 jobs relying directly on that trade.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mary Glindon: I will carry on, if my hon. Friend does not mind.

It is no wonder that in a recent survey the North East chamber of commerce found that the majority of the region’s businesses wish to remain in the EU. The same survey highlighted the frustration that businesses feel about having to deal with EU regulations, but the conclusion was that the single market remains the region’s most important market and that it will continue to be so well into the future.

The benefit to the north-east is further illustrated by a study by The Chronicle in Newcastle, which found that the north-east has received an average of £187 per head in EU funding since 2007, compared with £82 in the rest of the UK. The generous funding from the EU to our region stands in stark contrast to how we fare when it comes to receiving funding from this UK Government.

I remind the House that it was a Tory Government who forced the closure of the Swan Hunter shipyard in Wallsend in the mid-1990s, with devastating consequences for Tyneside. However, thanks to money from the EU, the yard is undergoing a massive transformation. North
Tyneside Council was awarded £6.7 million of European regional development funding to part-fund enabling infrastructure works at the former shipyard, which has opened up development on a strategically important enterprise zone site.

Between 2007 and 2013, under the European structural fund programme, North Tyneside Council was the accountable body for nearly £13 million in our region. That money part-funded the refurbishment of a new centre for innovation on our enterprise zone site, creating flexible start-up and business incubation space for small and medium-sized enterprises. Some £1.8 million of ERDF funding was used towards funding business support to enable start-up support, particularly in our disadvantaged areas, resulting in a rate of 400 start-ups per year.

The council is already undertaking work to maximise European structural and investment funds from the current programme to meet the EU 2020 strategy ambitions of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The newly funded business support programme, Made in North Tyneside, will bring great benefits to the local community and businesses alike. In addition, the council is working with partners on a community-led development board under the Tories—from the police and fire services, to the closure of Government offices—all of which have suffered huge public spending cuts right across the board under the Tories. The truth is that the future prosperity of my constituency and the north-east region is inextricably linked to the EU. Being unrepentantly parochial, I say that that is reason enough to remain.

I hope that the north-east will not be fooled by those in the Brexit camp who claim that we would be better off leaving the EU. Since 2010, the north-east has suffered huge public spending cuts right across the board under the Tories—from the police and fire services, to the closure of Government offices—all of which have cost jobs and a loss of income to our local communities. The truth is that the future prosperity of my constituency and the north-east region is inextricably linked to the EU. Being unrepentantly parochial, I say that that is reason enough to remain.

5.28 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this very important debate. I have listened with great interest to the many excellent speeches that have been made.

There is an increasingly healthy trend of Members from all parties coming to this place having had a career outside of politics and life experience that they can bring to our debates. During the year in which I have had the honour to represent Telford, I have seen many fine examples of our debates being informed by that experience and expertise.

I am a chartered accountant. Before coming to this place, I specialised in the financial sector, specifically in investment in financial markets. I want to draw on that experience and bring it to the debate. Over the months, the debate on the EU has, naturally, been characterised by passion on both sides. That has led to increasingly impossible claims and predictions, which have seemed to the outside world, on occasion, alarmist and fanciful. I want to put on record some of the more moderate and balanced perspectives of investors who, because they earn their living generating investment returns for clients, truly understand the meaning of the word risk. We have heard that word repeatedly today and on other occasions. Investors are motivated to put economic considerations before any others.

I am sure that Members present who have an interest in economics will be familiar with the outstanding reputation of Neil Woodford, an investor in UK business. The Woodford report, which was published earlier this year, provides a balanced commentary on the economic impact of Brexit. I encourage those who genuinely harbour fears about a post-Brexit economy to read that report. In case they do not have the chance to do so, its main conclusions are: first, that the most extreme claims about the costs and benefits of Brexit are wide of the mark and not evidence-based; secondly, that a more tailored immigration approach, the freedom to make trade deals with global trading partners, moderately lower levels of regulation and savings to the public purse, although they will not be huge, will have some positive net benefits; and, thirdly, that the most plausible outcome from Brexit will be a modest positive impact on jobs and growth. Neil Woodford states:

“We continue to think that the United Kingdom’s economic prospects are good whether inside or outside the European Union.”

We have a Conservative Government to thank for that.

Neil Woodford is in good company. Richard Sharp, an external member of the Financial Policy Committee who has more than 30 years’ experience in finance and who is in constant contact with major international investors in UK businesses, said in evidence to the Treasury Committee:

“The UK is a thoroughly investable economy and it would remain a thoroughly investable economy whichever way we vote goes.”

The tone of those professional investors is a welcome relief from the sound and fury that political campaigns inevitably generate—although the debate today has been moderate and considered.

From my experience in the financial sector, and after listening to investors and advisers, I believe that when we look back in the not-too-distant future at GDP, employment rates, the FTSE 100 index and inflation, it will be difficult to identify when exactly Brexit occurred. The FTSE 100 is up £17 billion today. I think that some people may not have been following the markets. I want to reassure the House that despite what is said by the ardent campaigners, whose will to win I fully understand, we can sleep easy in our beds on June 24 because the economy will remain strong either way.

We have heard a great deal from the establishment, the elites and bureaucrats, and all those who benefit from the EU, but they are not talking the language of my constituents in Telford. They are not listening to the millions of ordinary people across Britain whose everyday lives are most affected by our membership. Many people in Telford are affected by increasing pressure on public services, by the difficulty of getting a school place and by waiting times to see their GP. The less well-off are the most exposed to the day-to-day reality of our membership of the EU.

We in this place have said enough. Now it is time for the British people to have a say. They want to be free—free to decide who comes to our country, free to make our own laws and free to trade with the rest of the world. On Thursday, I know that the people of Telford will trust their hearts and their instincts and vote for Britain’s future.
5.33 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Britain stands at a crossroads. The nation has to make a big choice: whether to stay in the EU or to leave. The EU was built on the ashes of world war two once people realised that security and prosperity were linked. Today, again, the world is an uncertain place. Russia has forcibly taken Crimea. Syria is in the throes of a devastating civil war. What is the best approach? Should we pull up the drawbridge or co-operate with our neighbours?

The Labour and trade union movement was built on the principle of solidarity, and what is true for individuals is also true for nations. I believe that, since 2010, this Tory-led Government have set about mending the public finances in the wrong way—cuts instead of investment, austerity rather than growth—and this has led to deep unfairness and economic insecurity. People must now think carefully about what is the best choice in the real world.

On putting jobs first, why has the head of Hitachi said that “jobs would be lost” if we left the EU? Because Britain is a market of 60 million people, whereas Europe is a market of 500 million people. If we leave, next time he invests in a new production line, it will be more economic to build it somewhere else. Today, Rolls-Royce has said the same. Foreign indirect investment creates 85,000 jobs in this country every year, which are all at risk from Brexit.

The Brexit campaign has totally failed to set out how a new trading arrangement would work. It has suggested the arrangements for Norway, Switzerland, Canada and Albania, but even the Prime Minister of Albania does not think that that is a good idea. Why has the head of Glaxo, part of our brilliant pharmaceuticals industry, said that the EU is the best platform for success? Because one system for drug licensing is faster and more efficient than 28 systems. Yet Dominic Cummings, the Lord Chancellor’s former Spad who now runs Vote Leave, told the Treasury Committee that “that is complete rubbish.” Such breath-taking arrogance is putting 93,000 jobs at risk.

Let us look at the car industry. If we leave, it will face tariffs of 10%. It is supposed to cope with that through labour market flexibility, which, translated into English, means wage cuts. Wages account for only a third of total costs, so people would have to take a 30% pay cut or lose their jobs. There are 450,000 jobs at risk.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) have visited textile factories that, outside the EU, would face a 6.5% tariff. It is hard to cut wages in such factories because the Low Pay Commission reports that most of the workers are on the minimum wage, so another 56,000 jobs are at risk, mainly in the north and the midlands. When I challenged the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip about that, he said that “there is no need for them to worry.”

It is all right for him: on top of his MP’s salary, he takes home another £250,000 every year for his column in The Daily Telegraph. His attitude is flippant to the point of irresponsibility, and this is not a joke.

Let us look at what is happening in the markets: £60 billion has been wiped off the value of shares in London in a week, and people are so desperate to get their money out of London that they are prepared to spend it.

Steve Double: I thank my hon. Friend for that—I was about to make the point that over the past 10 years or so Cornwall has received around £600 million in economic development aid. Part of the money we get back from the EU comes in the form of economic development aid. The constituency in Cornwall that I have the privilege of representing is one of the areas in England that benefits the most from that aid. Over the past decades, Cornwall has received hundreds of millions of pounds in regional growth funding from the EU.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: I believe Cornwall has been getting around £65 million a year since 2001.

5.38 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I feel a bit of a lone voice because I am going to speak in favour of voting to leave next week. It is very important for me to do so because I believe that Labour Members’ comments about a Tory Brexit betray the fact that they are not listening to the British people. The vote next week will quite clearly be very close, but at least half of the British people have had enough of the EU and want to leave. By calling this a Tory Brexit, Labour Members are just not listening to the many millions of British people who have genuine concerns about our current relationship with the EU.

This debate, however, is about the supposed economic benefits of our membership of the EU. I will address one very specific point in that regard. According to the House of Commons Library, in 2016 Britain is forecast to give £20.5 billion gross and £11.2 billion net to the EU, so we will be getting back some money from that £20 billion. No one can deny that that will be a large sum of money, and there are various opinions about how it could be spent, but only if we leave will we get to decide how it can be apportioned.

Part of the money we get back from the EU comes in the form of economic development aid. The constituency in Cornwall that I have the privilege of representing is one of the areas in England that benefits the most from that aid. Over the past decades, Cornwall has received hundreds of millions of pounds in regional growth funding from the EU.

The Brexit campaign has totally failed to set out how a new trading arrangement would work. It has suggested the arrangements for Norway, Switzerland, Canada and Albania, but even the Prime Minister of Albania does not think that that is a good idea. Why has the head of Glaxo, part of our brilliant pharmaceuticals industry, said that the EU is the best platform for success? Because one system for drug licensing is faster and more efficient than 28 systems. Yet Dominic Cummings, the Lord Chancellor’s former Spad who now runs Vote Leave, told the Treasury Committee that “that is complete rubbish.” Such breath-taking arrogance is putting 93,000 jobs at risk.

Let us look at the car industry. If we leave, it will face tariffs of 10%. It is supposed to cope with that through labour market flexibility, which, translated into English, means wage cuts. Wages account for only a third of total costs, so people would have to take a 30% pay cut or lose their jobs. There are 450,000 jobs at risk.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) have visited textile factories that, outside the EU, would face a 6.5% tariff. It is hard to cut wages in such factories because the Low Pay Commission reports that most of the workers are on the minimum wage, so another 56,000 jobs are at risk, mainly in the north and the midlands. When I challenged the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip about that, he said that “there is no need for them to worry.”

It is all right for him: on top of his MP’s salary, he takes home another £250,000 every year for his column in The Daily Telegraph. His attitude is flippant to the point of irresponsibility, and this is not a joke.

Let us look at what is happening in the markets: £60 billion has been wiped off the value of shares in London in a week, and people are so desperate to get their money out of London that they are prepared to

pay the German Government to look after it. That may be good news for the hedge funders, who make their money betting on volatility and then use it to fund the Brexit campaign, but it is certainly not good news for the millions of people whose pensions depend on the strength of the FTSE 100.

Security and prosperity are linked. The question on the ballot paper is the choice between letting off the leash a right-wing Tory Brexit group that is able to destroy the life chances of millions of ordinary people, and voting to remain in and holding on to the security and prosperity that we have in the EU.
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) rose—

Steve Double: I will not take any more interventions, I am afraid.

There is a very simple reason for that failure. We are not able to spend the aid on what we need to in Cornwall. How we should spend it is dictated, Big Brother fashion, by the EU. The requirements are designed for a Europe-wide programme that does not fit the Cornish economy. I will give an example. The current round of funding is targeted only at supporting and providing facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises. But Cornwall does not need another load of SMEs. We need big companies to come and invest in Cornwall, to create better-paid jobs and provide career opportunities for our young people. That is what Cornwall desperately needs.

Just this week, business leaders told me that there were two projects on the table and ready to go. One was from a large company that wants to invest in Cornwall and create jobs, and the other was from a manufacturing company in Cornwall that is ready to expand, producing lots more jobs. Both need European regional development fund support but do not qualify for the current round because they are not SMEs. The EU is giving us back our own money but telling us we cannot spend it on what we need and want to spend it on in Cornwall.

I do not know whether any other Members recognise this situation, but I get quite wound up when I see that wonderful blue plaque saying, “Funded by the European Union”. Every time I see one, I think, “No, that was funded by British taxpayers' money that you have recycled and given back to us then told us how to spend.”

We are often told we should vote remain because of all the economic support we get from the EU. Well, from a Cornish point of view, it is not working. Our own money is recycled, but how it can be spent is dictated to us. I contend that we would be far better off keeping that money ourselves in the first place and having the British Government decide how we can support our regional economies.

The theme of this debate has been the risk of leaving against the certainty of remaining. I say that there are quite clearly risks in remaining. No one knows what the future of the EU will be. The eurozone crisis has not gone away, but has just been kicked into the long grass, and the migration crisis will continue to be a major issue in the EU. There is no certainty. The vote is not between the status quo and leaving. We are voting on whether to remain, and there are many, many risks in a remain vote. Let us be honest with the people of this country that there are risks on both sides. I will certainly be voting next week to leave.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I must reduce the time limit for speeches—[Interruption.] Members may well sigh, but I cannot add to the number of hours in a day or minutes in an hour. The time limit is four minutes.

5.45 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Sometimes in this Chamber we say that we have heard it all, but talk about turkeys voting for an early Christmas! The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) wants to give back £600 million that has been given to Cornwall by the EU. What twisted logic. Over the past two days, the world has woken up to the risks of Brexit. The hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) said that the markets bounced by £17 billion today, but she ignored the fact that the FTSE index has fallen by £100 billion over the past week—a net £80 billion has been wiped off the FTSE as investors around the world begin to recognise the threat to our prosperity. Every renowned economist in the land has talked about the risk that we face from Brexit, not just in this country, but the risk of instability in Europe as well.

Not long ago we faced the financial crisis of 2007 to 2008, from which we have barely recovered. We have seen the markets react and sterling fall; the euro has fallen as investors flee towards the door. That is the risk that the Brexiteers are putting in front of the people of the United Kingdom. When we consider the fall in the value of the stock market, we are talking about people whose future pensions are being cut. That is what the Brexiteers are threatening for pensioners around the country, and we must all wake up and ensure that we vote for prosperity, security and sustainability by remaining in the EU.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the argument made outside this House, and critically in English communities, is about policies such as housing? The problem of England’s housing shortage lies fairly and squarely at the feet of the British Government, and with successive Governments who have undermined social housing for the working class since the times of Margaret Thatcher.

Ian Blackford: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We hear scare stories about constraints on housing, health and education, but it is the Government’s responsibility to plan for the increase from immigration. We must also consider the opportunity for all our people to live and work throughout Europe, from which we have benefited. In Scotland, 42% of exports go to the European Union and have a value of £11 billion, with 300,000 jobs directly connected to them. We must not play with fire and risk prosperity and jobs in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

There is a complete fallacy about immigration. Mark my words: we will end up back in the single market, and as a consequence we will have to accept free movement of people. The idea that we will fix the so-called problem of immigration with an exit from the EU is simply flawed and a lie. In Scotland, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has often said, we are not full up. We need migration, and for young people to come with families and deliver prosperity for Scotland. We need families such as the Brains, who live in Dingwall in my constituency and who this Government want to throw out.

Let me turn to Europe’s potential, and how trade and investment have benefited us. Let me mention opportunities for jobs, and workers’ rights that have been protected through Europe. The Minister for Employment is not in her place, but she said that she wants to deal with some of the rights for workers that come from the European Union. We must say to those on the left and those who voted for Labour, the SNP,
the Green party and Plaid Cymru: “For goodness’ sake, don’t risk your employment rights with a vote for Brexit next week.”

There is a real danger to this country that if the UK votes for Brexit, the keys to Downing Street will be taken by the likes of the ex-Mayor of London and his cronies on the right of the Tory party. We face the risk of a right-wing Tory Government that will affect people throughout the country. Scotland’s future is in Europe, and if we end up next week with the UK voting out but Scotland voting in, the SNP will stand up for the rights of Scottish people and ensure that this House does not pull us out of Europe against our will.

5.49 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow such eloquent speeches from across the House. I probably share exactly the same concern as the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) about a possible increase in whisky prices. I hope staying inside the EU will keep prices down low.

It is often quite difficult, in a debate that has lasted for so many months and so many hours, to add something new. I want to commence today with a measured assessment of the highly likely instability a vote to leave would cause our economy and what that instability may lead to. Later, I want to return to the benefits our economy receives from our membership of the EU, particularly in the south-west and in my constituency.

We have heard from many economists in this debate, some of whom were more convincing than others. I am not an economist—I am an economic historian—but I think it is helpful to look back at recessions caused by external factors in our history and explain how their impact helps to predict what could happen after a Brexit in a couple of days’ time.

During the 1976 International Monetary Fund crisis, the Labour Government of the time faced one of the largest crises of confidence in the British economy since the second world war. Britain racked up huge debts, creditors lost confidence, there were runs on the banks, inflation was sky high, interest rates rocketed and unemployment began to shoot up. Fast-forward 30 years to the recession of 2007 to 2008 and the country was running a substantial deficit, debts had been rising for years and the world economy faced the worst sovereign debt crisis in our history. There were queues of people withdrawing cash from their bank, unemployment rose, recession hit the UK and it has taken years of hard work to rebuild the confidence of our creditors. The current Government have worked hard to restore our economy, brought unemployment levels to record lows and put more money in all our constituents’ pockets.

Both those incidents caused a reduction in the confidence of our creditors in our ability to repay our debts. One required an IMF bailout, the other a downgrade in our credit rating. Despite the hard efforts of this Government, a budget deficit still persists and it is vital that the costs of servicing that debt are kept low. We retain confidence that the UK will be able to service the debt. Rating agency Standard & Poor’s has already signalled a downgrade of the UK’s credit rating by up to two degrees in the event of Britain leaving the EU. We cannot sacrifice years of hard work of deficit reduction for a leap into the dark. We have to learn from our past mistakes before we make that decision. That is on top of the risks posed to jobs and economic growth that Members from across the House and almost every major economist and financial institution have warned about thus far.

Leaders of the leave camp cannot guarantee a single job in the event of an exit. I seriously do not think Britain is in a position to be able to put all that at risk. If we take the leap into the unknown, we do not know how big the recession will be, how long it will continue or how deep it will go. It is an absolute no-brainer: Britain is stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union.

Finally, I want to turn quickly to the benefits that the UK’s membership of the EU brings to the UK economy, in particular to my constituency. Many Members who are also from the south-west have noted that 250,000 jobs in the south-west are linked directly to our place in the EU, and that withdrawal from the European Union could put tens of thousands of jobs at risk in our region. The Government have done so much to boost our economy and reduce unemployment levels. All that hard work could be undone quickly as the result of a Brexit. My constituency has a very vibrant tourist economy. I do not want anything to put it at risk. In conclusion, we are better and stronger in the European Union than out.

5.53 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett). He rightly reminded us of some of the economic problems this country has had, so let us go back to 1973 and 1974 when we had a three-day week. Since then, despite difficulties throughout the time we have been in the European Union, our country has been wealthier, more prosperous and more influential in the world in those deep dark days of 1973. People forget that.

One thing that really concerns me about the referendum debate is that when people come to vote, they will not be answering the question that is on the ballot paper. Some are angry about rubbish in the street and some are disappointed because it takes them four hours to get through to their GP surgery on the phone. Someone told me she did not like it that her next-door neighbours, from eastern Europe, smoked in their garden rather than in their house, meaning she could not open her windows. When I put that on Twitter, I was accused of being patronising. I am sorry but these are the kinds of reasons being given in conversations I have had. The referendum is in danger of becoming a generalised, anti-Government and anti-politician vote. That is the danger of referendums.

But we are where we are. I ask my constituents to think about their children and grandchildren. This referendum is not a vote on how they feel today; it is a vote forever. It is like buying a dog: it is not just for Christmas. We need to think about what kind of country we are. Are we, as the Foreign Affairs Committee said in a recent report, going to become smaller and less influential in the world? Do we, by leaving the EU, want to damage our relationships with our Commonwealth partners and neighbours? India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sir Lanka, Australia and Canada all want the UK to remain in the EU because we make it more outward-looking to them and the rest of the world.
We face a fundamental choice over our future. How do we work effectively with partners on climate change? How do we deal with tax avoidance globally? How do we ensure minimum standards? How do we uphold the values of the universal declaration of human rights, which are under attack from Russia and others? On that last point, it is great that today an EU country—unfortunately not us but Slovakia—has beaten Russia 2:1 in the Euros. It augurs well for our country on 23 June. Russia is not going to win the Euros, and it is not going to get its way in our referendum.

A generation of politicians failed Boston. First, it was Portugal and then Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and beyond that sent their most motivated people to do low-paid work, primarily in Britain's fields. Two things happened as a result. First, agriculture thrived and population growth meant a raft of businesses sprang up aimed specifically at new communities. Some churches thrived and local hospitals that previously struggled for numbers found they had the opposite problem. But the second thing was the other side of the coin: pressure on public services increased, the tax credits bill rose and local people saw their town change rapidly. People started to say they did not hear English accents on the streets as much as they previously had. Those tensions were palpable.

The impact of free movement and of economic growth means that Boston is, on paper, thriving, but it is often noted as the most Eurosceptic place in the United Kingdom. Some 10,000, and in reality many more, of the 65,000 population are not English. Why, then, did they elect a pro-EU MP? It is clear to me that Europe needs reform, but ultimately this referendum is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to plough our future. That time, my constituency voted to remain in the European Economic Community by 2:1. I have been knocking on doors for several months and have spoken to many of my constituents on the Labour In for Britain bus and at the street stall last Saturday in the centre of Denton, so I am not naive enough to think that that result will be repeated next Thursday. It is likely that when the votes are counted, my constituency will be on the opposite side of the argument.

In common with the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness, I think it would be remiss of me not to explain to those among my constituents who have yet to make up their mind why I believe that a vote to remain in the European Union would offer the best future for the communities that make up Denton and Reddish. I do so by challenging some of the assumptions of the leave campaign. I was unfortunate enough to watch its television broadcast last night, and it seemed to fall into five areas: the £350 million; the NHS; immigration; values of the universal declaration of human rights, which are under attack from Russia and others; and “take back control of our country”.

Well, we know that the £350 million figure is incorrect because it fails to take into account the rebate that Mrs Thatcher secured or the money we get from the EU for our fishing and farming industries, for science, training, education and urban regeneration.

When it comes to the NHS, I say that money cannot be spent twice. The money that we send to the European Union would almost certainly have to be sent to the EU anyway for us to continue to trade within a free trade area. If we use Norway as an example, we find that it pays more per head of population for its position than we do to be a fully paid-up member of the European Union. That money is not going to be there for the NHS.

As for immigration, if we have a Norwegian or Swiss-style deal—, of course, none of us actually knows what deal the Brexiteers are proposing—we shall have to accept free movement within the single market. And as for Turkey, we have a veto on Turkish membership, because we are at the table with the other 27 European Union member states. If we give that up, we shall have no say, particularly if the rest of the European Union reaches an agreement on Turkish membership, and we are in the free trade area that will then include Turkey.

I believe one thing above all else: this referendum is not an opportunity to punish the young for the mistakes of previous politicians, but it is a chance for politicians to reflect on ourselves here. We need to explain better, communicate more and make sure that disconnection does not extend to disenfranchisement.

I will vote to remain tonight, and I expect that the House will do the same, but we must note the difference between the result in this House and the result on Thursday. We must look to our own future if we are adequately to represent our constituents in the future. I will vote to remain, but I urge all Members to understand why there is a deep and legitimate disconnect between many of our constituents and many of us across this House.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), who described next week’s vote as a “once-in-a-generation opportunity”. Having been born in 1974, that is certainly how I see it. I was just one at the time of the last European referendum in 1975. For me, it really is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to look to the future. When it comes to the NHS, I say that money cannot be spent twice. The money that we send to the European Union would almost certainly have to be sent to the EU anyway for us to continue to trade within a free trade area. If we use Norway as an example, we find that it pays more per head of population for its position than we do to be a fully paid-up member of the European Union. That money is not going to be there for the NHS.

As for immigration, if we have a Norwegian or Swiss-style deal—, of course, none of us actually knows what deal the Brexiteers are proposing—we shall have to accept free movement within the single market. And as for Turkey, we have a veto on Turkish membership, because we are at the table with the other 27 European Union member states. If we give that up, we shall have no say, particularly if the rest of the European Union reaches an agreement on Turkish membership, and we are in the free trade area that will then include Turkey.
Finally, there is “taking back control”. I agree, in one sense, with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who says that being in a free trade area, or a common market, means having to accept common rules and regulations. What kind of control are we taking back when we give up our seat at the table in the Council of Ministers, when we give up our European Commissioner, and when we give up our European parliamentary seats, where precisely those common rules and regulations are being made? That is not taking back control; it is giving up control.

I say this to the constituents of Denton and Reddish: next Thursday, vote remain.

6.6 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in such an important debate.

Next week, as we know, the country faces an historic vote. We will all have the chance to have our say on the UK’s future, be it remain or leave. However, we must remember that this is not a general election. If we are not happy, we cannot vote again in five years’ time and change our minds.

It was the campaign to keep the pound that first got me involved in politics. I was, and still am, sceptical about the European Union, and I will always feel more British—in fact, more northern—than European. I also come from a business background, and, having seen it at first hand, I understand the frustration caused by the red tape with which small businesses in particular are often faced.

On a personal level, I have found the decision on whether to remain or leave a tough one. Like many, I have pondered, and I have considered the arguments for and against. I have sometimes struggled with the arguments presented by both sides, and, I must add, the tone in which they have been presented. Having spoken to constituents at the weekend, I believe that a number of them feel the same. I am not content with the EU, and that is why I have taken my time. I wanted to be sure about my decision. I am under no illusion about the fact that there are those who will accuse me of having sat on the fence, but for me, it was important to make the right decision.

Over the weekend, I talked to one of my constituents about the EU. We had had discussions with others about remain and exit, and all the ins and outs and all the arguments, but that one person said something that really struck me: “All that I want from politicians is for them to be straight with us, the British public.” It was one of those moments when one hears very wise words, and I heard them from someone on my patch.

Having taken account of all the matters involved—but especially business and the economy, safety and security—I will, on balance, support the remain campaign. That does not mean that I am content with the status quo; far from it. The EU needs continuous reform, and it is time that it was more accountable to us. I noted the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) about our connecting, or reconnecting, with the public. We need that connection with Europe as well, so that we understand more about what it is doing for us.

During the last few years, we have done so much work and made such tough decisions to secure our country’s economy, and I do not want that to be put at risk. I believe that it is in the interests of my constituency and my country to remain.

6.9 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton). I congratulate her on making absolutely the right choice about the referendum.

The decision facing the electorate on 23 June is a choice between economic security and global influence inside the EU or a leap in the dark outside it, and nowhere will the consequences of that choice be more deeply felt than in my constituency, where the Port Talbot steelworks is the beating heart of our economy and community. I was therefore pleased to see that this week Tata Steel UK sent an all-staff communication stating:

“The European Union influences very important aspects of Tata Steel’s business in the UK. The EU is by far our largest export market, with over a third of our UK steel heading there. And that’s not including the steel that goes via our customers—the EU is a critical export market for the UK’s car makers for example. So access to that market is fundamental to our business and one of the preconditions for this trade is that EU laws and regulations are followed. If the UK were to exit the EU and set these rules ourselves, it is likely we would still need to adhere to EU rules to enter that market. The difference: we would no longer have a say in how those rules are set up or applied.”

We know that the British steel industry is in a precarious state. The last thing it needs now is the turmoil that would be unleashed by a Brexit. That is why I am looking forward to once again joining steelworkers in Aberavon town on Saturday to send the message loud and clear that the steel industry is stronger, safer and better off inside the EU.

The bread-and-butter case for remaining is clear, but there is also a compelling strategic case to be made. The fact is that Britain succeeds when we open ourselves to the world, not when we close ourselves off. We succeed as a nation when we trade, forge alliances and build bridges. We are at our best when we are leading, not leaving.

In the spirit of cross-party consensus that is gripping the House this afternoon, I would like to quote Winston Churchill, who in 1948 spoke of the “three majestic circles” that should define our approach to the world: the Commonwealth, the United States and Europe, with Britain being “the very point of juncture”, the only country with “a great part in every one of them”.

Churchill’s message is as true today as it was almost 70 years ago. He knew then, and we know now, that weakening our ties with one circle will inevitably weaken our ties with all three. President Obama made that clear during his recent visit, because he knows that a strong Britain in a strong Europe is a stronger ally for the US. We need not just take his word for it; Prime Minister Modi has said that Britain is India’s gateway to the EU. If we leave, Mr Modi’s priority will not be us, it will be to find a new gateway.

Like all nations, we have grappled with the forces of globalisation for thousands of years. From the moment the Romans landed on our shores, we have been an
[Stephen Kinnock]

integral part of the international community, buffeted by the winds of commerce, conflict and geopolitics. Over the centuries we marshalled the arts of empire building, trade, and alliance building to emerge as the pre- eminent global power. Since 1948 we have evolved from being an imperial power to being a global partner. This transformation—this journey—has been morally, politically and economically right, and it has been powered by the politics of economic realism. The movement of goods, services, capital and people across national borders has given rise to a world in which the lines between the domestic and the foreign have blurred. Fast-forward 42 years and we see how right we were; from the steel crisis to the Panama papers, from the refugee crisis to taking on the Kremlin, the EU is the key player in all those issues, and that is why it is critical that we vote to remain on 23 June.

6.13 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I was born in March 1976, almost exactly nine months after the last referendum; I have not dared ask my parents how they felt about the result. I never expected to be campaigning to leave the EU, having spent seven very happy years working in the European Parliament for what was then the EPP-ED Group, working on internal market policy, including the development of the existing services directive. I have certainly seen a number of benefits of the EU, but I have also seen too many of the frustrations and limitations that are involved in our membership.

This is a question on which it is possible to have mixed feelings. It is also a question on which it is quite possible, and indeed right and natural, for good and reasonable people to reach different conclusions without any of them ceasing to be good, reasonable and rational people. I do not take a negative view of the Prime Minister’s renegotiations, as some people have done. I think it was genuinely the best deal available, and it is an improvement as far as it goes. If we end up staying in the EU, I saw that happening far too many times during the crisis to the Panama papers, from the refugee crisis to taking on the Kremlin, the EU is the key player in all those issues, and that is why it is critical that we vote to remain on 23 June.

I understand the argument that the Foreign Secretary made earlier. He talked about the number of our partners who are suddenly committed to competitiveness. I used to feel that way too—I used to believe it—but unfortunately, I saw that happening far too many times during the seven years that I was in the European Parliament. I remember Lord Patten calling for an end to the EU interfering in every nook and cranny of daily life. I remember Romano Prodi’s competitiveness action plan, and, a few years later, José Barroso’s revitalised Lisbon strategy. Each was announced, with a great deal of fanfare as a game changer in how the EU approached competitiveness and growth, but it was always back to business as usual within a few months. I have seen nothing to suggest that anything has really changed since I left 10 years ago, because it is in the culture of the European Union to be a rather more insular and inward-looking organisation than it ought to be.

I am proud to be Member of Parliament in the black country. It is the home of the industrial revolution, and we still produce world-class goods and services that are sold around the world. I am proud to represent businesses that export to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world—countries such as India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, China and Taiwan. Sadly, the EU is too often a barrier to trading with those countries. I saw that when I was in Brussels, and I have certainly seen it since, as a Member of Parliament. I have therefore reached the conclusion that black country trade would be better served if Britain were to take back the power to negotiate those trade deals and reclaim its independent voice on international bodies.

This week’s edition of The Spectator is surely correct in saying that no one—politician, economist or mystic—can be sure what the future has in store, and whether we will remain or leave. However, we can be sure that whatever happens, Britain will be better able to respond and adapt as a sovereign country living under its own laws. Britain can look forward to a prosperous, more outward-looking future trading and co-operating in Europe and also with countries outside Europe. That is why, like so many of my constituents and so many small businesses, I shall be voting to leave the European Union.

6.17 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I shall be voting next week to remain in the European Union, for three reasons—an idealistic reason, a practical reason and a selfish reason. The idealistic reason is that the EU has contributed to peace and freedom within its member states, and that is something for us to be proud of.

The practical reason is that we are interconnected with our European neighbours. A constituent stopped me on the street and asked whether we would still be able to use the European health insurance card if we came out of Europe. She was anxious because her husband has a particular medical condition and they have to go to a warm climate in Europe every winter. They are protected by the European health insurance card while they are there. That makes a practical difference to her, and she told me that if it were not for the card, they would have to pay an extra £2,000 each time, which would make it impossible for them to go. So practically, it is important that we stay in the European Union.

The selfish reason is that we are better off in the European Union. No one in this debate has challenged the view that there will be a massive economic shock if we leave. Everyone accepts that. Indeed, that fact is recognised by nine out of 10 economists, by the OECD, by the IMF and by the World Bank. There is consensus on that, and it is clear that there will be difficulties if we leave and that jobs and livelihoods will be affected. It is better for our self-interest if we remain in the EU.

The list of businesses lining up to say that they are in favour of remaining in the European Union is vast. It includes Hitachi, J. P. Morgan, GKN, Airbus, Glaxo, BT Openreach and, today, Rolls-Royce. They are joined by 90% of trade unions. Businesses and employers’ and employees’ organisations are in favour of remaining. The EEF, the manufacturers employers association, is overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the EU because it is good for manufacturing, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) said, the steel industry would face even more challenges if we left the EU.
Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right. After the miners’ strike in the mid-1980s, the running down of coal mining in my constituency and many others in South Yorkshire devastated the local economies, which were fragile even when mining was taking place. Thousands of jobs were lost not only in coal mining but in supply industries. The objective 1 programme, which was introduced in 2000 and ran for six years, put some £2.4 billion into not only jobs and skills but health, neighbourhood renewal and housing. More than £820 million of that came from Europe, and without it south Yorkshire would not be what it is today. Many Ministers travel to places like the advanced manufacturing park, but they would not be able to go there if Europe had not taken the lead in the regeneration of poor areas in the UK. Such places just would not be there.

Nic Dakin: My right hon. Friend is completely right about the power of the European Union in assisting us in regenerating areas of the countries like his so that there can be a renaissance and they can move forward.

I echo the reference that has been made to Siemens, which is an important employer in my region, with a base in Lincoln and developments in Hull. It has said: “Siemens believes that being part of the EU is good for UK jobs and prosperity and we have concerns about the possible effects of a vote to leave.”

The company is investing in new wind power and renewables, which bring a lot of opportunities for steel. We should not take any risks with that future.

There is a massive choice about our future before the nation. In making that choice, I hope that everyone thinks it through very carefully. We respect the view of the British people, and I hope very much that they vote to remain.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid that a three-minute limit will need now to apply.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I wish to speak today to outline the huge benefits that have been secured by our membership of the European Union and, in particular, the benefits to my constituency and the wider valleys of south Wales. There is no doubt that the choice facing our country next week is the biggest political decision many of us will face in our lifetime. The EU was set up after the second world war and has acted as a forum to bring the countries of Europe together to promote peace and partnership. We have seen a long period of sustained peace during this time, and we should not underestimate the role of the EU in promoting peace across the continent of Europe.

In my constituency, and across south Wales, we have seen huge investment in recent years in transport projects, regeneration and support for training and job opportunities. In the 1980s, the Thatcher Government ripped the heart out of many of the communities in south Wales and left thousands of people on the scrapheap. Following the election of a Labour Government in 1997, and the work done by Gordon Brown and Tony Blair to secure European objective 1 status for the valleys and west Wales, we have seen our valleys regenerated. Working with the Welsh Government, many communities have seen their areas transformed. In the community where I live, local people, the local authorities and others have worked hard to develop a regeneration strategy that secured European funding and regenerated our area. Over the past 15 years, we have seen new employment units, new museums and a new community resource centre, all match-funded with EU funds. These projects were also a catalyst for further investment from the local authority and the Welsh Government.

Merthyr Tydfil town centre has seen huge regeneration, and the area is almost unrecognisable from what it was about 15 years ago. Town centre enhancement has taken place, with the creation of open space with a new town square. The wider county borough of Merthyr Tydfil has seen improved transport links, flood alleviation schemes and village centre improvements. Merthyr Tydfil has a brand-new, state-of-the-art college, attracting and supporting students in a variety of fields. The college has benefited hugely from the EU and continues to do so. When I visited there last October, students highlighted to me the benefits of the Erasmus programme, which supports our young people to study and undertake exchange visits and learning across the EU.

In Wales, thousands of jobs are supported by, or are reliant on, EU funding, and leaving the EU would have a massively negative impact on the Welsh economy. The claims by some Tories that leaving the EU would free up investment for public services is almost laughable. These are the very people who have spent their political lives dismantling public services and creating a smaller state. I do not believe for one minute that they have had a damascene-style conversion. The idea there would be extra investment for public services is just not credible.

As a socialist, I believe that we are always better off together—better off working in partnership with others. We will always achieve more by our common endeavour than we will do alone. I believe that to be the case for individuals, communities and indeed countries. For the sake of our communities and for our standing in the world, the only vote next week, on 23 June, is for us to remain.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The EU is far from perfect—we have heard that today—but that is true of this place, too. The policies that have come out of this place have really impacted on people in our communities, and many of them are finding life tough.

As I have gone through the streets of York listening to people, I have heard them talk about housing and the fact that this Government have not built the houses in which they can afford to live. They are talking about their job insecurity. Some 4.5 million people are now experiencing insecurity at work, and people are really struggling with the cuts to public services. All those issues that people are articulating come from Westminster, not the EU.

I want to consider and draw out these questions. Why is it that those who have always strived for people to have decent jobs and good employment rights; who are against the agencies undercutting workers; and who have always argued for protections around health and safety in the workplace—the trade unions—are arguing for us to remain and reform? Why are those who have always spoken up against inequality, injustice and poverty;
who have created the fight against the things that are happening at the moment; and who have always supported our communities saying remain and reform? Why is the Archbishop of Canterbury making the argument? Why is the Archbishop of York, who has just spent six months walking 2,000 miles and listening to people, saying remain and reform Europe?

The environmental movement understands the fragility of our planet, and it is saying that the way that we will change that is to remain and reform. The universities—the brains of Britain—say that for the future of our science base and research base we must remain in Europe and reform from the inside.

We must listen to the forces of good in our country. These are the people who have a history of always standing up for our families and our communities, and they are united in saying remain in Europe, but reform it as we go. They are unlike the Brexiteers—the people who have brought forward the bedroom tax, cuts to the benefits of disabled people, and harsh pension rules, and who have not protected people desperately needing homes. The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), for example, slashed social housing plans in London so that the millionaires could buy their assets. These are the people who have also advocated privatisation in the NHS.

We need to stand with those who have always fought for the people of this country. They are the people who are saying remain and reform. History is on their side, and as we face the challenges of our planet today, we need to be in the debate and at the table so that we can form the agenda for the future. We should not be isolated and on our own. Therefore, the only option on 23 June is to vote to remain in the EU.

6.28 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I wanted to use my short time to focus on the importance of the European Union to communities in my constituency of Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, in the highlands and of course in Scotland. There are 175,000 EU citizens living and working in Scotland out of a population of 5.4 million people. We have a problem not of immigration, but of emigration in the highlands. Those people from the EU who work for us are vital to the health industry. They fill skills gaps and help our tourism economy, but they are more than that. These people are not just numbers and EU citizens, but our neighbours, our friends and part of our communities. It is a two-way process. At the moment, both of my sons are working abroad in Europe: one in Germany and one in Spain. Earlier, we heard it said that this is about not immigrants or migrants, but expats when it suits.

**Ian Blackford:** I am delighted that my hon. Friend has given way. He is making some very important points. Does he also agree that those of us representing seats in the highlands and islands have benefited enormously from the European Union with the investment that is taking place in our roads and our infrastructure? The European Union has been a voice for good, and that is true for our crofters and farmers. All highlanders, along with everyone else, should vote to stay in.

**Drew Hendry:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. If not for the 40 years of the European Union, I wonder whether we would have that symbol of progress in the highlands, the Kessock bridge, which unites our constituencies. Given the paucity of investment from the Westminster Government through those decades, I believe that we would not have seen that or many other investments. Just imagine what would have happened there.

The UK’s relationship with the EU is a two-way street. We heard earlier about the European health card. This week I got the great news that Stephanie Inglis, the Commonwealth games medal-winning athlete who was critically injured in Vietnam, is coming home. That is terrific news. She was out there with travel insurance, and the insurance company found a loophole allowing it not to pay. It has taken £300,000 worth of fundraising to pay her bill. Imagine if that accident had happened in the European Union to one of our constituents without cover. That is why it is important that we recognise what we get back.

Between 2014 and 2021 the EU will have invested €192 million in the highlands and islands through the transition programme. We get more out than we put in. The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) is not in his seat—he obviously read his badge and took it as an instruction. If he wants to give that money to the highlands and islands, he is welcome to do so. Tourism is a £5.4 billion industry in the highlands, and airfares have been reduced by 40% over the time that we have been involved in the European Union, and budget airlines have become available to us.

The right-wing element in the leave campaign—which is the Leave campaign—wants to get rid of red tape, employment rights and consumer rights. That is the kind of red tape that leave campaigners want to get rid of. The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has spoken of a takeover. He has always had a long-term plan. Today it seems that there is a possibility that he will make Mr Farage a Lord so that he can bypass holding a by-election for him. We know that the hon. Member. For Uxbridge and South Ruislip wants a Boris island. On 23 June let us not make the UK Boris island.

6.32 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): I will start as I intend to finish. We need to think what will happen next week if we vote to leave. Who will be driving the Brexit bus? It will not be the hapless Prime Minister or the man who has been described as Pinocchio from No. 11. It will be people such as the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the man who trebled tuition fees, brought us a Back to the Future school system, took away the education maintenance allowance and destroyed Sure Start, or the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who destroyed Remploy, brought in the bedroom tax, gave Atos free rein, cut sick pay, cut jobseeker’s allowance and hit disabled people’s security.

Others who would be on the Brexit bus include the Leader of the House, who privatised probation, sacked 7,000 prison officers, destroyed legal aid, restricted access to tribunals and cut support for personal injury legislation; the new kid on the block, the Minister for Employment, who described British workmen as the laziest in the
world and pretends that she will pump billions into the NHS and VAT cuts; the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is risking the peace in Northern Ireland, ignoring the impact on our oldest and closest neighbour, and pretending that we can leave the porous border between the north and the south and still keep out the so-called hordes from Turkey, Syria and Iran; and finally, the clown prince, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who sold out his friends, his party and his country to move from City Hall to No. 10. His idea of negotiation was never to meet the unions while the tube was in chaos. He is a man who thinks that a funny line puts everything right. Well, I’m sorry—this is no laughing matter. If we want a joker to be Prime Minister, let us vote for Peter Kay.

That is the motley crew who will be in charge if we vote leave next Thursday. Behind them all is the man who has had the Prime Minister on the run for a decade, Mr “Farridge”. These are the people who will be heading off to Brussels with the intention of coming back here and starting this country on a path to deregulation and a free-for-all. They really do want the UK to be the Hong Kong of Europe.

To all those who are confused by the position of my party in the debate, I say, “Be very, very clear. If the Brexiteers win next week, you will need Labour more than ever.” This is the fight of our lives and it is more important than party politics. It is the defining moment of this new millennium. I urge everyone not to make the mistake of getting even with politicians who they think have let them down. I urge people not to let their anger and worries blind them to the reality of where we could end up, and not to let an unprincipled bunch of right-wing deregulators use xenophobia and racism as a front to change the future prosperity and security of this country.

6.34 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): This is the last of my chances over the past few weeks to put the case as an Ulster Unionist that not all Unionists are for leaving—the Ulster Unionist party is for staying in, although it is a free vote for the others. I am proud to be part of the Northern Irish team that wants to remain, along with the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Alliance and Sinn Féin, although we all have slightly different views. As we have heard, we all need to pull together if we are to remain. The public are fed up with the battling, the bullying and the hyping; they just want—in so far as they can—to have the facts on the table, to know how they will be affected and to have a chance to vote. We have to let them decide, and then things fall to us.

I say, as a Unionist, that we all have to work together. My greatest concern in this whole debate is that the Union may fall apart if we leave the EU. If Scotland, as SNP Members have indicated today, does its own thing, Northern Ireland will be stuck out there in the north-west, with Ireland on a different set of rules and Scotland on a different set of rules. We will then be coming to England for help whenever we need it, although I do not want Northern Ireland to carry on holding out a begging bowl.

When it comes to the economy, I am proud to have been on a Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that produced a balanced document, given that seven of its members were for out, and all the others were for in, and I recommend that document to everyone. However, the key point for me was when an Italian hedge funder told me, “It’s all very well for everyone in the south and everyone who is wealthy. They’ll be able to bounce along and succeed on their own if you leave, but everyone else—those who don’t have the strong marketing teams and the funds to expand—will struggle. They will be the ones who suffer.” That is the north, Scotland and all sorts of other places. We need to pull together. The Union should pull together.

The last point I want to make is that, when we go to the Somme and see the countryside and all the graves, we realise that there was not just that war—there was Waterloo, Agincourt and all the other European wars. Our duty is to lead and to be in there, showing people how to do things, pulling them all together, changing what needs to be changed, and not having the bloodbaths we had in the past. That is why I want to stay in.

6.37 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): There are great economic benefits from being a member of the European Union, and those are nowhere more obvious than in Wales. I am very proud of the investment that has been made in west Wales and the valleys, but less proud of the fact that we receive this money because we are one of the poorest regions in Europe.

A generation ago, the economic foundations of my constituency were torn apart by the closure of the mines; but visit Neath now and you see a bustling town, with shops opening, businesses starting up and a £13 million town centre redevelopment in progress, due to EU funding. But that image of a bright future is now on hold until a week tomorrow.

Projects financed through our membership of the EU have helped launch 485 businesses, supported 7,300 people into work and created more than 1,355 jobs. Some 14,870 qualifications have been gained, and nearly 5,000 people have completed an EU-funded apprenticeship in Neath County Borough.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is leading with the Workways project, funded through £16.7 million of EU structural funds. The project has tackled barriers that prevented individuals from finding or returning to employment; supported job searches; improved CV-writing and interview skills; and provided access to training. It has also developed links with local employers.

I must also mention the Swansea Bay science and innovation campus, which has had a substantial impact on Neath and the surrounding region. That would not have happened without £95 million of EU funding. I praise the efforts of Derek Vaughan, Labour MEP for Wales and former leader of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and Ali Thomas, the current leader, for creating that project. We are very proud of them.

I would be delighted if the leave campaigners could offer guarantees that in the event of Brexit, structural funds currently provided to west Wales and the valleys would be replaced like for like by the Government—gobsmacked, but delighted. However, like the Welsh First Minister, Carwyn Jones, I doubt that would happen. Yesterday, Carwyn said of the leave campaigners that they “have no more power”.

"have no more power"
to make such a promise
“than my children’s pet cat.”
They could do nothing to protect the 100,000 jobs in Wales that depend on our trade. For that reason, I will vote to remain.

4.60 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op):
I thank the more than 35 hon. Members from both sides of the House who have made speeches. I cannot mention them all, but I shall highlight a few of the points that were made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) talked about anger at cuts to public services but said that there is no way that leaving the European Union will magically solve that problem. My hon. Friends the Members for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) and for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) said that 160,000 jobs in the north-east are reliant on trade with the European Union, with much that comes through European structural funds that create opportunities for jobs, start-ups, and their local economies.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) talked about concerns about the impact on our manufacturing industries. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) noted the total failure of the leave campaign to set out how any new trade agreement could work.

John Redwood rose—

Seema Malhotra: I am afraid I do not have time to give way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) said that our rights are safer if we stand together, and that we should not risk those rights being jeopardised by those who see them as red tape. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) said that we need to stay in the single market for our economic prosperity and security, that we should not risk a race to the bottom on working conditions, and that the vote next week is a choice of austerity versus prosperity and influence versus irrelevance.

We are a proud nation—proud of our history, our diversity and our place in the world as a nation that has been at the forefront of progress in science and technology and in politics. I am proud of our place at the heart of the European Union. The vote next week is not just about keeping the world as it is today—it is about how we stand tall with our neighbours in shaping and creating the world of tomorrow, and facing the global challenges of sharing our prosperity and tackling the issues on the environment, tax avoidance and humanitarian crises. Those challenges will not go away if we leave the European Union; instead, we will have fewer allies as we seek to confront them. For our trade, manufacturing and employment, we gain from being members of the European Union. That is why Labour is pro-Europe and the party for reform in Europe. Our message is based on opportunity, hope and fairness—opportunities for future generations and for our economy and society from our membership, now and in the future.

I spoke to a man in my constituency who was conflicted about his vote. His parents were planning to vote leave, but then he asked himself what that would mean for his children. He thought about his children’s opportunities and decided it was vital to get his parents to think again about what their vote would mean for their grandchildren. Why are young people so positive about the European Union? It is because they cherish the freedom to travel, to learn and to experience what Europe and the world have to offer. When young people think about migration, they can see it also in terms of the opportunities it brings for them. Yes, we recognise that immigration needs fair rules and proper controls, but we cannot deny the benefits. Over the past decade, migrants from new EU member countries have contributed £20 billion more in taxes than they have taken in public services and benefits. More than 52,000 EU migrants work in the NHS.

We understand people’s legitimate concerns about the threat to their jobs from the undercutting of wages and the pressure on public services, but that is why we need stronger laws against bad employers and the migration impact fund, which should never have been cut. We need more houses and access to skills and apprenticeships.

I have no truck with those who say that we should choose between the Commonwealth and the European Union. That is absolutely a false choice. When the people and leaders of the Commonwealth nations say that it is in our interest to remain, we should listen to them. Likewise, when young entrepreneurs say that being in the EU has given their businesses the chance to go global overnight, and when scientists such as Stephen Hawking and 150 fellows of the Royal Society say that membership is vital for the future of scientific research, we should listen to them. When the National Union of Students, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the OECD, the National Farmers Union and many others say that we should remain, we should listen to them.

We are part of plans to create a digital single market in Europe, which will be a huge opportunity for Britain’s tech industry, creating the best part of 4 million jobs and worth £400 billion a year. Many of those jobs and opportunities will be available to this country’s entrepreneurs. Why would we walk away from that? This is what the future of the European Union can offer: more jobs, better jobs and better rights at work.

The European Investment Bank, an EU institution in which Britain holds a sixth of the shares, is the world’s largest international public bank and it is directly owned by member states. In the past 10 years, the bank has invested more than £40 billion in UK infrastructure. Last year alone, the UK received £5.6 billion from the EIB to help regenerate communities and invest in infrastructure up and down the country, with projects such as campuses in Swansea and Belfast and the technology and innovation hub at Strathclyde, and £250 million went to Northumbrian Water.

Let me be clear: I do not wish to scaremonger, and no one should vote based on fear, but people must vote with their eyes open to the risks. I have been asking businesses what makes Britain an attractive destination to invest in, and companies tell me time and again that they choose to invest in Britain because of our language, inclusive culture, heritage and world-class education system, but a key compelling factor is because it also provides access to European markets and, through them, to the rest of the world. That pull factor will disappear overnight if we walk away from the European Union.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady give way?
Speech, declared for remain here on the Floor of the Brownhills (Wendy Morton), in a moving and important from each side. I cannot mention all of them, so I will refer briefly to four—two staying in Europe, many of them passionately so. I cannot 53 speakers today, 46 of whom have supported Britain's Union than outside on our own. There have been the debate, I want to be very clear about my conviction is really in the interests of everyone in the UK.

We achieve much more by our common endeavour and by working together. When we look around the world, the achievements of the European Union must not be taken for granted. Sometimes, in the words of Joni Mitchell, “you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone”. We know that the European Union is not perfect, but this is an argument for reform, not for walking away. A vote to remain is a vote for stability and security for all our citizens in an increasingly uncertain global world. It is a vote to remain part of the world’s biggest trading bloc, with safeguards for the environment and protection for consumers.

We should be leading, not leaving. I urge all hon. Members to join us in the Aye Lobby tonight.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): It is my privilege to bring this most timely debate to a close. This is, of course, the final word from the Government at the Dispatch Box before the British people go to the polls next week to make one of the most important decisions about the future of the United Kingdom in the modern era. For many people, this is the biggest political decision that they have ever had to make. Indeed, I was only nine years old at the time of the 1975 referendum.

This is not like a general election. It is not just a choice for the next five years. There is no going back from the choice that we make, as a nation, next Thursday. A vote to leave would be irreversible. There is no “try before you buy”, and there are no returns. That makes it all the more important that we make the most of the opportunities, such as this debate, to look again at what is really in the interests of everyone in the UK.

I thank all Members for their contributions. In closing the debate, I want to be very clear about my conviction that the UK is far better off as part of the European Union than outside on our own. There have been 53 speakers today, 46 of whom have supported Britain's staying in Europe, many of them passionately so. I cannot mention all of them, so I will refer briefly to four—two from each side.

First, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), in a moving and important speech, declared for remain here on the Floor of the House. I commend her for making the right choice. In the interest of fairness, let me briefly mention one of the speeches against the motion, of which there were not many; there were seven in all. I did not agree with the arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), but she made extensive references to Looe in her constituency, where I spent many happy years as a child growing up, and it was great to hear references to places such as Pengelly's fish shop.

I will mention two speeches from Labour, by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly). Far be it from me to suggest how Members should campaign in their constituencies on the matter, but I thought both of them did well to mention the local businesses, local jobs and local facilities that would be under threat from a vote to leave the European Union. I have to mention that the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme and I were both migrant workers in the 1980s in West Berlin in the Feischmnecker-Etage of the Kaufhaus des Westens.

I want us to remain, and I say that as someone who is not blind to the faults and the flaws of the European Union. Being critical of the EU does not mean wanting to leave the EU; it means wanting to keep enjoying all the benefits it has to offer while continuing to fight for the best interests of the UK in Europe. If we choose to stay, we can have the best of both worlds. We will never be forced to join the euro, and the deal struck by the Prime Minister in February means that our rights as a country outside the eurozone will be protected, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) said. We will have no membership of Schengen, no ever-closer political union, greater control over welfare and greater control over the pull factors for migration.

Crucially, we will also be at the heart of the single market, which is improving in the areas of services, capital, energy and digital. We will have a seat at the table when the rules affecting us are set. We can trade freely with half a billion people inside the EU. As part of this huge trading bloc, we have gained much better deals with other countries across the globe than we ever would have done had the UK been sitting at the negotiating table alone.

John Redwood: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I do not have the time. I am sorry.

Today, we have seen yet further proof that the UK’s economy is on the road to recovery. We have the highest employment level on record. Unemployment is at its lowest since 2005, the year I first entered Parliament. We can be proud of what we have achieved. However, we are putting our hard-won recovery in jeopardy: with one enormous leap into the dark in just eight days’ time, we risk throwing it all away.

I care about facing up to the facts. It is only right to examine what voting to leave might do and, frankly, we should be concerned. In the Treasury, we have done a lot of work to understand what leaving the EU might mean for this country. One study of the short-term impact of leaving suggests that if we vote to leave, we could be pushing ourselves headlong into a recession within a couple of years. In fact, compared with remaining,
we might well see a rise in unemployment of between 520,000 and 820,000; a fall of between 12% and 15% in the value of sterling; a decrease in GDP of between 3.6% and 6.0%; and increased borrowing of anything up to £39 billion, which is the equivalent of a third of the NHS budget each year. Some people say, “So what?” Others say, “This is a price worth paying.” For the vast majority of people in this country, however, these things—they are just what will happen in the immediate aftermath—really matter.

We have debated employment rights quite a bit and heard about the benefits of the EU in creating and guaranteeing them, but no one among the leavers has been quite clear about which of these rights would be guaranteed if we leave. So many questions have been left unanswered about what Britain might be like if we left. Of course, there is also the possibility we might still just have to follow any regulations handed down by Brussels, but, crucially, with no choice or influence over what they are. Norway is a clear example: it is required to comply with EU legislation, such as the working time directive or the agency workers directive, in exchange for access to the EU market, but, crucially, with no vote on the decision making.

It is also unclear how leaving the EU could be better for our businesses and for our trade, because the world in which we live and trade is more globally interconnected than ever before. All the alternatives to EU membership would represent a huge step backwards in terms of trading with the EU and, I believe, with the rest of the world as well.

It is the sheer number of uncertainties about leaving the EU that is so concerning. People desperately want to know what leaving would really mean. What would our relationship with the EU be? Would we have access to the single market, and if so, on what terms? What about our trading relationships with other countries, and what happens to all the laws and rules we have that come from the EU? Resolving such questions will be intricately complicated—so much so that it is doubtful whether negotiations would be completed after a decade, let alone in this Parliament. Let us think about that for a moment: where will our lives be in a decade’s time? Let us think in particular about the young people whose futures also lie in the balance on this decision: where will they be after a decade?

Our economy is growing once more. In my view and that of the Government, that is not an accident. It is the result of the sacrifices we have all made, and the parts we have all played in fixing the economy. A vote to leave, with all the uncertainties that surround it, will put all of this country’s hard work at risk. Let us listen to our global allies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and Germany, and indeed to businesses based in this country—not just our major financial corporations, but the smaller companies that rely on exporting to the EU market. It is clear to me, as it is clear to them, that it is by remaining in a reformed European Union that we can keep growing, not bring about a recession of our own making; keep creating jobs, not jeopardise people’s livelihoods; and keep attracting investment, not lose out to our international competitors.

As I said at the start, this debate represents the final opportunity for this House to look at this vital question. This is not about the narrow interests of any one political party; it is about coming together in the national interest. If, like me, the House believes Britain is stronger, safer and better off in the EU, I urge it to support this motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 0.

Division No. 21] [6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baldwin, Harriett
Barron, rh Kevin
Barwell, Gavin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackwood, Nicola
Blenkinsop, Tom
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, Neil
Carr, James
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coffey, Ann
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Colville, Oliver
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon

Davies, Byron
Davies, Geraint
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Dugher, Michael
Dunne, Mr Philip
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elmore, Chris
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Freer, Mike
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gauke, Mr David
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glen, John
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Graham, Richard
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gummer, Ben
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hall, Luke
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Herbert, rh Nick
Hiller, Meg
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
EU Membership: Economic Benefits

15 JUNE 2016

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hollinrake, Kevin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddlestone, Nigel
Huq, Dr Rupa
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Lavery, Ian
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Brandon
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mackintosh, David
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCaig, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, John
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Milling, Amanda
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morton, Wendy
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Neill, Robert
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Parish, Neil
Paterson, Steven
Pawsey, Mark
Pearce, Teresa
Perry, Claire
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pound, Stephen
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pugh, John
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Rutley, David
Ryan, rh Joan
Salmond, rh Alex
Selous, Andrew
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skidmore, Chris
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Julian
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Soubry, rh Anna
Stephens, Chris
Streeting, Wes
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Tami, Mark
Thewlis, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Michelle
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Tolhurst, Kelly
Trickett, Jon
Twigg, Derek
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Warman, Matt
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whately, Helen
White, Chris
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Craig
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Mr Rob
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Tellers for the Noes: Grahame M. Morris
Mr Alan Campbell and

Question accordingly agreed to.
Resolved.
That this House believes that the UK needs to stay in the EU because it offers the best framework for trade, manufacturing, employment rights and cooperation to meet the challenges the UK faces in the world in the twenty-first century; and notes that tens of billions of pounds worth of investment and millions of jobs are linked to the UK’s membership of the EU, the biggest market in the world.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Building Societies (Floating Charges and Other Provisions) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 8 February, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(Harriett Baldwin.)

Question agreed to.
Tees Valley Inward Investment Initiative

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Julian Smith.)

7.12 pm  

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Lord Heseltine’s report “Tees Valley: Opportunity Unlimited” was written to explore the possibilities of transforming the SSI steelworks site and attracting inward investment into Teesside. Unfortunately, I do not believe it offers the comprehensive plan that was promised. Instead, it recycles many proposals that have already been published or suggested by the combined authority and the local enterprise partnership. I hope the Government will pay more attention to those aspirations now that they have been endorsed by the former deputy leader of Conservative party, but few marks can be given for originality.

As we all know, the SSI steelworks closed in autumn 2015, and as a result 5,000 jobs were lost directly or indirectly. Government inaction over the Chinese dumping of cheap steel in the UK market, high energy costs and a lack of infrastructure helped contribute to the steel crisis that made the report necessary. From reading it, however, we would think that the economic impact of the closure had all but been dealt with. Specifically, Lord Heseltine claims that employment levels have recovered since the closure of the steelworks. Not in my constituency: unemployment has increased by 23%. In the constituency of Redcar, where the steelworks were located, unemployment has increased by a staggering 43% since September 2015. It is not acceptable to ignore those facts, or to deny the reality that many of my constituents are facing in trying to find a job. I believe it is right that Lord Heseltine paints a positive picture of Teesside’s future, but he cannot gloss over the fact that the heart of Teesside’s economy, the steelworks at Redcar, has stopped beating on this Government’s watch. Nor must we forget Caparo in Hartlepool or Air Products or the many redundant offshore workers returning to the Teesside conurbation.

Lord Heseltine’s report talks about the steel industry solely in the past tense, as if it was some relic rather than the industry with huge potential that we know it to be. Thankfully, the remaining steel mills in Teesside, including Skinningrove in my constituency, still produce high-quality long products. With the right Government backing, the steel industry has a genuinely long-term future on Teesside and in the UK.

Unfortunately, the report offers no serious recommendations to secure the future of the steel industry in Teesside and the UK, and this at a time when the future of the 25, 42 and 84-inch tube mill in Hartlepool is still uncertain. The Government are now finally attempting to respond to the steel crisis, in part due to the hard work of Teesside MPs. I hope that the remaining steel mills on Teesside that still have uncertain futures are not neglected by the Government in the way the works in Redcar were, and I urge Government action to secure the long-term future of the remaining works, despite the fact that the report fails to suggest any.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the fantastic work that he has done to ensure a viable future for the steel industry. He was kind enough to mention the pipe mills in my constituency. Can he reassure me that we will be talking up the steel industry in the north-east to make sure that it has a viable future we can be proud of as part of a modern, dynamic manufacturing supply chain?

Tom Blenkinsop: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. The Greybull deal for long products, which covered Skinningrove in my constituency, the beam mill in Redcar and of course Scunthorpe, took 18 months of hard work and negotiations to help the Government help the industry come to a deal. It meant assisting Tata in releasing the assets so that we could get not just a buyer but a responsible buyer. As we know, the initial purchaser was seen in a suspicious light in Government circles, as well as in Opposition circles, but eventually, given time, we were able to get Greybull in and formulate a new British steel company. Something similar needs to be done for strip and speciality steels as well as for tubes, for Hartlepool and, further down the road, for Corby. There has to be a national strategy that interacts with local agencies.

Although SSI TCP has gone through a hard closure, much related industrial expertise remains in the region. Specifically, the Materials Processing Institute in Grangetown uses world-leading research to develop innovative approaches in the materials processing and energy sector. Last week, the MPI welcomed representatives from the Slovakian steel industry who wanted to learn how to improve and innovate in their steel industry. That came after recent similar visits from Swedish and German Government representatives.

Another institute harnessing the UK’s expertise in this area is TWI, which not only exports knowledge and experience but trains more than 25,000 students each year in testing and researching welding and inspection technologies. Those are, of course, linked to the tube mills. TWI has offices around the UK, including in Middlesbrough. If the Government were to invest to unite and strengthen those institutes, steel in the UK could leap ahead of our global competitors. I have previously advocated the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills taking advantage of that expertise as a way to secure investment and harness expertise to give our industries the edge over competitors, which would make the term “northern powerhouse” more than just words.

I turn to the site itself. Lord Heseltine recommends that responsibility for it be passed to the mayoral development corporation as soon as possible. There are significant costs associated with reclaiming the site, and I am concerned that without additional funding from central Government, much of the corporation’s budget will be consumed by those costs. The clean-up costs at previous sites, such as Ravenscraig and Corby, ran into the tens of millions. I note that the report requests that Her Majesty’s Treasury pay for any further assessment needed on the site. Will the Minister outline what the Government contributions to the costs of regenerating the site will be? A cast-iron guarantee of long-term regeneration funding from the Government is necessary to secure private and commercial investment in the site.

We also need funding for an investigation into whether the existing blast furnace has a future—that has to be nailed down—and into the existing mills on the SSI site, whether the continuous casting plant or the basic oxygen
steelmaking plant, because those assets could be reused. At the moment, under the official receiver, their future is unclear. For example, I know from local knowledge that the locos on the site, without which nothing can be moved on a 3 square mile site, have been cut up and sold off. We want a potential buyer to come forward to reuse the site for industrial purposes—hopefully steel, but we are not choosy as long as it is used for some form of industry. Removing the assets, cutting them up and selling them off undermines its ability to be resurrected. That leads me on to the future use of the site. Helpfully, a large part of the former steelworks, earmarked for a second blast furnace and plate mill in the 1970s, is still empty and relatively clean. In my view, the prairie, as it is known, should be earmarked for job-creating development early in the process. With good access and links to the still existing deep-water terminal, it could be a prime area for warehousing and distribution. Indeed, it could have a manufacturing dimension if the Government were to revisit an earlier but rejected proposal by the combined authority, which was for the whole area around Teesport, including the SSI site, to be designated as a free port. That could mean tax-free status for the land, allowing raw or semi-finished materials to be imported that could then be fashioned into final products for possible re-export. The idea was turned down flat, as I understand it, by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. If there is the will, it is one suggestion that the Chancellor could prioritise.

I turn to the recommendations that Lord Heseltine makes about boosting investment in the Tees valley. He rightly highlights the importance of transport to building the economy, but Government action does not seem to be aligned with his thinking. In answer to my question on the report’s recommendation to extend the trans-Pennine electrification scheme to include the Northallerton to Teesport line, the Minister confirmed that the line would not be included in the scheme and that its electrification would not be considered until after 2022. On top of that, on the day after the report’s publication, a clause was added to the Government’s Bus Services Bill limiting the ability of councils to run their own bus services, despite the fact that the report explicitly states that small leadership is the key to boosting transport infrastructure. We are therefore presented with the absurd situation of a Conservative Lord publishing a review commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which makes proposals on transport, yet within days the Department for Transport contradicting or ignoring the report. I hope the Minister and the Department for Transport will present a united response to the report that provides Teesside with the infrastructure it needs to boost investment. On the energy economy, Lord Heseltine rightly praises the work done so far to build the industry in Teesside. I hope that the Department of Energy and Climate Change will continue to work with local partners, in line with the approach outlined in the devolution deal. Lord Heseltine also rightly asks the Government to clarify their position on the carbon capture and storage industry. Their decision not to proceed with the CCS commercialisation competition has left a lot of uncertainty about the future of the industry. I asked for clarification of that point in April, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) received an answer as recently as 1 June stating that the Government would set out their approach to CCS “in due course”. That is not good enough for Lord Heseltine; it is not good enough for me and my constituents; and it is certainly not good enough for potential CCS investors in Teesside, including ours. The Government’s intentions in this respect are unclear. I hope a statement on the Government’s approach to the industry, which will only grow in importance in my constituency, will be presented soon.

I will finally highlight areas that I believe are vital to Teesside but are not touched upon by the report. As on steel, the report fails to make serious recommendations on mining, which employs hundreds of people in my constituency. Unfortunately, at one mine in my constituency, up to 250 of the 1,000 strong workforce were made unemployed at the beginning of this year. People are losing jobs that are vital to the east Cleveland economy, leading to some terrible and tragic consequences, with redundancy processes happening in the lead-up to Christmas last year. There is nothing in the report to help those people or to promote investment in a new mine, despite the fact that new mining locations are being developed by Sirius, for example. Logistics is another growing industry based around Teesport that is neglected in the report. I hope that Government action will extend to supporting that sector, too.

Put simply, the report is not good enough. It asks the Government to “consider”, “to make assessment for” and “to take account of” all sorts of things, but it does not call for clear action and Government support to keep our steel industry alive, regenerate the SSI site and make us the world leader that we know we can be. Without the action that is needed, I am afraid that under this Government and with these empty recommendations, the Hercules of Teesside will remain an infant. Perhaps the Minister will be able to assuage my fears and commit the Government to the following: providing additional resources to the mayoral development corporation to ensure that its role in not limited to maintaining the SSI site but includes renewing its potential; re-evaluating the free port proposal for an area including the SSI site; acting to support the remaining works in Teesside and actively exploring how skills in institutes such as the MPI can give the industry a secure footing; setting money aside to fund an additional road crossing over the Tees; re-examining the proposal to include the electrification of the Northallerton to Teesport line in the trans-Pennine scheme; prioritising the Tees valley in the roll-out of the national teaching service, given Lord Heseltine’s criticism of educational establishments in the area—that should include addressing parity of school funding not just for Teesside schools, but for schools throughout the north that are not receiving as much as those in the south; continuing to commit resources and support from the Department of Energy and Climate Change to the energy sector in Teesside; and developing a new plan to support carbon capture and storage in the Tees valley. If the Government cannot even commit themselves to implementing the recommendations in the report, it will have been a complete waste of time and money. Can the Minister tell us how much it has cost the taxpayer to produce a report that is full of proposals on which, apparently, the Government do not currently wish to act? I hope that the review, and the comments that I have made today, will not be forgotten as a result of their proximity to next week’s referendum. Whatever choice
the people of the Tees valley make on the European Union, Teessiders will need to see more action from their Government than they have seen so far.

7.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) on the broad thrust of his speech. I think we can all agree that Teesside is a wonderful place that provides incredible opportunities, and that we should now focus on how those opportunities can best be delivered.

The Tees valley has many great strengths. Teesside contributes more than £12 billion to the national economy each year. Its rate of new business creations is higher than the UK average, and unemployment has fallen from about 31,400 in December 2014 to 27,000 in December 2015. However, that does not mean that it has not faced real challenges, of which the hon. Gentleman gave specific examples. He also gave us his thoughts on both the work that has been done and the work that still needs to be done to overcome some of the difficulties that our economy has faced.

The Tees valley economy has been growing for some years, but it has certainly faced difficulties. We must now focus on what is great about the area—what we can sell and what we can talk about, and how we can promote the economy to those who might wish to invest in it—but also on how we can gain the maximum benefit, and unlock the potential that exists. There is some good news. In February, Lord Heseltine and I attended PD Ports’ launch of its new £35 million redevelopment and expansion. In March, Cavitech opened its new office. Nifco, a company in my constituency, has expanded into two new facilities over the past four years. On Friday I opened the new offices of Odyssey Systems in Stockton, which means the provision of IT services, the creation of jobs, and investment in the Tees valley. There is, in fact, a great deal of good news, but there are also those challenges, which still need to be addressed.

Lord Heseltine’s report is an important part of the process. It is an important step in the journey towards both identifying opportunities and addressing them when we are able to do so. It is an independent report: although it was commissioned by the Government, it does not set out the Government’s position any more than it sets out the position of the local authorities, businesses and universities that contributed to its production. It contains a wide range of recommendations, many of which have been broadly welcomed, although there is, of course, debate about how some of the challenges that it identifies should be addressed. That debate is welcome.

The hon. Gentleman made clear his views about what might be done in future. I shall be happy to work with anyone who has the best interests of Teesside and the Tees valley at heart, to consider any specific recommendations and work with the Government to establish whether they should be delivered, and, if we conclude that they should, to ensure that that happens whenever possible.

Teesside has a complex local economy. We have experienced the great shock of the loss of SSI in Redcar and its impact on the economy—not just the impact on those who were directly employed, but the impact on those in the supply chain. We are left with a site which is in itself challenging, given the need for remediation, investment and support to bring employment back to the area, but which is also part of a bigger picture along the banks of the Tees, speaking not just to a glorious industrial past but to the incredible potential for a brighter future. That is why I very much welcome and support the establishment of the mayoral development corporation in its current shadow form. It is populated by some well-informed and capable business people and the leaders of our local authorities. It is bringing together many of those who want to make a contribution to the future of the Tees valley economy, and it has a remit that stretches further than the SSI site, which looks down the banks of the Tees, to what can and needs to be done.

The hon. Gentleman is right that a great deal needs to be done. We are still in the early stages of dealing with the official receiver, who has a job to do. Government and the board and the GovCo that sits under the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills are talking to the official receiver about the best way through the process, to give us the best chance of making a success of the site that is left at the end of those discussions and, at the end of that, when it is handed over fully to Government. We are in talks with local businesses about identifying opportunities, and work needs to be done to understand the needs of that site and to understand the clean-up, the infrastructure potential and the opportunities to attract investment. That stands at the heart of the issue we are here to discuss today: the investment we want to attract to Teesside.

In Lord Heseltine’s work in the Tees valley in recent months, he has worked with UK Trade & Investment to identify where Government can assist in bringing investment to the area, and to identify those potential investments that will help to drive regeneration and create jobs. I welcome that work and I know he is looking to support it where he can, and I have had discussions with a number of potential international company investors who could bring jobs and work to the Tees valley. I know that work will need to continue if we are to ensure that employment is brought to that former site and into the broader area over which the development corporation will operate. This will go hand in hand with the Government’s programme of devolution.

Tees valley is at the forefront of the devolution agenda and will be one of the first areas to have elected a new metro-mayor, in May next year. It has agreed a deal with Government, but I want it to go further—to agree more, to take more control and to take more powers from central Government so they can be exercised closer to the people who are affected by the decisions the new mayor would be able to make for that local economy. None the less, it is on that journey and those talks are under way.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of areas of industry that he felt needed more attention than they have perhaps been given in the past. I can assure him I have had numerous meetings with Sirius to talk about the mining potential not just from its investment in north Yorkshire, but also through into the Tees valley, and the difference that can make to our economy locally and the jobs it can create.

The hon. Gentleman talked about logistics, which offer a huge opportunity for the Tees valley. The port is a great asset, is one of the largest and most successful in
terms of tonnage in this country, and it is already making a significant contribution, but I have no doubt that it can do more and should be supported to do so.

Mr Iain Wright: The Minister mentions industries and sectors and I want to mention two more in which we have comparative advantage: the processing chemicals industries, with NEPIC leading; and the great potential in the offshore wind supply chain cluster. What tangible steps will the Minister and Government take to ensure we can accentuate the positive and fulfil the potential of these industrial sectors?

James Wharton: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Teesside is of course internationally respected for the chemical processing industry; not just NEPIC but CPI and the work done in that sector provide good jobs, long-term investment and real opportunity to attract more. We always want to continue to support that. As part of the process of looking for international investors, we are looking to support those organisations to see where more investment can be brought in. The chemicals and processing industry will form part of the story going forward of the sites that the MDC will become responsible for and the work it is doing.

Tom Blenkinsop: The Minister mentions CPI and its importance to the local and national economy. Can he comment on my question about MPI and the steel catapult: do the Government intend to go forward with that? In our area we have the capability of R and D closely associated with the former blast furnace. That could provide the inward investment necessary to get that industry going again in our locality.

James Wharton: I will come on to talk about that. I just want to address the second part of the question from the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright). He asked about offshore wind, and significant approvals have been given offshore and not far off the coast of Teesside. This will present a real opportunity to bring investment to our area. I know that live discussions are taking place with companies in the Tees valley about how they can be part of that supply chain and bring jobs and investment to our area through being part of the processes of delivering that potential driver of our economy. I have had discussions with some of those local companies, and I am supporting them as far as I can. Some of the discussions are of course commercially sensitive, but I also want to extend a direct offer, particularly to the hon. Gentleman, given his constituency’s interest in the matter. If there is something specific that a company in his constituency would like to see done, if there is a meeting that it would like the Government to attend, or if there is any assistance that I can give, he need only call on me to arrange it. If the Government can support or help, I will join him and do everything I reasonably can to persuade people to take the right decisions.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland asked about the Materials Processing Institute. There is a bid from that organisation for a catapult similar to the one we have already mentioned, but my understanding is that that bid is not sufficiently strong at this time. However, despite that having been the initial decision and recommendation by officials, it is my intention to ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to look personally at that and to ask officials whether improvements or changes could be made that would enable that to be delivered.

The Government have to take these decisions on a sound basis, and they have to assess things fairly, wherever in the country they might be, but if there is potential and opportunity, it is important that we ensure that that has been explored to the fullest degree. If there is something that can deliver benefits and improvements to our area and bring investment and jobs to our communities, I want to see it explored and every avenue considered—certainly before any negative decision is made—in the hope that a positive decision might be forthcoming. I am happy to give a commitment to ask for that work to be undertaken, and I will do so following the debate this evening. I do not know what the outcome will be, but whatever happens with the individual projects of which we have spoken and with the individual recommendations in Lord Heseltine’s report on the economy of the Tees valley, we have great potential and I am confident that we have a great future.

The Evening Gazette newspaper is running an Invest in Teesside campaign, recognising that the more we talk up our area and highlight the opportunities that exist there, the more we can jointly achieve and drive forward for the benefit of its economy. I look forward to working with hon. Members across the House—indeed, I have little choice other than to make that offer in relation to the Tees valley. I look forward to working with the Evening Gazette, with local businesses, with the local enterprise partnership, with the new combined authority and with the mayor—when they are elected next year with the exciting range of powers that they will have, whoever they might be—to drive forward investment in Teesside.

Our area is very well placed to profit from many of the exciting things that are happening in the world and from the great skills of the people who live in our communities. We have a duty to work together to deliver on that, but that does not mean that the Government will acquiesce in every request, or that we will do everything that is asked of us immediately. It means that we will properly assess and consider the situation, and think long and hard about the right approach to take. We will build a broad consensus on what can be done for the good of the economy of our area. That work is well under way, as we can see in the mayoral development corporation and in the devolution deal that has been agreed. I hope we can also see that in the tone of this evening’s debate.

Tom Blenkinsop: I repeat a question I asked in my speech about an investigation into the remaining assets on site at SSI, including the continuous casting and basic oxygen steelmaking equipment. I also asked whether there would be an investigation into the blast furnace itself. This is important because it would enable us to establish the degree to which the assets might be redeemable or saleable. It would also give the official receiver an instruction about how those assets could be used in future.

James Wharton: Given the specific nature of the hon. Gentleman’s question, I will seek to address it. The site is in the hands of the official receiver, and the Government are talking to them. We are working to ensure that the
[James Wharton]

site is handed over in the best possible circumstances that can be achieved, given its sad recent history, and when that happens we will of course seek to maximise the use of all the site's assets and the land, including any assets that remain on it. That will primarily be channelled through the development corporation, which will drive that process. It is in all our interests that that proper work is done in the appropriate way and at the appropriate time.

I am absolutely confident that the Tees valley has a bright future ahead of it. We have the most incredible people, businesses and opportunities. Given the things those people and businesses are doing and the way in which the leadership in the private and public sectors is pulling together in the interests of the broader local economy, these could be exciting times. We have faced a difficult year, but I hope that by working together we can ensure a brighter future for all our constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

7.39 pm

House adjourned.
Deferred Division

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West Midlands Combined Authority Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 28 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.


Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England:
Ayes 260, Noes 3.

Division No. 20]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brake, rh Tom
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Byrne, rh Liam
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyly-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Effiel, Simon
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, rh Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Farron, Tim
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazier, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Hafon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Heron, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Mr Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Charlotte
Lewin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCann, Jason
McCafferty, Tania
McCafferty, Tania
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David

Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Morrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, John
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Alok
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Souby, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, lain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swarbrick, Fleur
Swinyard, Steve
Swire, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Symes, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tohur, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tredinnick, David
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname, First Name</th>
<th>Surname, First Name</th>
<th>Surname, First Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vickers, Martin</td>
<td>Wiggin, Bill</td>
<td>Clwyd, rh Ann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa</td>
<td>Williams, Craig</td>
<td>Lucas, Caroline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker, Mr Charles</td>
<td>Williams, Mr Mark</td>
<td>Skinner, Mr Dennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker, Mr Robin</td>
<td>Williamson, rh Gavin</td>
<td>Spellar, rh Mr John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warburton, David</td>
<td>Wilson, Mr Rob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warman, Matt</td>
<td>Wollaston, Dr Sarah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wharton, James</td>
<td>Wood, Mike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whately, Helen</td>
<td>Wragg, William</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittaker, Craig</td>
<td>Wright, rh Jeremy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittingdale, rh Mr John</td>
<td>Zahawi, Nadhim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question accordingly agreed to.
Tributes to Jo Cox

2.38 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House has considered the matter of tributes to Jo Cox.

Last Thursday, Jo Cox was doing what all of us here do: representing and serving the people she elected her. We have lost one of our own, and our society as a whole has lost one of our very best. She had spent her life serving and campaigning for other people, whether as a worker for Oxfam or for the anti-slavery charity, the Freedom Fund, as a political activist and as a feminist.

The horrific act that took Jo from us was an attack on democracy, and our whole country has been shocked and saddened by it, but in the days since the country has also learned something of the extraordinary humanity and compassion that drove her political activism and beliefs. Jo Cox did not just believe in loving her neighbour; she believed in loving her neighbour’s neighbour. She was determined to live life to the full. She succeeded superbly.

Jo was murdered in the course of her duty, serving constituents in need. She fought for them just as she fought for others—at home and abroad—who were victims of poverty, discrimination or injustice. An attack such as this strikes not only at an individual, but at our freedom. That is why we assemble here both to honour Jo and to redouble our dedication to democracy.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, we meet today in heart-breaking sadness, but also in heartfelt solidarity. Any death in such awful circumstances is an outrage and a tragedy. Yet this death in this manner of this person, our democratically elected colleague, Jo Cox, is particularly shocking and repugnant.

All of us who came to know Jo during her all-too-short service in this House became swiftly aware of her outstanding qualities. She was caring, eloquent, principled and wise. Above all, she was filled with, and fuelled by, love for humanity. Devoted to her family and a relentless campaigner for equality, human rights and social justice, Jo was proud to be the Member of Parliament for Batley and Spen, where she had her roots and where she was determined to live life to the full. She succeeded superbly.

Her former colleague at the Freedom Fund, Nick Grono, said:

“Jo was a powerful champion for the world’s most vulnerable and marginalised.”

She spoke out in support of refugees, for the Palestinian people and against Islamophobia in this country. Her integrity and talent was known by everyone in this House, and by the community of Batley and Spen, which she proudly represented here for the past year. It was that community in Batley and Spen that brought her up, as well, of course, as her wonderful family, with whom she share their grief today.

Her community and the whole country has been united in grief and united in rejecting the well of hatred that killed her in what increasingly appears to have been an act of extreme political violence. We are filled with sorrow for her husband, Brendan, and young children. They will never see her again, but they can be so proud of everything she was, all she achieved and all she stood for, as we are, as are her parents, as is her sister and as are her whole wider family.

Jo would have been 42 this Wednesday. She had much more to give, and much more that she would have achieved.

I want to thank the heroes who tried to intervene. Bernard Kenny, a 77-year-old former miner, saw the need and ran to Jo’s aid. He was stabbed and taken to hospital. I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing Mr Kenny a speedy and full recovery—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Many shopkeepers and bystanders also tried to help, and administered first aid to Jo and Bernard, and there were also the police officers who made the arrest and the national health service paramedics who were on the scene so quickly.

In her maiden speech last year, Jo said:

“Our communities have been deeply enhanced by immigration … While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.”—[Official Report, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 674-75.]

We need a kinder and gentler politics. This is not a factional party political point. We all have a responsibility in this House and beyond not to whip up hatred or sow division.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Prime Minister, and Rose Hudson-Wilkin, our wonderful chaplain, for accompanying me to the vigil for Jo last Friday at the Priestley statue in the centre of the lovely town of Birstall. We—all of us—were moved by the unity and warmth of the crowd brought together in grief and solidarity.

I have been very moved by the public outpourings since her death—the hundreds of letters and emails we have all received in solidarity with Jo’s family in their hour of grief—and by the outpouring of charitable donations to causes close to her heart, the White Helmets, HOPE not hate, and the Royal Voluntary Service. Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) and I held a vigil outside our town hall, one of hundreds of vigils attended by tens of thousands of people right across our land who are so shocked by what has happened and want to express that shock and grief.
I also want to thank the other parties in this House, which have offered their sympathy and support at this very difficult time. We are united in grief at her loss, and we must be aware that her killing is an attack on our democracy. It is an attack on our whole society. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) wrote recently, “Jo’s life was a demonstration against despair”.

In Jo’s tragic death, we can come together to change our politics, to tolerate a little more and condemn a little less. Jo’s grieving husband Brendan said:

“Jo believed in a better world and she fought for it every day of her life with an energy, and a zest for life that would exhaust most people.”

Today, we remember Jo’s compassion and her passion to create a better world. In her honour, we recommit ourselves to that task.

2.45 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): We are here today to remember an extraordinary colleague and friend. Jo Cox was a voice of compassion, whose irrepressible spirit and boundless energy lit up the lives of all who knew her and saved the lives of many she never ever met. Today, we grieve her loss and we hold in our hearts and prayers her husband Brendan, her parents and sister, and her two children, who are just three and five years old. We express our anger at the sickening and despicable attack that killed her as she did her job serving her constituents on the streets of Birstall. Let me join the Leader of the Opposition in his moving words praising Bernard Kenny and all those who tried to save her. Above all, in this House we pay tribute to a loving, determined, passionate and progressive politician, who epitomised the best of humanity and who proved so often the power of politics to make our world a better place.

I first met Jo in 2006 in Darfur. She was doing what she was so brilliant at: bravely working in one of the most dangerous parts of the world, fighting for the lives of refugees. Her decision to welcome me, then a Labour student conference about 18 years ago, and it was through Brendan that I first met Jo.

There have been so many moving tributes in the past few days, but if I may I would like to quote someone already mentioned—the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern):

“We mourn your loss, yet know that all you stood for is unbreakable. We promise to stand up, even though we are broken. We promise that we will never be cowed by hate.”

May we and the generations of Members who follow us in this House honour Jo’s memory by proving that the democracy and freedoms that Jo stood for are indeed unbreakable, by continuing to stand up for our constituents, and by uniting against the hatred that killed her, today and forever more.

2.50 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I stand here today to honour a friend and a colleague. Along with shock, anger and grief, I have very many fond memories of Jo. Jo and I knew each other for around 10 years. I have known her husband Brendan for longer than that: we first met at a Labour student conference about 18 years ago, and it was through Brendan that I first met Jo.

I remember Jo and Brendan coming round for dinner at my and my husband’s house in London and our visiting them on their boat—first in Ladbroke Grove
and later in Wapping. I remember worrying that I had drunk too much wine early in the evening, until I realised that it was the boat that was swaying and not me.

I remember talking with Jo about her future shortly after I became an MP. She was thinking about standing for Parliament and spent a day shadowing me in my constituency of Leeds West, talking to constituents about their problems, campaigning with local party members and attending meetings. By the end of the day, a lot of people were not sure who was the MP and who was doing the shadowing. Jo had a way with people—a way of relating to people from all walks of life. She had a real way of doing that.

Jo’s main hesitation about a parliamentary career was her young family. She worried, as many of us do, about whether she could be a great MP and a great mum at the same time. But when the opportunity came up to represent her home seat of Batley and Spen, Jo felt a special responsibility to step up and do what she could for the place where she was born, grew up and went to school—the place that Jo called home.

Jo wanted to make the world fairer, more equal, more tolerant and more generous. We all have better instincts and deepest fears. Jo appealed to our better instincts—our sense that, as she said in her maiden speech, what we have in common is greater than what divides us.

On Friday morning, less than 24 hours after Jo was killed, I sat in a coffee shop in Batley just a few minutes away from where Jo had been murdered. A woman came over to me and said that she had not known Jo, but that Jo’s death had made her want to be a bit more like her—a better person, a better mother, a better daughter, a better wife. It is ironic that, having travelled to some of the most damaged, war-ravaged places in the world, Jo died so near to her home. But she died doing the job she loved, in the place she loved, representing the people she loved. Her mum and dad said to me that Jo would not have changed a thing. She lived the life she wanted to live. And yet, in her mum’s words: “She had so much more that she could have done”.

Jo was struck down much too soon. So it now falls on all our shoulders—the woman I met in a Batley coffee shop, Jo’s friends, MPs, all of us—to carry on Jo’s work: to combat and guard against hatred, intolerance and injustice and to serve others with dignity and love. That is the best way we can remember Jo and all she stood for.

But lastly, let me say this. Batley and Spen will go on to elect a new MP. But no one can replace a mother.

2.54 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Today we mourn the terrible loss of our friend and colleague Jo, so tragically murdered as she went about her constituency duties last Thursday. The life has been taken of a truly exceptional woman, whose goodness and passionate dedication to humanitarian values has inspired us all. I knew her as a friend, but how unbearable must it be for those who mourn her as a daughter, sister, husband and, above all, as their beloved mum, whom they used to visit for tea each week in Portcullis House.

I first met Jo 10 years ago in London, when we marched against injustice in Darfur, and on two visits to al-Fasher in Darfur, where she helped develop a central humanitarian role for Oxfam. The Leader of the Opposition, as he then was, and I stayed there with her and other humanitarian workers and witnessed her crucial role for Oxfam in supporting women and children and securing water for thousands of refugees in the El Salam and Abu Shouk camps. She gave me the green wristband—I wear it still—to ensure that we remembered the desperate people caught up in what President Bush rightly described as a genocide. It is among her many friends and colleagues in the international humanitarian and development family all around the world, of which she was such a respected and experienced member, that she will be mourned and remembered as a staunch friend of the most desperate and deprived in our world and as a campaigner against injustice.

When she entered this House just 13 short months ago, she rapidly used her deep knowledge to champion the dispossessed. She was Labour to her fingertips, but restless in seeking to be more open in working with the disorganised, ineffective and supine.

On Friday morning, less than 24 hours after Jo was killed, I sat in a coffee shop in Batley just a few minutes away from where Jo had been murdered. A woman came over to me and said that she had not known Jo, but that Jo’s death had made her want to be a bit more like her—a better person, a better mother, a better daughter, a better wife. It is ironic that, having travelled to some of the most damaged, war-ravaged places in the world, Jo died so near to her home. But she died doing the job she loved, in the place she loved, representing the people she loved. Her mum and dad said to me that Jo would not have changed a thing. She lived the life she wanted to live. And yet, in her mum’s words: “She had so much more that she could have done”.

2.58 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I want to add to the very moving tributes to Jo. I got to know Jo after the 2010 general election, when she was elected to chair Labour Women’s Network, which she saw as a barrier to progress. Making common cause with a crusty old Tory, she and I became co-chairs of the all-party Friends of Syria.

And she was brave: her energy and effectiveness were an inspiration. We invited ourselves to tea with the Russian ambassador in his London residence. With clever charm but steely determination, this five-foot bundle of old-fashioned Yorkshire common sense dressed him down for his country’s cruelty and cynicism in Syria. I do not believe the Russian ambassador will easily forget that visit.

I think there are many things Jo would want us to remember this afternoon. May I mention just two? I do not believe she would want this vile and unspeakable act to change the open and accessible relationship we enjoy with our constituents. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear! Hear!”] All of us take the advice of our local police in protecting those who work with and support us. Thankfully, the record shows these attacks are as infrequent as they are disgraceful. Secondly, Jo would want us in this House to redouble our efforts to resolve the greatest catastrophe of our age: the crisis in Syria, where the lives of more than 11 million people have been ruined while the international community has shown itself disorganised, ineffective and supine.

I mourn Jo today as a friend and as a colleague, but most of all I mourn for her as a mother, whose two gorgeous children will now have to chart the shoals and eddies of life without the love and support of their wonderful, lovely mum.
so deeply mourning Jo’s loss were women whom, under Jo’s leadership, Labour Women’s Network helped and supported.

Not long after she had her son, she came to give me one of those regular briefings, and, of course, the baby came too—I remember it because she literally did not stop kissing him all the way through the meeting. When she had her daughter, she was still there for the women who were trying to become candidates—texting them support, phoning to commiserate if they did not make it, urging them to try again. Her feminism—her solidarity with other women—was a thread that ran through her and all her work in her community and for humanitarian causes. She always said to me emphatically that her children were her priority above everything. But there was no dividing line between Jo’s maternal heart and her great political heart. Her children will grow up to know what an amazing woman their mother was. She is such a great loss to our politics; and an irreplaceable loss to her family, to whom we send our heartfelt sympathy.

3 pm

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): “What an amazing woman.” “Jo was one of us.” “She was clearly a remarkable person.” These are not my comments, although I clearly concur with them; they are just some of the many comments I heard from constituents and from those I met over the weekend in Batley and Spen.

Conscious of time and wanting to ensure that her friends have the opportunity to speak, I make this short but heartfelt contribution on behalf of my fellow Yorkshire Conservative MPs. I first met Jo just over a year ago. It was not long after the general election and we were both appearing on the region’s “Sunday Politics” show. On arriving at the studio, I was taken to the make-up room, where Jo was already sitting in the chair. Needless to say, I had to spend a lot longer in that chair than she did. As I walked in, Jo looked at me in the reflection in the mirror and greeted me with that wonderful smile that lit her whole face. In that instant—that split second—I knew this was someone I was going to like enormously, that it has caused. Jo’s family have lost a loving mother, her children were her priority above everything. But there must also remember the unspeakable personal suffering that it has caused. Jo’s family have lost a loving mother, a wife, daughter and sister. The fearless Jo Cox never stopped fighting for what is right. She gave voice to the voiceless. She spoke truth to power. She exemplified the best values of our party and of our country: compassion, community, solidarity and internationalism. She put her convictions to work for everyone she touched—for united communities and campaigned for things that highlighted the unifying qualities she cared so passionately about. In these last few days, I have been amazed at the kindness and love expressed on social media and in emails, letters, cards and conversations. The #thankyoump hashtag has encouraged so many messages of gratitude and appreciation, even from people who have opposing views. In her tragic death, Jo is managing to achieve what she successfully did so much in her life.

I know I am not alone in saying that I will miss Jo. I will miss her compassion, her determination, her conviction—but above all I will miss her smile, whether it be as we passed each other in the corridor or from across the Chamber. Jo was a proud Yorkshire lass; a brilliant Yorkshire rose. My only regret about Jo is that I only knew her for a year.

The murder of Jo Cox was a national tragedy, but we must also remember the unspeakable personal suffering that it has caused. Jo’s family have lost a loving mother, wife, daughter and sister. The fearless Jo Cox never stopped fighting for what is right. She gave voice to the voiceless. She spoke truth to power. She exemplified the best values of our party and of our country: compassion, community, solidarity and internationalism. She put her convictions to work for everyone she touched—for the people of Batley and Spen, for the wretched of Syria and for victims of violence and injustice everywhere.

On Thursday, Jo was assassinated because of what she was and because of what she stood for. But out of the deep darkness of Jo’s death must now come the shining light of her legacy. So let us build a politics of hope, not fear; respect, not hate; unity, not division. I can only imagine Jo’s reaction had she seen the poster that was unveiled hours before her death—a poster on the streets of Britain that demonised hundreds of desperate refugees, including hungry, terrified children, fleeing from the terror of ISIS and from Russian bombs. She would have responded with outrage, and with a robust rejection of the calculated narrative of cynicism, division and despair that it represents, because Jo understood that rhetoric has consequences. When insecurity, fear and anger are used to light a fuse, an explosion is inevitable.
In the deeply moving tribute that Brendan Cox made last Thursday, he urged the British people to unite and fight against the hatred that killed Jo. It is the politics of division and fear, the harking back to incendiary slogans and the rhetoric of “Britain First” that twists patriotism from love of country into an ugly loathing of others. We must now stand up for something better, because of someone better. In the name of Jo Cox and all that is decent, we must not let this atrocity intimidate our democracy. We must now work to build a more respectful and united country. This is our time to honour the legacy of the proud Yorkshire lass who dedicated her life to the common good and who was so cruelly taken away from us in the prime of her life. Jo Cox, we love you, we salute you and we shall never forget you.

3.7 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Jo Cox was a politician who spanned continents and political parties. Among other causes, she campaigned alongside many of us on behalf of people with autism. With her death, we have lost a powerful advocate.

When I came into this House in 1992, I sat alongside the first woman MP for Batley and Spen, Elizabeth Peacock. She held her surgeries for 14 years in the Birstall library, and she exchanged letters with Jo when Jo was still at school. Like all of us, she has been shocked to the core by this tragedy. She asked me to say that the attack on Jo was an attack on our democracy and on the very basis of our Government and political system. She will mourn the loss of an outstanding friend in politics.

Jo’s family will mourn her as irreplaceable. We will mourn a woman of talent and humanity, a rising star and a bright light, whose voice may now be extinguished but whose spirit, which epitomises our democracy, will not be forgotten. It will inspire not only her children but many generations of politicians still to come.

3.9 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): This is the hardest speech I will ever give. However, it was not difficult to write because there was so much that I wanted to say. Jo Cox, the hon. Member for Batley and Spen, was the very best of us. She may have been small, but in politics as in life, she packed a punch that was simply beyond measure. She came into this place with such passion and energy. From the start, she had a clarity about what she wanted to achieve and what needed to change, and she was not going to waste any time in getting on with it. She knew that the people counting on her could not afford to wait.

Jo’s experiences of working in some of the most dangerous places in the world, caring for some of the most desperately vulnerable, upholding the principles of justice and basic human rights, were reflected in her politics and her character. It meant that when she spoke, people listened. There was a weight to what she had to say and she was not afraid to say it. She had a vision of a world better than the one that has taken her from us.

Characteristically, Jo would work across the Benches to build support for change in the most collegiate way. That has been reflected in the tributes paid to her.

When the new 2015 intake of Labour MPs arrived in Westminster in May last year, our then acting leader, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), told us: “Every day you are an MP is a day that you can make a difference.” Nobody embodied that sentiment more than Jo.

With friends and colleagues, Jo would speak candidly about the challenges of balancing a young family with the pressures of being a diligent and effective Member of Parliament. I was both Jo’s friend and Jo’s Whip, which should have been a difficult balance to strike, but it was not. That is not to say that she was the easiest person to whip as she knew that certain late night votes were not as important as being there to put her children to bed and to tuck them in.

Jo managed to reconcile being a hero of our movement with being incredibly down to earth. People only had to hear Jo speak to know that her roots were firmly in Batley and Spen. She was a daughter of Yorkshire and she fought tirelessly for those who had put their faith in her.

Like all of us, I will remember Jo in many different ways. She spoke of her predecessor, Dr Broughton, in her maiden speech, alluding to the fact that he had been credited with bringing down a Government, and she put Government Front Benchers on notice with a smile that we all came to know and love. Although they laughed it off at the time, I would not be at all surprised if they had become increasingly nervous once they began to realise just how formidable she was.

I will also remember Jo in the voting Lobbies in her cycling kit and trainers, leaving us all wondering where she found the energy. I remember hearing about the trials and tribulations of the kids recently having chicken pox. I remember regional news following her as a newly elected MP and capturing the moment when one of the kids lost their shoe to the Thames and Jo had to try to retrieve it, all before starting the day. I will remember her warmth, her spirit and her laugh.

Those of us from my intake who had the pleasure of Jo’s company as she hosted an event to mark our first year in office last Tuesday will be eternally grateful for those treasured memories and the chance to all be together one last time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) told me that she will remember Jo as a comet: burning brightly, lighting up the dark, awe-inspiring, giving off sparks of heat, light and positive energy wherever it goes. I cannot think of a better way of describing her.

Jo was the heart and soul of the Labour Benches and we are heartbroken. We loved her every day and we will miss her every day. She inspired us all and I swear that we will do everything in our power to make her and her family incredibly proud.

3.13 pm

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Today, this House is united in grief. In Jo Cox we have lost a respected and treasured colleague and friend, and on behalf of SNP and Plaid Cymru MPs and the people we represent, I want to pay tribute to a remarkable
woman whose passion, determination and dedication characterised the short time she was with us, and rubbed off on those around her.

I was lucky enough to know Jo long before either of us was elected to Parliament, when we both worked for Oxfam. Jo was an inspired and inspiring colleague. When we first met, Jo, still only in her twenties, was already heading up Oxfam’s advocacy office in Brussels, lobbying to make trade fair for developing countries, and she was a joy to work with.

Jo was incredibly talented. She was very smart, focused and driven, but it was the way she worked with others that really marked her out: she was supportive, inclusive and generous, and she radiated positive energy. Jo really was a bright star who helped others to shine. She could have done anything with her life, but she chose to spend it helping others and making the world a better place.

Inevitably, over the last few days I have been sharing memories of Jo with many of our former Oxfam colleagues, some of whom worked far more closely with her on a daily basis than I did. I want to share with the House just a few of the things they said, because they sum up how connected Jo was to her Yorkshire roots. As one friend observed:

“Jo brought energy, fun and an absolute focus on wanting to improve the lives of those living in poverty. She was determined to make Governments do more to end the conflict in Darfur and protect civilians. She embodied what it meant to be a true humanitarian.”

Another says:

“The wonderful thing about Jo was how much she genuinely cared—for those around her and for those far away. She was not afraid to wear her heart on her sleeve.”

Another friend describes her as:

“A massive bundle of brains and energy—a woman who radiated friendly warmth and intellect.”

Almost everyone I have spoken to has mentioned how connected Jo was to her Yorkshire roots. As one friend observed:

“She was proud of where she was from, but rightly saw no contradiction between that and caring about the lives of people on the other side of the world.”

We often witnessed that here in Parliament too, where Jo fought with equal resolve for refugee children fleeing Syria and the children in her own constituency growing up in poverty. I like to think that it was those deep, strong roots in her own Yorkshire community that enabled Jo to branch her arms around the world with so much love. She was proud of Yorkshire; Yorkshire enabled Jo to branch her arms around the world with so much love. She was proud of York orshire; Yorkshire had neither of those attributes; her stature was quite possibly the only thing about her that was diminutive. Nevertheless, there she was pulling for the women MPs’ team with every ounce of her strength and every fibre of her being, and with sheer, dogged determination.

That is how I want us to remember her; this strong, brave, determined woman giving her all with absolute commitment. I want to remember Jo Cox for how she lived, not how she died. I want her to be a symbol of the politics of hope, not the politics of fear.

This Parliament is a lot poorer for Jo’s passing, and we in the SNP and Plaid Cymru extend our sincere condolences to her colleagues and friends in the parliamentary Labour party. Jo’s constituents in Batley and Spen have been robbed of an outstanding and dedicated MP—the person they chose, democratically, to be their voice in this place.

To Brendan, Cullin and Lejla, and the Leadbeater family: we know your loss is immeasurable and that your lives have been changed irrevocably. We hold all of you in our hearts. I hope that in time, when they are older, Jo’s children will come to understand more fully just how much their brilliant, beautiful mother was able to contribute to humanity in her short, purposeful and well-lived life. Jo, those of us who knew you will never forget you. I hope you rest in peace.

3.17 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): In a tale of another Yorkshire tragedy that led to action and hope in the midst of sadness, we are told:

“The flowers of Yorkshire are like the women of Yorkshire. Every stage of their growth has its own beauty, but the last phase is always the most glorious.”

And it was glorious, Jo.

I was in awe of Jo. To be honest, I was always a bit envious. She was energetic, brave, dynamic, fit, beautiful and passionate. I cannot ever recall seeing her sad, negative or without hope. She once told me, in a one-to-one meeting as my manager at Oxfam, that she did not do touchy-feely, that I was being too emotional, that we needed to “get on with it” and sort out the campaign we were working on.

Jo believed in building bridges. She was fiercely Labour to her core, but when we thought our party was on the way out of government, she knew there were bigger things at stake. We had to reach out to others: we had to convince them of the case for tackling global poverty and for standing up for civilians in conflict and crisis and for women and girls. She was never satisfied with platitudes. She wanted action. We have all been overwhelmed over the last few days with just how many lives she touched, from the refugee camps of Darfur to the mountains of Pakistan, but she was not some do-gooder jetting in to hand out alms. She wanted to lobby to make trade fair for developing countries, already heading up Oxfam’s advocacy office in Brussels, lobbying to make trade fair for developing countries, and she was a joy to work with.

The last time I saw Jo was at the Macmillan Cancer Support parlimentary tug of war event just a couple of weeks ago. The conventional wisdom is that height and weight are distinct advantages in tug-o-war. [Laughter.] Jo had neither of those attributes; her stature was quite possibly the only thing about her that was diminutive. Nevertheless, there she was pulling for the women MPs’
and assuredness. It was brilliant. That brilliance was universally felt by all those she worked with. Moira described her as a “fearless, compassionate professional with such an impish streak.”

Vicky said that Jo had smarts and spirit. Conor, who worked closely with her, said that she taught him “how to get stuff done … with passion and professionalism.”

Our friend Ben, who spent a famous night on a mountain with her in Pakistani Kashmir, reminded our friends in recent days that everyone assumes that in NGOs people must all be really kind. He said:

“But the truth is we are not … we can be vain, arrogant and mean … not Jo. Not just did everyone like Jo. More impressively Jo liked everyone. She was furious at injustice … but saw no one as a permanent enemy, and everyone as a potential ally.”

Though Jo was kind, she was a steely edged campaigner. Our friend and colleague Phil Bloomer said that she was “one of the most kind, caring and committed people I have had the privilege to know … but she could also make herself a right royal pain in the back-side if she profoundly disagreed with you: a lesson many political leaders learnt too late, and to their cost.”

He reflected on Jo’s years influencing Peter Mandelson when she headed Oxfam’s Brussels office at a young age. He had to quickly adapt his approach. But most of all, Phil hit the mark. He said:

“Jo loved justice … Jo loved Love”.

Adrian, our friend, told me of the time he saw Jo just a few months ago over a sandwich. He told me that he “saw again the bravery and determination as she figured out how to hold feet to the fire—in her own party as well as her opponents—over Syria and the good we failed to do.”

Our close mutual friend and campaigner Kirsty summed Jo up perfectly for me. She said that Jo “never just asked ‘what do you think?’ always ‘what should we do’. This is what we should do. Act. Love. Unite.”

That was the Jo I knew. Kind, caring, passionate, principled, thoughtful—an intellect, but most of all focused on doing for others, not just being for ourselves.

3.21 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): We stand united as colleagues, indeed comrades, to mourn someone who was an enormous figure in the House and who would have gone on to be much greater still. For me and millions of others, the snatching away of a wife and mother, hugely loving and hugely loved, is what has moved Britain to stand in collective grief this last few days.

Others who knew Jo well have commented on her unique and equally vulnerable. When the world could not find the wherewithal to meet the millennium development goal to cut maternal mortality, Jo took on this huge challenge and made global leaders sit up and listen to women.

Jo did not just believe that women’s voices should be heard; she made it so. She was a feminist whose activism saved women’s lives and whose political skill got women elected to this House. Many in this place will never have seen the quiet, careful work of Jo and her colleagues at Labour Women’s Network to give women the knowledge to hold feet to the fire—in her own party as well as her opponents—over Syria and the good we failed to do.

Our close mutual friend and campaigner Kirsty summed Jo up perfectly for me. She said that Jo “never just asked ‘what do you think?’ always ‘what should we do’. This is what we should do. Act. Love. Unite.”

That was the Jo I knew. Kind, caring, passionate, principled, thoughtful—an intellect, but most of all focused on doing for others, not just being for ourselves.

3.23 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Let me begin by saying again Jo’s own words:

“Who can blame desperate parents for wanting to escape the horror that their families are experiencing? Children are being killed on their way to school… one in three children have grown up knowing nothing but fear and war. Those children have been exposed to things no child should ever witness, and I know that I would risk life and limb to get my two precious babies out of that hellhole.”—[Official Report, 25 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1234.]

When Jo spoke, we all listened. Why? Because the principle that she drew on in that speech and in life is the simple idea that we have more in common than that which divides us. Her words demonstrate that if we choose, we do not always have to see ourselves as different from those far away. We can choose to see what unites us. We all listened because her words spoke to each and every one of us.

To know Jo, even a little bit, was to understand how proud she was of her family and to hear her relish her role as a mum. Many of her friends have spoken of that joy, that warmth and that natural charm. She had a way of talking not just about herself and her own ideas, but always about what we could do together.

Jo took on the toughest of problems and the most forgotten causes, and fought campaigns that we could all feel a part of and that would truly make change happen. Whether it was Darfur or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jo knew how easily our global responsibilities fade from view without conscious activism. As she herself wrote:

“This active internationalist approach is not inevitable. It has been, and is still contested across the political spectrum.”

Jo wrote about a fight not just for one country, one people or one cause, but for a world view that bestowed on each of us rights and on all of us the responsibility to protect. That is especially true in relation to her activism in pursuit of women’s rights. Faced with the great joy and great risk of motherhood, women are uniquely and equally vulnerable. When the world could not find the wherewithal to meet the millennium development goal to cut maternal mortality, Jo took on this huge challenge and made global leaders sit up and listen to women.

Jo did not just believe that women’s voices should be heard; she made it so. She was a feminist whose activism saved women’s lives and whose political skill got women elected to this House. Many in this place will never have seen the quiet, careful work of Jo and her colleagues at Labour Women’s Network to give women the knowledge and networks to take control and win power. She did it not by hectoring or lecturing, but by believing in the goodness of others. As Jo’s friend and mine, Kirsty McNeill, has written:

“Half holding you upright, half shoving you forward. That’s what it meant to have Jo’s arm around your shoulder.”

How we all long for those arms round our shoulder today—for one more hug, and definitely for one more smile—but it cannot be.

The words from Jo’s maiden speech must therefore truly ring out today:

“we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.”—[Official Report, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 672.]

Cheap populism cannot take hold. Jo’s vision of our country, explained in that speech, is one that we know in our hearts to be true. It is not where you come from
that matters; it is the compassion and love in your heart. You might be ferociously proud of your home town, as Jo was, but you know that compassion does not end at its boundaries.

And here is another thing that does not end: Jo Cox’s life had real meaning. She gave love to us all and that can never be lost. We may feel lost today, but inside us all, the love is still there.

3.27 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I speak today, by agreement, for all the Northern Ireland parties and Members represented in the House: the Democratic Unionist party; the Social Democratic and Labour party; the Ulster Unionists; and the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). We sit together and speak with one voice to echo the common, united response of all the people we represent at home in Northern Ireland.

Whatever is said cannot adequately express our deepest, most heartfelt feelings but, through the words that have been spoken already and that will be spoken, I pray that Jo’s family may find some comfort and solace at this terrible time. We all want to extend our deepest sympathies to Brendan, her dear children and their wider family circle at the tragic loss of someone so loved and admired, and who will be so missed. We also want to extend our sympathies to the Labour party and the wider Labour movement, to the people of Batley and Spen, and to the many, many friends of Jo who have spoken about her in recent days in such moving ways.

It is right that we as parliamentarians meet together in this Parliament today not just to record our disgust or outrage at what has happened to an honoured colleague, but to express our determination to uphold the values of democracy and the open, accessible way in which we conduct our political life in this country. A life such as Jo Cox’s should not be defined by its end. It was her life that counts, and that is what we remember today and should always remember.

We in Northern Ireland, on all sides and in all parties, who have direct and personal experience of murderous attacks and have indeed lost friends and dear colleagues to men of violence, have felt the pain and anguish that attacks and have indeed lost friends and dear colleagues who have direct and personal experience of murderous attacks.

I wish to record our support for the people of Syria and the many thousands of unaccompanied Syrian child refugees. In 13 short months, Jo achieved more than some MP’s achieve in 13 years.

Jo had an open mind and an open heart, and the world really needed somebody like her—somebody who never gave up; and somebody who knew that, by the strength of our common endeavour, we achieve more than we can alone.

We send our deepest condolences to her dear family, and thank them for sharing her with us. It was a blessing to have known Jo. Rest in peace, sweet friend.

3.33 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I first met Jo through my daughter Madeleine. Madeleine was working for Glenys Kinnoch in Brussels and said, “I’m not worried about leaving Glenys because I’ve found this brilliant replacement called Jo Cox”, so we go back a long way. There was a little bit of friendly rivalry because my daughter went on to work for David Miliband and Jo for Gordon and Sarah Brown, but it was all in good part.

Only a year ago, as a long-standing Member of Parliament for Huddersfield, suddenly I had two brilliant new young Members of Parliament just down the road from me, in Dewsbury and in Batley and Spen. Was I happy! What a change they made to this Chamber. Jo was wonderful, but, as someone said to me the other day, “Don’t be mistaken about Jo. She’s as tough as old boots when she’s campaigning for anything. I upset her once or twice about things, but she always got her own way.”

If you have a daughter like Jo, you must have a darned good family behind you. I am a grandparent—my 10th granddaughter was born only a few days ago. To have a girl like Jo, you need a wonderful, supportive family. We have a duty in this House to watch over that family in the days and months and years to come. We have a duty to support that family and those children.

3.33 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I did not know Jo well at all, but the more I have learned about her life and work makes me wish so much that I had done. I want to convey the Green party’s very sincere condolences and our deep sadness. Indeed, on behalf of the many constituents who have been in touch with me, as constituents have been in touch with all hon. Members, I want to send those deepest condolences to Jo’s husband, Brendan, her children, and her other family and friends.

Jo knew what really mattered and cut through to what was important. Her commitment to cross-party working, to speaking out for the voiceless and to fighting for justice are a shining light. As we pause and reflect on all Jo achieved in her short time as an MP, there is also the opportunity to recommit ourselves to the many causes for which she was such a powerful advocate, and to pledge to not let them be forgotten.

It seems that all who worked with or knew Jo considered her a friend. I want to mention in particular the staff in her constituency office, who will no doubt be hugely affected by the events of last week.

Jo was a formidable woman, juggling the demands of serving her constituents with those of being a mother. She will be very much missed and will always be remembered. We pledge in her memory to do all we can to continue to put hope before hatred.
3.34 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):
This is a speech I could not even have imagined giving just a few days ago. How bitterly ironic it feels to be here, in one of the greatest debating chambers the world has ever known, and yet no words can do justice to our sense of loss or the grief we feel for Jo’s family.

My wife Claire and I have known Jo and her husband Brendan for many years. They are a couple very much like each other—driven, passionate and impatient to change the world. I remember before the last election having dinner with them on their boat and encouraging Jo to stand for selection if her home town constituency of Batley and Spen came up. I thought she would be a brilliant candidate for Labour and a huge asset to Parliament. Her whole life had been spent serving others. I told her she could continue to do that here in Parliament, yet her willingness to enter public service has now cost her her life.

Over the weekend many people have rightly praised Jo’s maiden speech or cited her campaigning on Syria and refugees as the way that they will remember her, but a different sort of story about Jo as a friend and a mother has been the memory most on my mind. It was at Labour party conference about five years ago, when my wife was breastfeeding our daughter at a fringe event and feeling quite self-conscious about it—some older comrades were still not at ease with that sort of thing—[Laughter.] Jo saw that and she sat down next to Claire and began to feed her own son, just to show solidarity with Claire and to make her feel better—[Laughter.] It is just one example of how Jo always thought of others in her everyday life. They went on to work together through Labour Women’s Network, which Jo would chair while also changing the world through her day job and raising her young family with so much love.

Through Labour Women’s Network, Jo would fight for other working-class women to have the same opportunities as her, to end everyday sexism and to make politics a safer space for women. What agony it is that her life is now for ever testament to just how important those causes are. Jo was right to believe in public service, she was right to believe in making the world a better place, and she was right to believe in this place.

In the overwhelming grief of this story there are shards of hope that exemplify just what this country is really about: the two unarmed police officers who wrestled her assailant to the ground; the 77-year-old retired miner, Bernard Kenny, who dashed from his car to try to save her; and her assistant, Fazila Aswat, who was with her when it happened. Theirs are the true faces of the Britain that we love.

Most of all, there is Jo herself. Once, when I had my own daughter with me in this place, she turned to me and asked, “Daddy, can little girls become the Prime Minister?” When our daughters ask us that question, let us tell them and inspire them with Jo’s story—Jo the parliamentarian, Jo the campaigner, Jo the mother and Jo our friend.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, thank you to everyone who has spoken in tribute to Jo and in support of her family. There is a tributes motion and I have to put the Question, but I hope that, when I do so, it will attract the loudest unified response in the history of this House.

The Question is that this House has considered the matter of tributes to Jo Cox. As many as are of that opinion, say Aye. [HON. MEMBERS: “Aye!”] To the contrary, No.

Resolved.
That this House has considered the matter of tributes to Jo Cox.

Colleagues, we will adjourn formally in a moment or two. Before we do so, may I invite all right hon. and hon. Members to follow me in processing behind the Serjeant at Arms via Central Lobby and St Stephen’s Entrance to St Margaret’s Church across the road for a service of prayer and remembrance for the life of Jo Cox? Perhaps I can take this opportunity to re-emphasise that our chaplain, the Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin, will be at the service and will also be available in days to come to support Members, the staff of Members and the staff of this House.

Business without Debate

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25).
That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn till Monday 27 June.—(Margot James.)
Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(Margot James.)

3.40 pm
House adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Monday 6 June 2016

[VALERIE VAZ in the Chair]

Fireworks

4.30 pm

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): I beg to move.

That this House has considered e-petition 109702 relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I am pleased to introduce this important debate on fireworks and animal welfare based on the petition that was signed by more than 100,000 people. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for attending and look forward to hearing his views on and valued input into what I am sure will be an important debate.

I am sure that all hon. Members receive regular letters from pet and animal owners or elderly people who are worried about the increase in the use of fireworks throughout the year. Although everyone enjoys them for big celebrations, it is important that from time to time we debate the restrictions on them. This debate will not lead to a change in the law, but will give the Government the chance to outline to hon. Members the current regulations and to listen to concerns for when they do consider any changes in the future.

For many of us, fireworks are a source of great enjoyment and are used to celebrate many great occasions throughout the year. However, for animals, fireworks can be a source of fear and distress. In particular, the sudden loud noises that many fireworks make can cause fear.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I am delighted that we are having this very important debate. A number of constituents have contacted me about the distress that animals experience. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is about balance—the balance between enjoyment of fireworks on the one hand and protecting animals from distress on the other?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful for the intervention. Gentleman for raising those concerns. It is estimated by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for example, that 45% of dogs show signs of fear when they hear fireworks. The animals affected not only suffer psychological distress, but can cause themselves injuries—sometimes very serious ones—as they attempt to run or hide from the noise.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): Having grown up in a household full of dog owners and dog lovers, I have witnessed at first hand the problems that occur on bonfire night. Does my hon. Friend agree that pet owners have had a much bigger problem in recent years because of firework displays taking place over a longer period, and may I add my support for a more regulated period for firework displays?

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): In my constituency in 2001, a young boy died while playing with fireworks. He was not under the supervision of his parents and he was with a number of other young people. We had debates very like the one that we are having now in the run-up to the 2004 legislation, and I said at the time—

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising those points, which I will come on to in more detail later.

The use of fireworks has become a central part of the public celebration of many religious and cultural events in the UK, as this petition notes. There are, of course, those who would argue for a blanket ban, but most people, I think, would agree that a balance should be struck between the right to use fireworks in a safe and responsible way and the need to prevent unnecessary suffering and harm to animals.

Although most reports of welfare problems caused by fireworks relate to domestic pets, other animals can of course also experience fear, distress or injury as a result of their use. Livestock are easily frightened by loud noises and sudden bright lights, and can be at risk of injuring themselves on farm equipment or fencing if startled. The debris produced by fireworks can also pose a hazard to livestock if found on the land, as it can be many days later. Although there is limited direct evidence, it is also likely that fireworks and their debris cause disturbance to wildlife, including waterfowl, and cause suffering or distress, depending on the distance from the explosive and on the noise level.

There is widespread concern among the public about the effect that fireworks can have on animals. I am sure that we all receive letters about that, particularly in November. The RSPCA receives hundreds of calls about fireworks every year. For example, in 2015, it received 386 calls from people concerned about fireworks, and it says that the figure has been increasing in recent years.

Before the debate, I was contacted by various animal welfare charities, as, I am sure, were many other hon. Members. The charities understandably have concerns about the effects that fireworks can have on animals and what they see as an increase in the number of animals affected and the prevalence of fireworks each year.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): On the point about fear, distress and injury, my constituents have raised with me the fact that Chinese lanterns can also cause harm to the livestock in my community. The use of fireworks is much more prevalent, as we have heard, and it is not always advertised so that people in the locality can take precautions with their pets. Certainly that would be one way of being more thoughtful to other members of the community.

David Mackintosh: I am grateful for that intervention and I am sure that the Minister will have noted it. On that point, the British Veterinary Association has put together a list of measures that it would like the Government to consider, including changes to the design and classification of fireworks to reduce noise levels, and better information for pet owners to help to reduce stress in their animals. I am sure, on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), that that would include guidance for people using fireworks and Chinese lanterns.

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention and I am sure that the Minister will have noted it. On that point, the British Veterinary Association has put together a list of measures that it would like the Government to consider, including changes to the design and classification of fireworks to reduce noise levels, and better information for pet owners to help to reduce stress in their animals. I am sure, on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), that that would include guidance for people using fireworks and Chinese lanterns.
although I was loth to say it—that I could see no long-term solution other than banning the sale of fireworks to the public and allowing public and private displays only if supervised and managed by a properly qualified individual. I am still of that opinion, and we could be here again in 10 or 12 years’ time with the same debate. What is the hon. Gentleman’s opinion?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising such an important and, clearly, tragic case. As I will outline, there is a debate to be had about that issue, and I am pleased that we are having the start of that debate here today.

Animal welfare charities such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, the Blue Cross and Cats Protection suggest that tougher enforcement of existing rules, better advance warning of organised events and animal welfare information for pet owners would help to improve the situation. Importantly, on some of these points, there is agreement between animal welfare organisations and the fireworks industry, which would support tougher enforcement of existing rules; I will ask the Minister to consider that in the future.

We all know that events using fireworks should be well planned, and that is of course the case at a vast number of events to mark significant occasions such as new year’s eve and Diwali, and other special events and religious festivals such as Chinese new year. The biggest firework displays are of course very relevant to Members of this House, as the Guy Fawkes plot was thwarted in this very building on 5 November 1605 and is of course marked every autumn. I am sure that hon. Members will all agree that those events are managed responsibly and bring enjoyment to many people. Indeed, the bonfire night display in my constituency of Northampton every November attracts thousands of people, and the new year’s eve fireworks in London, as I am sure hon. Members will agree—perhaps not all of them—are the best in the world.

The Minister will, I am sure, say that all fireworks on sale to the public are required to comply with essential safety requirements that govern how they are made, tested and labelled.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the safety requirements that are in place for fireworks, but those requirements are not necessarily followed by those who use fireworks. Does he share my concern that as well as the dangers for domestic pets and farm animals, there are significant dangers for members of the public, and that is really where our focus should be?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful for that intervention because I feel that we are getting consensus, both from the animal welfare organisations and from the hon. Members raising points here today, that the issue is enforcement of the existing rules as much as any review in the future.

There are already strict guidelines in place for the private use of fireworks, and legal penalties for individuals who use them irresponsibly. The existing legislation limits the sale of fireworks, provides specific curfews for their use, sets maximum allowable noise levels and sets strict penalties, including possible imprisonment, for those in breach of the rules.

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the recommendation on fireworks and animal welfare in the British Veterinary Association report that he quoted? The association recommends that better legislation and enforcement is put in place, particularly regarding the noise control of fireworks given that virtually silent fireworks are available.

David Mackintosh: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point and I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response. The British Fireworks Association observes that the industry is responsible and is already heavily and effectively regulated—a point that I will put to the Minister later. The association also points out, for balance, that the industry employs thousands of people, and it is understandably concerned about the impact that the measures outlined in the petition might have on the industry.

The British Fireworks Association is opposed to tighter regulations, believing that they could introduce or lead to an increase in illegal sales and create a black market trade, and worrying that they could create additional problems for the enforcement agencies. The association believes that extra regulations could prevent thousands of people across the UK from celebrating weddings, birthdays and other occasions with a firework display and could force legitimate importers and retailers out of business, costing hundreds of jobs.

Clearly, the vast majority of people who use fireworks do so responsibly and in accordance with the law. When distress is caused to animals—domestic pets, wildlife or livestock—it is most likely the result of a lack of understanding of the issue, as opposed to irresponsible or inappropriate use. However, we need more effective enforcement of the current rules. The most effective way to reduce the suffering of affected animals may be through education instead of legislation. Estimates seem to vary as to the percentage of pets and other animals that are distressed by fireworks, but it is generally accepted by animal welfare organisations that the figures are significant, and that concern among animal owners is increasing.

Given the level of concern, we need to consider several questions in this debate. For instance, do the existing laws, regulations and guidelines reasonably provide for animal welfare? Are enforcement measures adequate? Are the public sufficiently aware of their responsibilities when using fireworks and of the possible unintended consequences? To what extent could firework manufacturers and retailers reasonably help to mitigate the impact on animals and wildlife? Can more be done to support the owners of pets and livestock to lessen the possibility of distress and injury suffered by those animals?

More than 100,000 people have added their signatures to the petition, calling for the issue to be looked at again. I look forward to hon. Members’ contributions and, of course, to hearing the Government’s response.

4.42 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I was not expecting to be called to speak so soon, but it is a pleasure to contribute. Back home, some of my constituents have been on to me about the issue and I did an interview with Radio Ulster when the petition came about, so I have some knowledge of the subject. I wish to contribute
from a Northern Ireland perspective, as always, and I hope to add some helpful points to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David MacIntosh) on the way in which he presented the case, as well as the 104,000 people who took the time to sign the e-petition, bringing forward something that they feel is constructive. I want to say, at the outset, that I will put forward a balanced point of view.

My boys are all grown up now—they are young men—but when they were young we had lots of cats, dogs and animals, as we live on a farm. The one thing that we could always enjoy together was the fireworks, and there were usually plenty going off in the middle of countryside. We had very few neighbours so, as well as having spectacular lights in the sky, the noise did not really affect many other houses round about, as they were spaced far apart.

When it came to my dogs and cats, I made sure that they were in the house and away from the fireworks. For the other animals and the stock, I made sure that the barns were noise-proofed as much as possible. The dogs that we had at that time were quite nervous and, although they were shooting dogs, the noise of the fireworks upset them. It is important for us all to be accountable and respectful, and there should be a balance. That balance should be between the enjoyment of fireworks by children and others, and ensuring that there are controls in place for those who do not have the respect that any of us in this room have. Every one of us here, including those in the audience, has respect for others.

We have all experienced fireworks and we take great pleasure in them. When used properly and safely, fireworks have been part of the greatest spectacles and moments not only in our personal lives, but in marking world events and truly historic moments. The hon. Member for Northampton South mentioned Guy Fawkes night. In Northern Ireland we have had our own fireworks of different degrees. When we were small and much younger, perhaps the things that we did with fireworks were not acceptable. We probably all went through that process of learning, but we always made sure that there was a level of enjoyment as well.

We now live in a world where, almost seamlessly, the use of fireworks has expanded to become a commonplace occurrence. They are used at all times of the day and of the year. That said, when fireworks go wrong, they can be devastating, and we all know of examples of that. In extreme circumstances, there can be significant casualties and injuries, and of course—this is why we are here today—animals are too often the innocent victims of fireworks.

We do not seek to be the fun police or to extend Big Brother into people’s lives further, but the facts make it clear that there needs to be a change in how we regulate fireworks so that everyone can continue not only to enjoy them, but to enjoy them safely. When we think of the potential risk, we automatically think about the potential for maiming and physical injury. It is far too easy to forget that, for animals especially, fireworks can have a psychological and mental impact. We have to do something about that and we have to get it right.

I was a councillor for 26 years before I came here, and I was a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for 12 years, concurrently at the end. I remember the old restrictions on fireworks in Northern Ireland, and then the new legislation came in. The legislation came directly but we had at least a consultative role and an input into it, although perhaps no direction on how it was finally agreed. However, the changes we brought in in Northern Ireland were for the best.

There are already restrictions in place across the UK regarding the domestic use of fireworks. In Northern Ireland, that process has constantly changed, adapted and moved forward with the times, and it continues to be manageable. We are looking at how we can improve the process again by preserving the enjoyment while ensuring that animals are not hurt in any way. Restrictions are in place to ensure that illegal fireworks are well and truly on the way out, and it takes a lot of legislative clout to make that happen.

In Northern Ireland, we have had years to look at such matters—for instance, the Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970. Maybe that has helped us a wee bit better to come up with legislation that makes the right important changes. It is important to educate people from the outset. It is good to see the Minister in his place, and I know he will respond to that point clearly. Educational programmes in schools are important. Starting at that very early stage is about teaching children to have fun, but to do so in a controlled, legislative and regulated way.

In Northern Ireland, the number of incidents involving fireworks have consistently fallen. We have done something that might enable us all to move forward. Although the importance of taking animals into account has been impressed upon us, it is clear that more needs to be done, especially through education and awareness about the impact of fireworks on animals.

The issue is most common in the private home, which makes it difficult, and potentially invasive, to monitor. We know that there is an issue and that, more often than not, harm to animals is completely unintentional, but some unintended consequences have repercussions. In the past, people would have considered sedating the animal—we have heard of people doing that—to reduce the stress caused by the sudden explosive bangs of fireworks, but such actions were few and far between. When people are educated about alternative ways of calming their pets, they can and will use them. Currently, there is not enough information out there, and the information that is out there is not easily accessible or widely available. It is about re-educating people on how they use fireworks, but it is also about re-educating people on how they look after their animals as best they can.

**Kirsten Oswald:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are many and varied ways in which people can help their pets to deal with the situation, which can cause pets such distress, but that if people are not aware that fireworks will be let off in their area, it is wholly impossible for them to do so?

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Lady is right, and I agree with her wholeheartedly. We need the regulation that we have in Northern Ireland, where fireworks are controlled. If something will be taking place, the police and the council have to be notified, and councils have the authority to respond. On re-education, she is right that people have to know that fireworks will be let off, which is an issue.
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. I do not know whether he is as old as I am, but when I was growing up it was all about the firework code and safety for human beings. We are here now thinking about distress and the safety of animals, too. It is about education and making firework users think about their environment, their neighbours and their animals. We should let people know about the time limits and the regulations so that they can be more thoughtful not only about people but about pets in their environment.

Jim Shannon: I cannot say whether I am older than the hon. Gentleman—I just had a harder paper round—but I thank him for his wise words. On re-education, things have been done to reduce the effects of noise, such as by raising the volume of CDs, MP3s or Spotify so that animals do not get shocked, upset or panicked when the big bang comes at the end. Products are also available through vets. I am not a vet—far from it—but I love animals and have had animals all my life. Vets tell me that there are products available that act like air fresheners and, instead of just making the house smell like flowers, release a calming hormone into the air. Does it work? I cannot say.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Can we have one in the Chamber?

Jim Shannon: I am not sure whether that is possible. If the product works, and there is some indication that it does, it means that there are other things we can do for our animals. There are options out there to help reduce the stress that fireworks cause animals, and as access to such methods, and knowledge of them, becomes widespread, there will be an opportunity to ensure that our response to animals and fireworks is firmly going in the right direction and that we are doing the right things. We do not need to be the fun police or to reduce the positive aspects of fireworks, though it can be tempting to go straight down the road of regulation, but it is always good to have regulation with balance. Yes, protect the animals, but let us have fun with fireworks for our children, as we had when we were wee kids, and as the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) said, so that my grandchildren will also have that opportunity. Let us do it responsibly and safely. Furthermore, there are alternative means of reducing stress in animals to a negligible level.

Animals have no voice, and we, as their owners, have a responsibility to look after them responsibly in a way that also gives us enjoyment. When people pet their dog, it responds; when people give their cat a pat on the head, it will purr and lift its tail. Those things happen because our pets respond to us. We have to respond to them, too, and ensure that our animals are not scared of fireworks. This Westminster Hall debate has been another useful opportunity for Members to give voice to those with no voice, which is welcome.

4.54 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vázquez, especially as we are fellow members of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on opening the debate, which has resulted from a huge petition. This issue does not get enough of a public airing or the debate it needs in Parliament.

I start by emphasising that I am not a killjoy—I am sure everyone will say that today for fear of being labelled one—and I am fully aware that many people enjoy fireworks. Indeed, it is estimated that each year, more than 10 million people across the UK enjoy a firework display. I have attended the new year’s eve fireworks here in London and the spectacular display that happens every new year’s eve in Madeira—I will not say which one I enjoyed the most, as that would be dangerous. As I will say is that displays such as the one we enjoy in London, and those held in great cities across the world, every new year’s eve are joyous occasions, and everyone here will agree that they play an important part in every culture.

History tells us that people across the UK have enjoyed firework displays since the 16th century, with the first being at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I in 1559, so this cultural activity has a long history. I recognise that large numbers of people in the UK enjoy fireworks and want to make use of them in their gardens and outside their properties. Although I instinctively agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), who is no longer in her place, that ideally we would end the use of fireworks in back gardens—I would prefer to see people going along to their local public display—I understand the difficulty of delivering that policy. Let us remember that, as a society, we have introduced severe restrictions on the use of tobacco. People cannot smoke in public places, and now they cannot smoke in a car if a child is present. We have gone a long way towards restricting the public’s freedom to enjoy certain products, primarily on the ground that we want to protect children’s health. Children’s health, and the health and safety of the public in general, should always be paramount in policy, and we should not be frightened if evidence presents itself showing that we need to legislate for a rules-based system protecting society from the abuse of what are, ultimately, very dangerous explosive devices.

The terrible effect of firework use on animals, especially pets, has been the driver behind the petition, which gained more than 100,000 signatures. I congratulate the originators of the petition, Jill Cutsforth from Beverley and Julie Doorne from Sleaford, on gaining so much support and getting the issue debated today. Mrs Cutsforth’s explanation for starting the petition is typical of why further restrictions on the use of fireworks are needed. Her pet dog had to be sedated with diazepam when it became frightened by a firework that had been set off close by. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home has made it clear that it is forced to do all it can to keep its dogs and cats calm and safe by blacking out the windows, playing music, sitting with the most anxious residents and providing plenty of hiding places and distractions. With the restrictions that the petitioners ask for having the backing of such a powerful and well respected charity, we should think twice before dismissing the petition’s demands. They include, of course, a change in the law to restrict the use of fireworks—not their sale; we already have that provision—to traditional days such as bonfire night, new year’s eve, Chinese new year and Diwali. I think that many of us here would agree with that demand.

The terrible effect of firework use on animals, especially pets, has been the driver behind the petition, which gained more than 100,000 signatures. I congratulate the originators of the petition, Jill Cutsforth from Beverley and Julie Doorne from Sleaford, on gaining so much support and getting the issue debated today. Mrs Cutsforth’s explanation for starting the petition is typical of why further restrictions on the use of fireworks are needed. Her pet dog had to be sedated with diazepam when it became frightened by a firework that had been set off close by. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home has made it clear that it is forced to do all it can to keep its dogs and cats calm and safe by blacking out the windows, playing music, sitting with the most anxious residents and providing plenty of hiding places and distractions. With the restrictions that the petitioners ask for having the backing of such a powerful and well respected charity, we should think twice before dismissing the petition’s demands. They include, of course, a change in the law to restrict the use of fireworks—not their sale; we already have that provision—to traditional days such as bonfire night, new year’s eve, Chinese new year and Diwali. I think that many of us here would agree with that demand.
Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that any policy response in this area hinges on proportionality and requires a realistic understanding of what the Government can do? I am a passionate animal lover; I have recently been traumatised by the loss of my 20-year-old cat. However, would it not be disproportionate, and indeed counterproductive, to propose any policy change that would potentially cause the closure of successful and responsible fireworks display businesses such as Star Fireworks in Bracknell?

Angela Smith: I have absolutely no interest in banning public displays. The Fireworks Regulations 2004 require those organising public fireworks displays to be trained in delivering such events and in fireworks safety. That is exactly why I think that ultimately, we as a society will move towards more support for publicly organised and regulated fireworks displays rather than events that go on in people’s back gardens, which are where the real problems are.

Dr Lee: My point is that if we restricted sales to only a few days a year, there is a limited likelihood that a business would be successful purveying only on those days. I agree that restricting fireworks to organised public events would be a step in the right direction, but restricting the number of days would restrict businesses’ viability.

Angela Smith: If one’s policy position is to move towards public displays only, restrictions on the domestic use of fireworks would be a good starting point. The safety of the public—particularly of children—and the welfare of animals are far too important for us to compromise on that. However, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The 2004 regulations allow for penalties to be levied for antisocial behaviour involving fireworks, but enforcement of that power is poor. I hope that the Minister will comment on that. Over and above the demands in the petition, which I support, enforcement of the current regulations would help. A response to a parliamentary question in 2011 indicated that in the previous five years, fewer than 50 people a year had faced prosecution.

It is not only household pets who suffer as a result of the inappropriate use of fireworks but livestock and wildlife. Poultry are especially at risk of a smother, where birds huddle closely together, which can result in overheating and occasionally death. In addition, of course, fireworks can pose a fire risk if used irresponsibly or if hot embers land on buildings or in fields of standing crops, particularly during the summer. For much of our wildlife, sudden noises and flashes can be frightening and confusing.

I ask for assurances from the Minister that he will look again at the enforcement of the 2004 regulations and review them to test whether they are strong enough, or whether tighter restrictions along the lines recommended by the petition should be considered. I also ask him to consider the important recommendations made by the British Veterinary Association about adjusting the noise levels applying to fireworks categories 1 to 4.

We must also consider whether we need a more robust approach to regulating the use of fireworks by members of the public, notwithstanding the point made by the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on introducing the e-petition.

For the sake of animals, wildlife and our children, we should at least consider what else we need to do to eradicate the abuse of what are, ultimately, explosive devices that are extremely dangerous in the wrong hands. In Sheffield last November, we had to deal with serious incidents involving the abuse of those devices, when young hooligans hurled fireworks at police patrol vehicles. That is totally unacceptable, and something must be done. I know that such activity is already illegal, but we must deal with it. People need to understand that fireworks are potentially very dangerous; they are explosive devices. I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to the case being made today.

Sir Alan Meale (Mansfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is another problem involving the sale of fireworks? People buy imported goods that do not fall under the protections normally afforded in the European Union and in this country. They import a lot of illicit goods and sell them at certain times of the year to the public, who do not know how dangerous they are. That adds to the problems at those times of year.

Angela Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point. New European regulations are now in force on safety marks and the traceability of such devices, but again, there may well be an issue with the enforcement of the regulations on sales.

For the sake of animals, wildlife and our children, we should at least consider what else we need to do to eradicate the abuse of what are, ultimately, explosive devices that are extremely dangerous in the wrong hands. In Sheffield last November, we had to deal with serious incidents involving the abuse of those devices, when young hooligans hurled fireworks at police patrol vehicles. That is totally unacceptable, and something must be done. I know that such activity is already illegal, but we must deal with it. People need to understand that fireworks are potentially very dangerous; they are explosive devices. I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to the case being made today.

5.7 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour, as always, to serve under your chairship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on introducing this important debate on the back of the very successful e-petition.

I know that many people here might think it slightly off that I am talking about perhaps restricting the sale of fireworks, given that in Scotland we are world-famous for our use of them. Never mind the spectacular displays at the Burj Khalifa in Dubai or over Sydney harbour on new year’s eve; in Scotland we do it far better than anywhere else. The scenes in the skies over Edinburgh on Hogmanay are the envy of the world, and we certainly show everyone how fireworks displays should be organised.

I admit that we in Scotland are a nation of firework lovers, but we are also a nation of animal lovers. I wish to discuss in particular the balance between firework use for celebrations and the impact on animals. Any legislation pertaining to fireworks must take into account the fact that people have the right to mark celebrations with fireworks, whether they be concerts, weddings or religious festivals. However, legislation must also protect those who do not have a voice and who need our support. Just as a balance must be struck between the rights of animals when it comes to slaughter and religious
and cultural beliefs, the same fine balance must be made here too. If we can change something without necessarily legislating for it, that would almost certainly be my preferred option every time.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a telling contribution to this important debate. Does she join me in agreeing with the Dogs Trust’s position on the issue? It is interesting that she talks about a collaborative approach. The Dogs Trust recommends that local authorities take into consideration the location of public displays when granting a licence and require that it be well publicised in the surrounding area. Does she agree with such a course of action?

Margaret Ferrier: Definitely, I will come to that point, and to some statistics from the Dogs Trust. The hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), who is not in his place, mentioned that it is important for people to have advance notice. I know that that is not always easy when people buy fireworks and have a display in their garden; they do not let the general public know. That is an issue. It is about knowing the time that an event will take place, which is why the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) made a good point in saying that general fireworks displays are better; everyone knows about them because they are well publicised.

I thank the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) for his intervention, but he stole my next sentence: I was about to say that one way to solve the problem is by having and promoting public fireworks displays. In Glasgow, the council holds fireworks shows every bonfire night, which attract as many as 50,000 people. The consequence of such a large number of people attending these gatherings is that far fewer people buy their own fireworks, and fewer fireworks at home mean less disturbance for our pets. If a major display is well publicised, people who have pets are made aware of it and can easily draw up contingency plans to avoid it if necessary, because they have plenty of advance warning. A Dogs Trust survey of 3,750 people found that 93% of pet owners alter their plans during fireworks celebrations to try to minimise their pets’ trauma. No matter how annoying or inconvenient it can be for people to change their routine, they can do it.

Of course, I am not naive enough to think that having more public displays will magically solve the problem, because, as we know, fireworks are not exclusively used on 5 November. People’s plans cannot be changed when their next door neighbour holds an impromptu fireworks display at 10.30 pm on a random Tuesday. Several of my constituents say that it is the lead-up to and aftermath of both Guy Fawkes night and new year’s eve that cause the most problems for their dogs. Scamp, the dog belonging to my office manager Derec, is absolutely petrified of fireworks, as is Fluffy, my constituent Carol’s Lhasa Apso. Both dogs show signs of distress and completely change their behaviour, which has a negative effect on their owners. Fluffy is a small, petite dog, while Scamp is a larger Border collie, showing that all sizes and breeds of dog are affected by fireworks. As we are all aware, across the country thousands of dogs are affected by fireworks and many show the same symptoms of fear, including freezing on the spot. People can imagine how hard it is to carry a Border collie back home: because Scamp will not move at all at such times, it is no mean feat to carry him. Affected dogs can also bark or panic.

Another of my constituents, Lynne, is actually a dog trainer and trainee behaviourist. She has managed to teach her dog, Cal, a coping strategy; when he hears fireworks, he runs into a “safe” room and stays in there until the noise ends. Lynne is one of the lucky ones who is talented enough to provide such training. Sadly, however, most dogs have to suffer, with many of them actually requiring veterinary assistance.

To tackle this issue, I certainly do not wish to bring down the fireworks industry. Fireworks are enjoyed by some 10 million people in the UK every year and banning them completely would change many of our celebrations for the worse. None the less, we must take a pragmatic approach. The British Fireworks Association says that current legislation must be correctly enforced and it has also called for an increase in fines—from £1,000 to £5,000—for those found guilty of breaking the law. If the association is calling for such steps, it shows that something has to be done.

Philip Boswell: Current legislation and—critically—enforcement of it restricts the periods within which fireworks are sold by unlicensed traders. However, fireworks are often stockpiled for later use by members of the public when prices are slashed after Guy Fawkes night, and fireworks are readily available online. Does my hon. Friend agree that these sources also need more effective regulation and enforcement?

Margaret Ferrier: I do indeed and I thank my hon. Friend for making that point about the bigger issue of online sales and—as the hon. Member for Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale) said—fireworks being imported from other countries that perhaps do not adhere to EU law. Such imports should not be used or even brought into the country. We need to find a way round that issue as well, because such fireworks will be dangerous not only to animals, but to the humans who end up using them.

The Dogs Trust says it is important that owners take preventive measures to prepare their dogs for the noise of fireworks, and the Kennel Club argues that existing legislation should be properly and rigorously enforced. I agree with both those points. In the lead-up to this year’s fireworks season, I will do all I can locally to ensure that everyone acts in a socially responsible manner with fireworks and I urge all Members present today to do the same. To reduce the disruption to animals, it is incumbent on everyone to play their part to guarantee that fireworks are used with minimal problems, and that is true for both the owners of shops that sell fireworks and the owners of pets. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s responses to all the points that have been made by Members in this important debate.

5.15 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on introducing the debate on the back of the e-petition. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier); I always enjoy listening to her contributions. I do not want to get into
a squabble with her about which fireworks display is better, London or Edinburgh. If she had said Glasgow’s display was better than London’s, I might have faced a little conflict of interest, but London against Edinburgh? Come on; that is just too much of a stretch.

A number of colleagues will know that I spent 23 years in the London fire brigade before becoming the MP for Poplar and Limehouse. I was an operational firefighter for 13 years. For 364 days of the year, people young and old would be knocking on the doors of the fire station because they wanted to come in and look at the fire engines and talk to the firemen, as they were in those days—now we have both male and female firefighters. However, on bonfire night, things were entirely different. I have a quote here from the Chief Fire Officers Association, stating:

“Emergency service workers are more likely to be the victim of violence and hostility whilst carrying out their duties on November the 5th than most other nights of the year. Organised displays are generally safer and people are less likely to be injured.”

That is because 5 November is the night of the year when fireworks literally pour cold water on a lot of people’s fun—fires get out of control, and firefighters try to make sure that their community is safe.

The Minister will know that we have nearly 7,000 fewer firefighters today than we had in 2010, which means that there are not so many targets for people to aim at on 5 November. Maybe he would like to take that up with his colleague at the Home Office who is in charge of the fire service, because the cuts to the fire service across the country have gone too far and we are now endangering the public, as a variety of recent statistics have demonstrated.

Of course, the situation now is very different from when I was in the fire service. It is no longer just on 5 November that fireworks are used; people enjoy fireworks at parties, birthday events, cultural festivals and weddings. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale) pointed out, fireworks are bigger and noisier, and many of them are a lot more dangerous because they are illegal imports. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said, the misuse of fireworks as weapons by the antisocial means that they are dangerous to ordinary people as well as to emergency service workers, let alone the damage that they do to animals.

I confess to having been very interested when I read the House of Commons Library briefing for this debate, for which I thank the Library. I am interested in hearing the Minister’s response to the debate, and especially hearing why the Government regard things as having improved, which is the essence of their comments in the briefing pack.

The Government say that current regulations outline the times of the year when fireworks are on sale, but colleagues have already made the point about fireworks being stockpiled at the end of those periods to be used at other times of the year. The Government say that “the availability and use of fireworks outside the traditional periods has been greatly reduced” and that the regulations regarding curfews are working really well. I would be very interested to hear the Minister’s statistical defence of those comments. I am not saying that they are not true, but I would be happy to hear the statistics supporting them. It will be good news if they are true, but anecdotally that does not seem to be the situation. The Library briefing further quotes the Government’s response:

“Although there is some use of fireworks outside the traditional periods, we believe that the majority of people who use fireworks do so at the appropriate times of year and have a sensible and responsible attitude towards them. There are no plans at the moment to place further limitations on their use.”

The message that has come across from virtually every speaker in the debate so far is that we should ask the Government whether the balance is right, and how vigilance can be maintained to ensure that people who abuse the privilege of fireworks or misuse the materials are taken to task. I will come back to that point in a moment, and I will also turn to animal welfare issues.

First, however, I want to refer to the briefing and factsheet that the British Fireworks Association sent us—these points have already been made by one or two colleagues. The BFA urges us “not to support the proposals outlined in the petition”, because they would “increase illegal sales and create a black market trade, creating an additional problem for law enforcement agencies” and “force legitimate importers and retailers out of business, costing hundreds of jobs”.

It says that the industry is “responsible” and “puts safety first”, that its products are “enjoyed by 10 million people every year” and that if they are enjoyed responsibly there ought not to be a problem. The association suggests that the penalty for those found guilty of misuse should be increased from £1,000 to £5,000, so even the industry accepts that there needs to be some adjustment of the regulations controlling the sale, use and misuse of fireworks.

The association helpfully draws attention to another fact:

“In 2014/15 there were 114 people admitted to hospital as a result of firework related incidents. During the same period there were over 7,000 people admitted to hospital as a result of dog bites.”

A lot of Members have been campaigning about responsible dog ownership for many years, and excusing one issue does not excuse the other. We should be doing more on both.

The Chief Fire Officers Association largely supports the BFA. In a quote it supplied to us it states that it “supports the need for maintaining effective controls…However, the legislation in place following the review” of the 2014 regulations “we believe is proportionate to the risk and any proposals to shorten sales periods could have an opposite impact with the potential to increase illegal firework sales, black market and rogue traders”.

which we obviously need to be wary of.

We have received briefings from other organisations, including Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, the British Veterinary Association and the National Farmers Union, some of which have already been quoted from. My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge referred to the lengths to which Battersea has to go to look after its animals. The home also gives us an interesting statistic: in an average week in October it takes in 88 animals, but in the week of bonfire night there is
a 20% increase in the number. Animals are frightened—they panic and scatter—and then are handed over because their owners are not able to control them indoors, are worried about their behaviour and are looking to offload them.

Helpfully, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home draws attention to its 10-point plan, which I will come back to when I speak about Government advice for people who use fireworks and for those who have to suffer them. The points include looking after animals indoors, escape-proofing the house to protect animals from stampedes, creating a hiding place, drawing the curtains, putting on music and avoiding taking the animals out. They do not include the air freshener that was mentioned earlier, but whatever works has to be of assistance. The home goes on to say that it “would be supportive of...more effective enforcement of curfews, which would be of benefit as an anti-social behaviour measure for communities in a wider context than just animals.”

People who do not observe the regulations on time, noise or location of fireworks are straightforwardly being inconconsiderate, selfish and antisocial. It has been said that the concept of personal space seems to be diminishing in our society, and that is just another example.

On the British Veterinary Association’s briefing, I should declare that I found my BVA honorary membership card this afternoon, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge is also an honorary member, as are other colleagues here. We obviously have to take due note of the BVA’s briefing, otherwise our membership might be revoked. Its points have already been referred to, and they are straightforward. They are about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare. As my hon. Friend said, the association is calling for a revision of the levels of noise allowed, including through the setting of different levels for different types of firework. It is also calling on the Government to help ensure that information and advice on the prevention and management of noise is available to pet owners and others in the community. I would be interested to hear the Minister’s comments on that.

The National Farmers Union has also made some comments on the issue, stating: “Fireworks...have the possibility to frighten livestock, which can lead to lower production and even stock loss. Poultry especially are at risk of a ‘mother’, where birds huddle closely together which can result in overheating and occasionally death. In addition fireworks can pose a fire risk if hot embers land on buildings or in fields of standing crops. This is particularly an issue during the summer when crops are more likely to be dry. While the NFU does not have a position on when it is appropriate for fireworks to be let off we would call on everyone using fireworks to consider the safety and wellbeing of their neighbours and neighbours’ animals.”

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a farmer himself, made that point, and the point about the impact on the community.

Making fireworks illegal is just not sensible. It is a non-starter, notwithstanding the fantastic petition. Everyone who has spoken so far, and I suspect everyone who will speak, has sympathy for animal owners and the animals that have stress as a result of fireworks, but I do not think that banning fireworks will happen. The industry is regulated, but the regulations need to be kept under review. For me, as I said earlier, enforcement and information are key.

Organised displays are clearly preferably to amateur ones, whether in back gardens or on commons and whether organised by individual families or communities. They are safer for individuals, families and communities and are better for managing animal stress. The BVA’s point about noise levels is worth examining. We need more support for the police and trading standards in prosecuting antisocial behaviour and, worse, criminal behaviour, as well as in clamping down on dangerous products. We need common sense from the public about using fireworks at times when they are less likely to disturb neighbours and their pets, as well as wildlife. It is not rocket science—excuse the pun, Ms Vaz; I wrote that earlier and just had to get it in—it is basic common sense and civic responsibility.

I come back to my point about the Government’s response, in which they are positive about the progress that has been made. I do not deny that, and I look forward to the Minister elaborating on it. Most importantly, the existing regulations need to be enforced, as the hon. Member for Northampton South said when he opened the debate. I look forward to hearing the contributions of the Opposition spokespeople, especially that of my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue), as well as those of other colleagues, but I particularly look forward to hearing from the Minister about how the Government see the situation.

5.28 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I would like to place on record my thanks to the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) for his thoughtful introduction to the debate.

Such debates are interesting, because we never know what we will learn. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for informing us that fireworks were first used early in Queen Elizabeth I’s reign. I am afraid that those of us who thought that the problem was caused by that continental European immigrant Guy Fawkes cannot use that one any more, which makes a nice change.

I think most of us rather like fireworks: the Roman candle, the Catherine wheel, the snowflake—or is it the snowstorm?—the sparkler, the traffic light and all the rest. As children, most of us enjoyed fireworks every year, but part of the problem is that fireworks now happen in a random way. That is fine for those enjoying the fireworks, but less fine for owners of animals living in the vicinity. I will quote what one of my constituents, who lives in one of the industrial villages a couple of miles outside Wrexham, had to say on the subject:

“I myself have 2 dogs that get extremely distressed every year and the onus is naturally upon myself to protect them. However having to stay indoors without being able to safely let them outside...keeping them inside with high volume music on in order to drown out the noise outside every night from mid-October to mid-January is ridiculous. Many anti-social people will set fireworks off at all hours in my area...and the police are powerless to do anything about it as it’s impossible to identify who is responsible, and more often than not they’re also setting them off before the curfew (regardless of the time of year), so the police won’t do anything about it anyway because these people are currently within their legal right to set off fireworks at these times.”
That, in a nutshell, is the problem, but how do we deal with it? Most of us do not want to stop firework displays, but we have to recognise that there is a real problem. In addition to some of the solutions that other Members have suggested, I propose one possibility, which is that at least some form of advance notification be given.

As a representative of a constituency that is very rural in part, I very much accept what the National Farmers Union and others, including the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), have said about the impact on livestock in certain communities, but there is an additional problem in densely populated areas: people just do not know where some of these fireworks will be going off. I suggest that we have a solution similar to that for street parties. Imagine if a group of friends decided spontaneously at 7 o’clock one evening, or perhaps a bit later, to have a party in the middle of their street with no licence and no permission. It would probably be a bit of a nuisance if one was trying to get one’s car out and could not do so without disturbing the street party. Could practical solutions such as advance notice be looked at? Through that, owners of animals and pets would at least have notification of fireworks displays.

There is an important issue of balance in all this. The problem does not merely affect those with pets. Many of us like fireworks—we really like fireworks—but I suspect that it is different for a family with young children trying to get the children to sleep to the accompanying cacophony of bangers and Catherine wheels and some of the other louder fireworks. It would be all right if it was just the quiet little sparklers, but usually it is not. How we sort this issue out in terms of balance is important. I am sure that the Minister will listen to the points that we have all made in our speeches, and I am sure that he will take on board the real concerns of animal owners across the country. We do not want to be killjoys, because many of us really like fireworks, but we recognise the practical problems and that we have to have some balance.

5.34 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate those who signed the petition, because it raises an issue that is of genuine concern up and down the country—not least in Kettering. I am disappointed that I was not able to hear the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who is a former fireman, agrees that that number is probably a lot higher. We have all read of very distressing cases where very small children have lost eyes or been caused serious burns and injuries because a fireworks display went wrong at home. Accidents of course happen with organised displays, too, but it is far less frequent. In this country we are privileged to have some fantastic fireworks companies and operators who organise magnificent displays, and we should encourage that. Were we to ban fireworks from domestic sale and say that all fireworks displays should be licensed with a proper operator, that would encourage the number of licensed displays in this country. Far from being bad news for the fireworks industry, it could be very good news.

The other point is that fireworks are of course distressing for animals. I have a feeling that those who like to have an amateur display in the back garden think it is upsetting only a few people, but they do not see the distressed dogs cowering in the corner. I am sure that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who is a former fireman, agrees that that number is probably a lot higher. We have all read of very distressing cases where very small children have lost eyes or been caused serious burns and injuries because a fireworks display went wrong at home. Accidents of course happen with organised displays, too, but it is far less frequent. In this country we are privileged to have some fantastic fireworks companies and operators who organise magnificent displays, and we should encourage that. Were we to ban fireworks from domestic sale and say that all fireworks displays should be licensed with a proper operator, that would encourage the number of licensed displays in this country. Far from being bad news for the fireworks industry, it could be very good news.

The other point is that fireworks are of course distressing for animals. I have a feeling that those who like to have an amateur display in the back garden think it is upsetting only a few people, but they do not see the distressed dogs cowering in the corner. I am sure that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who is a former fireman, agrees that that number is probably a lot higher. We have all read of very distressing cases where very small children have lost eyes or been caused serious burns and injuries because a fireworks display went wrong at home. Accidents of course happen with organised displays, too, but it is far less frequent. In this country we are privileged to have some fantastic fireworks companies and operators who organise magnificent displays, and we should encourage that. Were we to ban fireworks from domestic sale and say that all fireworks displays should be licensed with a proper operator, that would encourage the number of licensed displays in this country. Far from being bad news for the fireworks industry, it could be very good news.

Fireworks are great if they can be seen and if they are good, but they are universally awful if they can only be heard. Fireworks have to be seen to be appreciated; it is not possible to appreciate just the noise. Whereas if somebody has a family fireworks display, hundreds of animals in the vicinity in a built-up area will be terrified for however long that display lasts.

The Government insist that children attend school every day, get their homework done and get the right grades, but how can we expect children to perform well at school if they are woken up at 9.30, 10 or 10.30 at night by an amateur firework display in the neighbouring
[Mr Philip Hollobone]

street? They will probably wake up distressed; they might find it difficult to get back to sleep; and they will certainly not be as right as rain when they wake up for school the next day.

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech and showing a refreshing independence of mind in calling for regulation and indeed a ban on an activity such as this. His comments about the noise and the spectacle itself underline the point that we cannot drive fireworks underground by restricting their use to certain times of the year. It is impossible to drive the use of fireworks underground; they are seen and heard, so it is possible to police restrictions on the use of fireworks at certain times of the year.

Mr Hollobone: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. As a former special constable under the police parliamentary scheme, I know a little about trying to enforce rules and regulations. Often it is difficult, but she is right; when it comes to fireworks, it is relatively straightforward, although not in every case. I have had the experience of trying to track down where a very loud noise was coming from in a local area, and sometimes it is more difficult than people think. However, I managed to do it. It is possible, especially with other officers in attendance. It is also possible to draw on local intelligence from neighbours. The hon. Lady is therefore right to say that it is possible to enforce restrictions.

A ban is simple and understandable. If I were drawing up the legislation, I would prescribe days in the year when it is permitted to have licensed firework displays: Guy Fawkes night, Chinese new year, Diwali and the Queen’s 90th birthday, for example. At all other times fireworks would not be allowed, and I would have an absolute prohibition on letting off fireworks during a school evening.

Encouraging people to notify their local area is very well meaning, but in practice it will not happen and will not be enforceable. We all know that there are responsible local firework displays organised on a small basis. One was organised by my local church not long ago. The volunteers from the church were well meaning. They put up notices in the local area that said what time the display would be and how long it would last. That is great, but there would still have been lots of animals in the local area distressed by the noise.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that he was a special constable; he is also a graduate of the fire scheme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge has outlined, the hon. Gentleman is directly challenging the Government. Is that just from his time as a special constable or because of his experience from the fire scheme? Or does he want a ban because he is a constituency MP listening to complaints from constituents?

Mr Hollobone: The hon. Gentleman brings to this debate the enormous benefit of his long service with the London fire brigade. He probably came across pretty dramatic firework instances, and he will know that the risk to people and property from the improper use of fireworks is a common complaint among firefighters. In a poll of firefighters I would be surprised if there were not a big majority in favour of banning them because they are simply too risky. The fireworks industry in this country would benefit from a ban on the domestic sale of fireworks because we could then develop the very good reputation that a lot of the licensed operators have for fantastic displays. If people knew that they could see fireworks only at a licensed display, I think fireworks would become more popular.

Sir Alan Meale: The hon. Gentleman’s analogies are interesting. He talks about amateur backyard ventures by parents and huge displays at community events such as we have had at Westminster. Back-garden displays are likely to keep children up and not going to school the following day, as indeed are the very large bangs from organised professional displays. The one thing we all know, which is why we are having this debate, is that they all scare the living daylights out of animals, whether pets or wildlife. How can he justify saying that we should organise regular and larger professional events? We should ban them.

Mr Hollobone: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point in his own way, but I would not go as far as him in banning them altogether. I do not believe that a complete ban on firework displays would enjoy popular support in this country. I do not think that that would get a majority of votes in a referendum. However, there could be a majority of votes for banning the domestic sale of fireworks. I can reconcile the question he asks by saying that there would be more fantastic licensed displays on the specific days when they were allowed throughout the year: for example, on Guy Fawkes night, Chinese new year, Diwali and the Queen’s birthday. Whatever the event, I envisage more displays of better quality just on those days. Most pet owners in this country would recognise that as a reasonable solution, so they would need to worry about this issue only on certain days during the year.

Sir Alan Meale: It is bizarre that we are here in the Palace of Westminster discussing whether we should have large bangs and firework displays when we all know that they came about only because of a guy called Guy Fawkes who initiated it all.

Mr Hollobone: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. Of course, this is where the original Gunpowder Plot took place, so perhaps it is apposite that we should be having this debate here. I readily agree with him.

I hope that the Government do not dismiss the petition as simply another House of Commons petition signed by just over 100,000 people who have a particular bee in their bonnet. I think that the issue is bigger than the petition suggests it is.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman was not here when I made my contribution and referred to Northern Ireland where we have a licensed system organised by the council and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The system seems to work. It is regulated and controlled. We have a system that works and people can enjoy fireworks. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman and I are at odds on this, but I want to see balance in the debate. I want the opportunity to use fireworks and I want protection for animals. I believe that it is possible to achieve that. We have done it in Northern Ireland. Why can we not do that here?
Mr Hollobone: The hon. Gentleman always seeks balance in a debate. I am disappointed that I missed his contribution, but I know that I will not have to wait too long before chancing upon another one, which I am sure will be of his usual high standard. He makes a good point. Often we can learn from Northern Ireland about how to do things. The issue is more serious than indicated by the great numbers who signed the petition. Were we to ask the British people to weigh up the pros and cons and consider banning the domestic sale of fireworks and have only licensed firework displays, I think a majority in this country—a majority in Kettering—would vote for that.

5.48 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to see you in the chair, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on securing this debate. Importantly, I congratulate the authors of the e-petition, which offers a constructive path that the UK Government can follow to ensure a healthy balance between limiting noise pollution and respecting and acknowledging important occasions that our communities take part in.

I declare an interest as my family includes two rather spoilt whippets, so I can fully sympathise with the thousands of people who signed the e-petition, including those from my own constituency, calling for a limit on when the general public can use fireworks.

To pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), I cannot stand fireworks. They are the dullest thing since sliced bread. I would rather be sitting in the house, having a cup of tea and watching “Coronation Street”. Perhaps I am the odd one out, but I have never really got into them. By allowing communities to celebrate and mark events, such as Hogmanay, that are part of our culture and heritage, while at the same time offering protection to those dog owners whose animals are adversely affected by noise, we will go some way towards tackling the increasing problem of noise pollution for those who have pets, as well as for those affected by the noise personally.

[Mr David Nuttall in the Chair]

The traditional bonfire night was perhaps the reason why I do not really appreciate fireworks. They were always very small bonfires, and back in the good old days when I had hair, the fireworks were useless. Most importantly, it was always raining, so I never really liked fireworks displays. In my constituency, we have bonfire night events in Levingrove Park in Dumbarton and Dalmuir Overtoun Park in Clydebank. They are organised by the local authority and done very well, but I hear from constituents who live close to such large organised events that dogs—it is predominantly dogs, but also cats and other animals—have to be sedated so that they can deal with the noise. Traditionally, we did not have so many huge events or back-garden fireworks displays. Fireworks were not easily accessible and more often than not people could not afford them. There has been a change in the culture, and fireworks are now used a lot more often and are a lot noisier.

As the owner of two whippets who like nothing better than to run about in the park or the garden, I see at first hand the impact that the noise from fireworks has on them and neighbouring dogs. As the saying goes, dogs are our best friends, and they are an important and integral part of any family. For me, seeing them suffer is like seeing one’s own children suffer. Noise pollution harms not only dogs but their owners, who feel helpless as they are unable to offer comfort to their pets. The psychological impact on all those affected cannot be fully calculated or identified, but it is not too difficult to agree that there is some impact.

I was pleased that the former Scottish National party MSP Dennis Robertson released an eight-point guide to helping pet owners and, probably more importantly, their pets through last Hogmanay. The recommendations included having a specific play area in the house—as is often mentioned by charitable bodies that deal with animal care—filled with favourite toys, treats and so on, and making sure that pets are secure and cannot escape if they are suddenly frightened. Dennis also highlighted the effect of fireworks on his companion and working guide dog, Mr Q, who retired at the end of the last Scottish Parliament Session. Although highly trained, working animals are nevertheless susceptible to noise pollution from fireworks, which can undermine their working capabilities and affect those who rely on them.

Dennis’s guide will go only some of the way towards combating the issues relating to noise pollution from fireworks. As Members have mentioned, more could be done by strengthening the existing Fireworks Regulations 2004, or by fully ensuring that they are properly and rigorously enforced. I am sure that, like me, other Members will find that the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 go some way towards addressing the issue of access to certain fireworks, such as those classed as category F4. That legislation was a step in the right direction.

The noise of fireworks gives cause for concern, but other devices, such as Chinese lanterns, are well documented as having caused injury and the death of livestock. That is a dreadful way for any animal to die and a huge loss to local farming communities. Animals face many challenges. Although it is not the UK Government’s intention to legislate at this point—the Minister can correct me if I am wrong—if further work is to be done, the implementation of the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 might allow additional support. The purchase of fireworks online is a serious issue mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell). It gives me cause for concern, and I am sure that it is brought up with other Members in the lead-up to fireworks night.

It is critical that we work with animal welfare and educational charities to bring about a cultural shift in the indiscriminate use of fireworks, thus reducing noise pollution and ensuring a better experience for communities when they use fireworks. This debate offers the welcome opportunity to highlight the work of various national bodies that seek to educate the wider community about the impact of using fireworks, especially organisations such as the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which has been on the frontline of animal welfare in Scotland since 1839.

The SSPCA reminded me, as a constituency MP, that individuals and communities must bear in mind that fireworks can be very stressful for pet owners who are trying to protect their animals from fear and distress. It also highlighted the fact that the bang from a firework...
is terrifying to an animal, causing some to panic and flee. That has resulted in road traffic accidents, and there have even been reports of swans flying into electricity pylons and horses being badly injured after running into barbed wire fences.

We require a cultural change in our use of and interaction with fireworks, based on the understanding that noise pollution affects people and animals. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, pet owners have a personal duty to protect their pets in the lead-up to firework night. Nevertheless, as the hon. Member for Clwyd South said, it is ridiculous for pet owners to have to do that from October all the way through to January. It is unacceptable that they find themselves in that position. Perhaps the Minister will reflect on that.

We must recognise changes in fireworks themselves. As I said, for me Hogmanay used to be about spending time with neighbours and family; it is now more about going out to huge fireworks displays. There has been a huge cultural shift in many events across these islands, with more, louder fireworks. That, of course, affects communities. Partnership is key to changing attitudes. Closer collaboration can enable people to better understand the impact of noise. We should work with the fire service and people in education services. We should work with people in the health service, who understand the effect of fireworks through working in A&E departments and seeing the reality of the impact a firework can have on an individual. We should work with veterinary surgeons, who can tell us about the effect of fireworks on animals who escape during displays.

We must collaborate and we must better understand the impact of noise pollution on people and animals to better inform the enforcement of the existing legislation. If required, future legislation should be based on communities’ experiences. We must ensure that future legislation or policies better reflect the impact of noise pollution on animals, as highlighted by the petitioners. I congratulate them on their petition and thank the hon. Member for Northampton South for bringing it to the House.

5.58 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) and the Petitions Committee on providing this valuable debate. I also congratulate the people who initiated and signed the petition.

It is 12 years since the existing legislation was introduced in 2004, so it is right that we look at it again and consider whether it is adequate. We also need to see whether things are being monitored correctly, because it is not only about having the legislation but about what we do with it, and adequate monitoring and enforcement are key. As many Members have said, in the end, the debate is about balance. As someone who was injured by a firework at the age of four and still bears the scar—do not worry, I am not going to display it—I am very much aware of the dangers of fireworks to human beings. I do not think we considered pets enough in my youth, and it is a positive sign that we are now considering how livestock and pets are affected by fireworks. It used to be all about the terrible tragedies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who has vast experience of the fire service, knows, they were all that became news at the time. Animals were never mentioned, so we have made progress.

It would be far too simple to see this debate as a clash between two opposing forces. On the one hand, the animal welfare charities bring to our attention the effects of noisy fireworks on livestock and domestic pets. It is indisputable that loud bangs and bright lights can cause distress to animals. I have had to sit in a garage with my cats for long periods, because it happens not just on firework night but in the period leading up to it and at other times. On the other hand, the fireworks industry, equally understandably, points to the potential loss of jobs if there were further restriction, and to the public’s enjoyment of firework displays. All of us, with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), enjoy firework displays. Although I was injured by a firework, even I watch them at a very, very safe distance.

Both sides have a point. The real questions are, where do we draw the line, and are the laws that are in place enforced sufficiently? Nobody wants a free-for-all in the sale of fireworks, or to go back to the situation where they were on sale for months in supermarkets. We need to look at whether the regulations are sufficient and sufficiently enforced. The Fireworks Regulations 2004 were made under the Fireworks Act 2003, which was a private Member’s Bill—that shows that private Members’ Bills have an effect in this place. The previous Labour Government supported it, and it had cross-party support. We worked together for the good of people and animals. The purpose of the Act was explicitly to stem the trend of year-round fireworks, which concerned the RSPCA and others at the time.

Fireworks can be sold to the public by unlicensed traders, including supermarkets, only for Chinese new year and the preceding three days, Diwali and the preceding three days, the bonfire night period—although if it lasts from 15 October to 10 November, I think that is a very long period—and new year celebrations from 26 to 31 December. That is 41 days in total. Perhaps we should look at the length of time for which they can be sold for bonfire night. As far as I am concerned, they should be sold for 5 November and perhaps the Saturdays around that date, although my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse made a good point: how do we know that people are not stockpiling fireworks and keeping them for other dates?

Suppliers that want to sell fireworks outside the traditional periods have to be licensed by local authorities, which is pretty costly and requires them to comply with stringent conditions. Under the 2004 regulations, it is an offence to use fireworks outside the traditional periods after 11 pm and before 7 am without permission. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) asked, how difficult is it to enforce those regulations? Do the police go out if they hear fireworks? What monitoring is done of whether action is taken in areas where the rules are abused? A number of hon. Members mentioned the noise level allowed, which is 120 dB for home fireworks. Will the Government consider that noise level and its effect on animals? Has more research been done? Is the level being continuously monitored?
I have concerns about trading standards organisations’ monitoring of firework sales. We know that trading standards departments are being cut throughout the country, and that they are overworked at the moment. Are they monitoring the illegal sale of fireworks? Do they have the resources to do so at the moment? We need to raise that concern.

The use of fireworks has changed for the better since I was younger. I remember fireworks being available far more widely. They were often bought by what we might call a hooligan element. Bangers were regularly thrown at cars, and there were constant reports of fireworks being tied to cats’ tails. People seemed to have less respect for fireworks in those days. I am pleased that the education appears to be working. The television news used to be full of horrendous incidents, and there were not many reports about pets, apart from the more horrific tales. I am pleased that public concern has been raised, but I would like there to be more education. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South said, people should contact their neighbours if they are going to have a display in their back garden. I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith): I would like public displays to be much better promoted, although with adequate notice so that people can keep their pets in. Public displays, rather than back garden displays—which are often, frankly, very disappointing and expensive—should be the norm for fireworks.

It is not just the 2004 regulations that protect us from firework misuse. The Explosives Regulations 2014 deal with the storage of fireworks and explosives, and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 deal with the safety of fireworks as a consumer product. We need to look at whether trading standards organisations have enough resources to deal with the illegal trade in fireworks. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires that local authorities’ environmental health officers take “all reasonable steps” to investigate complaints about excessive noise. Have there been any prosecutions for the use of fireworks? Is that monitored? Are the statistics looked at?

To return to the petition, of course animals need to be protected. They do not like fireworks, there is no protection for animals and their owners by the unexpected noise that fireworks produce. Of course, not only animals are affected by noisy fireworks. I also sympathise with those who suffer from mental health issues, autism and post-traumatic stress disorder, for whom the noise from fireworks can be very upsetting.

The majority of people who enjoy fireworks do so responsibly with consideration for others and in accordance with the law. None the less, I completely understand the distress caused to animals and their owners by the unexpected noise that fireworks produce. Of course, not only animals are affected by noisy fireworks. I also sympathise with those who suffer from mental health issues, autism and post-traumatic stress disorder, for whom the noise from fireworks can be very upsetting.

As a Minister in the Department responsible, my challenge is to find the right balance between the enjoyment of fireworks by consumers and the impact of those fireworks on vulnerable groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South, in his excellent opening speech, and other hon. Members have asked several pertinent questions, which I will attempt to answer.

I will take animal welfare and enforcement measures together—namely the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing framework and the various measures with respect to animal welfare. Considerable legislation is already in place on the use, sale and production of fireworks—as hon. Members have noted, the Fireworks Regulations 2004 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015—and is enforced by trading standards officials, in partnership with the police. Elements of the Explosives Act 1875 also set certain restrictions on fireworks, again enforced by the police.

Fireworks must be produced to high standards. As mentioned, the 2015 regulations require that all fireworks and other pyrotechnic articles must comply with essential safety requirements, which control how the fireworks are manufactured, tested and labelled with use and safety messages. They are designed to ensure that the risks of injury to users, onlookers and the public in general, and of damage to property, are minimised.

The requirements vary by category of how powerful the firework is, and cover design and construction, labelling, and the need for full product testing. They also include restrictions on, for example, safety distances, explosive content and means of ignition. My hon. Friend also expressed concern about fireworks debris, which is restricted by the relevant British and European standards.

The 2004 regulations set an 11 pm curfew on the use of fireworks, with later exceptions for seasonal celebrations such as 5 November, new year, Chinese new year and Diwali. The curfew is enforced by the police, with any enforcement being tied to cats’ tails. People seemed to have less respect for fireworks in those days. I am pleased that the education appears to be working. The television news used to be full of horrendous incidents, and there were not many reports about pets, apart from the more horrific tales. I am pleased that public concern has been raised, but I would like there to be more education. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South said, people should contact their neighbours if they are going to have a display in their back garden. I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith): I would like public displays to be much better promoted, although with adequate notice so that people can keep their pets in. Public displays, rather than back garden displays—which are often, frankly, very disappointing and expensive—should be the norm for fireworks.

It is not just the 2004 regulations that protect us from firework misuse. The Explosives Regulations 2014 deal with the storage of fireworks and explosives, and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 deal with the safety of fireworks as a consumer product. We need to look at whether trading standards organisations have enough resources to deal with the illegal trade in fireworks. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires that local authorities’ environmental health officers take “all reasonable steps” to investigate complaints about excessive noise. Have there been any prosecutions for the use of fireworks? Is that monitored? Are the statistics looked at?

To return to the petition, of course animals need to be protected. They do not like fireworks, there is no protection for animals and their owners by the unexpected noise that fireworks produce. Of course, not only animals are affected by noisy fireworks. I also sympathise with those who suffer from mental health issues, autism and post-traumatic stress disorder, for whom the noise from fireworks can be very upsetting.

The majority of people who enjoy fireworks do so responsibly with consideration for others and in accordance with the law. None the less, I completely understand the distress caused to animals and their owners by the unexpected noise that fireworks produce. Of course, not only animals are affected by noisy fireworks. I also sympathise with those who suffer from mental health issues, autism and post-traumatic stress disorder, for whom the noise from fireworks can be very upsetting.

As a Minister in the Department responsible, my challenge is to find the right balance between the enjoyment of fireworks by consumers and the impact of those fireworks on vulnerable groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South, in his excellent opening speech, and other hon. Members have asked several pertinent questions, which I will attempt to answer.

I will take animal welfare and enforcement measures together—namely the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing framework and the various measures with respect to animal welfare. Considerable legislation is already in place on the use, sale and production of fireworks—as hon. Members have noted, the Fireworks Regulations 2004 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015—and is enforced by trading standards officials, in partnership with the police. Elements of the Explosives Act 1875 also set certain restrictions on fireworks, again enforced by the police.

Fireworks must be produced to high standards. As mentioned, the 2015 regulations require that all fireworks and other pyrotechnic articles must comply with essential safety requirements, which control how the fireworks are manufactured, tested and labelled with use and safety messages. They are designed to ensure that the risks of injury to users, onlookers and the public in general, and of damage to property, are minimised.

The requirements vary by category of how powerful the firework is, and cover design and construction, labelling, and the need for full product testing. They also include restrictions on, for example, safety distances, explosive content and means of ignition. My hon. Friend also expressed concern about fireworks debris, which is restricted by the relevant British and European standards.

The 2004 regulations set an 11 pm curfew on the use of fireworks, with later exceptions for seasonal celebrations such as 5 November, new year, Chinese new year and Diwali. The curfew is enforced by the police, with any enforcement being tied to cats’ tails. People seemed to have less respect for fireworks in those days. I am pleased that the education appears to be working. The television news used to be full of horrendous incidents, and there were not many reports about pets, apart from the more horrific tales. I am pleased that public concern has been raised, but I would like there to be more education. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South said, people should contact their neighbours if they are going to have a display in their back garden. I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith): I would like public displays to be much better promoted, although with adequate notice so that people can keep their pets in. Public displays, rather than back garden displays—which are often, frankly, very disappointing and expensive—should be the norm for fireworks.

It is not just the 2004 regulations that protect us from firework misuse. The Explosives Regulations 2014 deal with the storage of fireworks and explosives, and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 deal with the safety of fireworks as a consumer product. We need to look at whether trading standards organisations have enough resources to deal with the illegal trade in fireworks. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires that local authorities’ environmental health officers take “all reasonable steps” to investigate complaints about excessive noise. Have there been any prosecutions for the use of fireworks? Is that monitored? Are the statistics looked at?

To return to the petition, of course animals need to be protected. They do not like fireworks, there is no doubt about that. There is animal protection legislation—under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to animals. There is advice and guidance on the safe use of fireworks on the “Safer Fireworks” website, but it should be better promoted and the information should be strengthened. Perhaps people can be given advice if they really feel it is necessary to have a display in their back garden and want to spend their money on fireworks that fizzle out so quickly. Perhaps they can be asked to inform their neighbours if they have pets.

It is important that the misuse of fireworks is kept to a minimum and that they are prevented from being a nuisance and a danger to people and animals. We have a lot of legislation, but we need to ensure that it is monitored and enforced and look at whether the penalties are set at the right level. If that is combined with a stronger public information campaign, maybe, just maybe, we will ensure that people enjoy fireworks—as most people do—responsibly and safely without instilling fear and distress in animals.
breach subject to an unlimited fine and/or six months in prison. The police can also issue on-the-spot fines of £90 to persons aged 18 or over committing that offence.

Furthermore, sale of fireworks is limited to seasonal periods, unless a retailer is licensed. A licence costs £500 and is issued by a local authority, subject to strict criteria. The penalty for operating without a licence is an unlimited fine and/or up to six months in prison. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) asked about trends in recent sales, and I offer him some statistics in response. I will happily write to him with further information in due course. The industry estimates that about 15% of sales are by those with a year-round retail licence.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about stockpiling, as did the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue). Stockpiling and the storage of fireworks are governed by robust regimes. The storage of fireworks of less than two tonnes in weight needs a licence from the local authority; storage of more than two tonnes of fireworks requires a licence from the Health and Safety Executive. Both bodies may inspect storage facilities, if they so wish.

The hon. Members for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) mentioned online sales. Online sales are regulated in the same way as conventional sales. The trading standards body is doing specific work on national trading standards for online sales. Funding for that body continues at last year’s level of £14.8 million.

Fireworks cannot be set off in a public space, and the noise caused by them may constitute a statutory nuisance. Local authority environmental health officers may judge whether the noise constitutes a statutory nuisance and act accordingly. Finally, it is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to cause any unnecessary suffering to any captive or domestic animal. Fireworks must not be set off near livestock or horses in fields, or close to buildings that house livestock.

In my view, those existing laws, which are robustly enforced, and the penalties for breaching them are appropriate to ensure that animal welfare is protected.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am listening to the Minister’s response with great interest and, kindly, he is dealing with points made by colleagues. I am not sure whether I am anticipating something he might be going on to answer, but a number of us asked about enforcement because of the clear interest in whether we have the balance right. The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) said that we should ban anything but organised displays; most of us say, “Let’s get the balance right.” On the enforcement of the regulations, does the Minister have the statistics on how many prosecutions there have been, what the trend is, and whether it is improving or deteriorating? Those could give confidence to people that trading standards officers, for sales, and the police, for enforcement, are working on this and are doing all they can to protect exposed communities and animals.

**Joseph Johnson:** No centrally available data are with the Department; the data are not separated out to show specific fireworks offences. The basis on which data are collected and given to the Home Office has changed, so we are unable to identify fireworks offences specifically or data of the kind the hon. Gentleman is interested in.

**Angela Smith:** The points about the role of trading standards were interesting, and I wonder whether the point about centrally collected data also applies to trading standards. Trading standards departments are important in terms of animal welfare, because they also enforce regulations on the breeding and sale of companion animals, particularly dogs and cats. There is real concern in the animal welfare world that trading standards do not have the resources to enforce regulation of either fireworks or, all important, the breeding and sale of dogs and cats.

**Joseph Johnson:** As I said, national trading standards continue to receive significant Government funding, to the tune of almost £15 million last year, but the hon. Lady’s concerns are on the record.

On public awareness, there is Government-sponsored guidance on the safe and considerate use of fireworks on the gov.uk website, including the fireworks code. It includes a link to the Safer Fireworks website, hosted by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which includes a section on thinking of one’s neighbours and letting them know when planning a display, especially those with pets or animals, elderly neighbours and people with children.

In addition, the very useful “Celebrating with bonfires and fireworks: A community guide” is produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government. It, too, encourages consideration for neighbours and advising them of any fireworks planned.

Many local authorities provide advice on how to use fireworks safely and considerately on their websites, as well as links to other sites. In addition, UK fireworks manufacturers support the fireworks code, which is supplied with all their products and contains advice on safety and on considerate use, including informing neighbours when a garden display is planned. Many retailers have copies of the fireworks code available at point of sale. Retailers also have advice and safety information on their websites, including encouraging consideration for others. All such guidance means that the public have ample opportunity to be aware of their responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South also asked whether manufacturers and retailers could do more to mitigate the impact on animals. As I have already set out, the fireworks industry takes a responsible approach to the issue, and is keen to work with us to minimise the detrimental impact of its products. The sector supports the fireworks code, and its representatives regularly meet officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to discuss areas of concern, including those mentioned in the debate. However, I am confident that legislation already provides adequate safeguards and that the industry is doing everything it can to ensure that it continues to operate within that legal framework.

Finally, I come to the question of whether more could be done to support pet and livestock owners. Government are often not best placed to produce guidance on such matters, as others are in a better position to do so, but we are more than happy to promote and support...
guidance produced by other organisations. In particular, animal welfare charities such as Blue Cross, the RSPCA and the Kennel Club have produced freely available guidance on how to minimise the impact of fireworks use on animals and on how to reduce any distress that they might feel.

While this debate is not specifically about changing the law, I want to take the opportunity to reflect on the e-petition that sparked the discussion and the calls for further restrictions on fireworks use to four traditional periods: dates around Guy Fawkes, New Year’s Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year. In my view, changing the legal restrictions on use of fireworks is unlikely to be effective. It is likely that those who already use fireworks in an antisocial or inconsiderate way will not be deterred by further regulation. Indeed, further restrictions on when fireworks can be used could lead to more incidents of illegal use at unexpected times. That might also be associated with trade in fireworks illegally imported from overseas, which might not conform to stringent UK and EU standards. Moreover, restrictions in use could lead to a drop in legitimate sales, leading to job losses not only in the fireworks industry but in dependent and associated businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) called for a ban on fireworks outside tightly licensed displays. I remind him that this is a £180 million industry that provides employment to at least 250 people directly and supports thousands of others in the supply chain and I am not sure that they would share his optimism that the proposal he advocates would lead to an overall boost in revenues for the sector and an increase in the security of their livelihoods. We need to bear their position in mind in the debate, too.

In conclusion, there are already restrictions and penalties in place that I believe reasonably provide for animal welfare. Fireworks use, by both the general public and professional display operators, is heavily regulated. There are restrictions on when they can be bought—including on internet sales—and used, how they can be stored and noise levels.

Jim Shannon: I was hoping that we might have had some reference from the Minister to the good work done in the devolved Administrations. I hope that he has had an opportunity to consider that, but, if he has not, will he do so and come back to us?

Joseph Johnson: Indeed, we do reflect on differing practice around the United Kingdom. Fireworks use is of course a devolved issue and there is a differing regime in Northern Ireland. We look with great interest at how Northern Ireland approaches the question and any lessons that can be drawn from that will be learned.

Fireworks are subject to stringent testing regimes and new products undergo intense scrutiny before they are made available for sale. Low noise fireworks are becoming more widely available. UK manufacturers have introduced low noise fireworks and worked with animal charities on guidance for owners.

I understand the concerns of those who find the noise and flash of fireworks distressing, but I must reiterate that I believe the majority of people enjoy fireworks with consideration for others and in accordance with the regulations governing their use. It is a great pity that the actions of an antisocial minority tarnish the reputation of a responsible majority.

I am satisfied that enough is being done to make the public aware of their responsibilities when using fireworks and that fireworks manufacturers and retailers are helping with advice to mitigate the impact on animals. Moreover, many local authorities have advice and guidance on using fireworks on their websites. They will also be aware of any issues particularly affecting the local community with regards to firework use. I therefore suggest that those who feel that fireworks use in their area is excessive contact their local councils with a view to working together on seasonal awareness campaigns to promote consideration for others when organising domestic displays. In the meantime, the Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

6.23 pm

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to you, Mr Nuttall, and to Ms Vaz for chairing the proceedings and to all Members and the Minister for taking part in this important debate on how we ensure the balance between enjoying fireworks and animal welfare. We heard lots about how we consider that and I am grateful to the Minister for agreeing to take away some of what he has heard to look at for the future. I am also grateful to the creators of the petition and all the people who signed it for giving us the opportunity to have this important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered e-petition 109702 relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

6.24 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Tuesday 7 June 2016

[ANDREW PERCY in the Chair]

Support for Life-shortening Conditions

9.30 am

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered support for children and young people with life-shortening conditions.

Mr Percy, may I say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship for the first time? [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Prior to entering Parliament, I spent most of my working life in the hospice movement, with both adults and children. I worked in hospices, including Hope House in Oswestry; East Lancashire hospice, which cares for adults in the east Lancashire area; and Martin House children’s hospice, which cares for children in the Yorkshire area. During that time, I saw children and their families at their most vulnerable, looking for any kind of solace in what are probably the most challenging circumstances that any of us could possibly imagine.

In my 14 years working in the sector, I saw the hospice movement adapt and grow to meet the needs of children and young people as medical technology and provision developed. That growth was achieved by listening and putting the patients first at all times. However, unfortunately, there are still cases across the broader palliative care sector where that does not always happen, and that is why this debate is so important. There are currently 49,000 children and young people—and the number is rising—living in the UK with life-shortening conditions.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I congratulate the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) on securing such an important debate. He just quoted a statistic. Does he agree that data collection is one of the most important factors? Robust data collection is needed so that we do not underestimate the number of children who are suffering from life-shortening conditions.

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which I will come to later.

Some 49,000 children and young people are living with conditions that are life shortening, by which we mean conditions for which there is no reasonable hope of a cure and from which most of those young people are expected to die. The conditions can include conditions for which curative treatment may be feasible but can fail, as is often the case with cancers or congenital heart diseases; conditions for which premature death is inevitable but where there may be prolonged periods during which the child is well, such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy; progressive conditions such as Batten disease, without any curative treatment; and irreversible, but non-progressive, conditions that cause severe disability, leading to susceptibility to health complications and premature death, such as severe brain injuries.

The number of young people affected by one of those four categories of condition is equivalent to one child in every single school, and 50% of the 5,000 children who die in the UK each year will have one of those conditions. Of course, the number of people affected in other ways is much higher. Parents, siblings and other family members and friends can bring the number close to 400,000 people, which equates to more people than the population of the city of Leicester.

The 49,000 children and young people need palliative care from the point at which their condition is diagnosed or recognised—often at birth—until the end of their lives. There is an entire package of outcomes that good palliative care should achieve, which is quite different from that which adults receive given that children often need care throughout their entire life. Good care should meet children’s physical, social and emotional needs, enhancing their quality of life to ensure that the child and their family can come to terms with such life-altering issues.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining this important debate. I am sure that many people here will have come into contact with children with such difficulties. Does he agree—he touched on this point—that more psychological help is needed for the parents, especially when the children are approaching the time of death? It is a very difficult time. There need to be very quick results. Help is needed for the parents as well.

Stuart Andrew: I absolutely agree. During the time I spent in the hospice movement, I learnt that those final few weeks are incredibly distressing. None of us can possibly imagine what it is like unless we have been through it. The support for the parents and the wider family is what makes much of what happens in the children’s hospice movement such a success.

The care must be age appropriate—suitable for a child’s particular stage of development—and administered by people who have the exact skills needed to get the person through their care pathway. A comprehensive local children’s palliative care service spans health, social care and education. Joint commissioning is vital and should be accessible 24/7, 365 days a year, from diagnosis to bereavement. As a result of the complexity and severity of patients’ needs, the transition from children or youth services to adult services can be particularly daunting.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate and for the well-informed points he makes. Is it not the case that improvements in medical technology mean that more children with life-limiting conditions are transitioning into adulthood? Therefore, we have a real duty of care to ensure—as Acorns Children’s Hospice in my constituency is doing—that we find the best pathways to support those people into adulthood and to give them the best chance of living a quality life with the time that they have.

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right. I saw great advances throughout my time in the hospice movement. When I first joined Hope House, the life expectancy of the children who suffered from Duchenne muscular...
dystrophy was usually no longer than 18 or 19. By the time I had finished my career in the hospice movement, some were living into their late 20s and possible even their early 30s. Transition is incredibly important for them, because often the style of care provided is geared more towards the older generation than to young people.

Transition is incredibly important and centres such as Martin House, which I worked for, understand that. It built Whitby Lodge, a dedicated unit for teenagers and young people, which has state-of-the-art equipment designed to enable social interaction through things such as a mini nightclub—something that we all take for granted. As well as caring for children and young people in the hospices, members of the care team supported the family in their home. Even after a child has died, help is provided in the form of bereavement care for family members.

Transitioning to other services can sometimes present real difficulties. From dealing with new agencies and professionals, to transitioning to a completely different plan, the result can create quite severe gaps in service provision. The impact is, frankly, quite shocking, with 36% of families breaking down, 64% of mothers and 24% of fathers having to give up work entirely, and nearly 70% of siblings being bullied or feeling isolated at school.

All that can create a cocktail of problems that leads families into poverty. Therefore, at all times, it is vital that locally available, community-led children’s palliative care is at the heart of the service provision. These kinds of services are, thankfully, easier to find than they once were due to local offers and organisations such as Together for Short Lives, which provide directories of available services. That is just one example of how provision has changed since I began working in the hospice movement.

I will never forget seeing families, drained and exhausted, arriving straight from work or school on a Friday, the colour drained from their faces with no fight in them, dragging bulky equipment around in their car, when all they wanted to do was what we all like to do—go out for a simple meal on a Friday night. Great palliative care allows those families to have short respite breaks, the importance of which really cannot be overstated, because it provides support to everyone in the family. With the number of children and young people with life-shortening conditions increasing, it is becoming harder for the Government, the NHS and local councils to budget enough to meet those families’ needs, given that the number of people with such conditions is not being monitored, as the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) mentioned. The complex care that such families need from multiple agencies and professionals is not joined up enough, and families have to fight with their last ounce of strength to get the services they need. I therefore ask my right hon. Friend the Minister what can be done to ensure that the number and needs of children and young people with life-shortening conditions are more accurately monitored.

Funding for voluntary sector providers of children’s palliative care is not being provided fairly or sustainably. It is limited to medical elements of care and does not include crucial non-clinical elements such as short breaks and bereavement support. Together for Short Lives expects to publish soon the results of a series of freedom of information requests it has made to clinical commissioning groups and local authorities. Those results will show the extent to which different elements of care are being commissioned, and I hope that colleagues from across the country will use those data to see how their own constituents’ care is performing.

Before that, I ask the Minister whether he can set long-term plans for funding children’s palliative care fairly, sustainably and in a way that reflects the growing demand for such services. Additionally, will he work with his colleagues to write to CCGs and local authorities to make it clear what their responsibilities are in commissioning palliative care? Local authorities have a duty to provide short breaks for disabled children. However, they are cutting funding for short breaks at a time when demand from seriously ill children is increasing. The Government and local authorities, of course, face a difficult situation in balancing budgets, and I fully understand the need for that to happen, but at the spending review the Government gave councils the ability to raise more money for adult social care through council tax. Children’s social care was left out and I struggle to understand why, so I would appreciate it if he expanded on that. Additionally, will he hold local authorities to greater account for the money they spend on short breaks for disabled children and ask them what action they are taking to secure access to such breaks?

As I have mentioned, without access to specialist adapted vehicles, which many families need and many of which I saw, families are unable to transport their seriously ill babies and young children to and from hospital. That often traps those babies and young children at home or in a hospital bed, preventing them from enjoying the things that we all take for granted. Children under three with life-shortening conditions are not currently eligible for the mobility component of disability living allowance, so will the Minister work with his colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions to change the eligibility criteria so that nought to three-year-old children with life-shortening conditions, whose lives will end without heavy and bulky medical equipment, can have access to such important vehicles?

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that single gesture would do more to transform the lives of many families than all the recommendations and assurances that we all want to give those families?

Stuart Andrew: I certainly agree. As I mentioned earlier, it was staggering to see the smallest child come with so much equipment to keep them alive. Larger vehicles enable such families to do the things that every family likes to do, for example to go out for the day. The lack of such a vehicle often creates more isolation for the siblings I mentioned a moment ago.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Further to that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given the sensitivity of the issue, as he has laid out so well, it is terrible that the basic message to those families who have a child with a life-shortening illness is that the reason they cannot get that support is that the child is not old enough? That is a perverse message for those families.
Stuart Andrew: I take that point entirely. In this debate I want the issue to be considered carefully, because it seems perverse for a child to be too young to get the support they really need.

Medical advances thankfully mean that more young people with life-shortening conditions are living into adulthood. That should of course be celebrated but, as I have said, the transition from children's services to adult services can be daunting and is often not joined up. There is currently a distinct lack of age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate palliative care services to meet the growing demand, so again I ask the Minister whether he will look into providing seed funding to voluntary sector organisations so that they can set up age-appropriate services for young people transitioning from children's services to adult services.

I end by paying tribute to all the organisations, including Together for Short Lives, and all the people who were involved with Children's Hospice Week a couple of weeks ago. Those dedicated people are really quite superb. I could never have done my job at Martin House or at Hope House without their tremendous effort. Their reputation helped us to raise the money we needed, and we should all pay tribute to the tremendous work they do. I hope that today's debate will mean that we can all work together so that things can change for those 49,000 children and young people who are battling with the most difficult issues that we could possibly imagine.

Several hon. Members rose—

Andrew Percy (in the Chair): Five people wish to speak, which works out at about 8.6 minutes each—not that I have used my calculator. This is an important debate, and it is important to get everyone in before I call the first of the Front Benchers at half-past 10.

9.46 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) on clearly outlining the case and how we all feel about this important subject. I apologise in advance for not being here to hear the shadow Minister and the Minister—I have apologised to them both. I have to attend the Select Committee on Defence, otherwise I would look forward to hearing what they have to say.

This issue is important to me, as it is to the hon. Member for Pudsey and others in the Chamber, which is why we are here. We are here to represent our people and their viewpoints on issues that they want to be debated. There are Members here with personal stories, some of which we have heard before, and I look forward to hearing some of those stories again.

Life-shortening conditions are those for which there is no reasonable hope of cure and from which children are expected to die, or for which curative treatment may be feasible but can fail. Children with life-shortening conditions need continuing palliative care throughout the trajectory of their illness. As I always do in Westminster Hall and in the House, I will give a Northern Ireland perspective. The Minister knows that health is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, and I will therefore add to the debate and the knowledge we all have by addressing some of the positive things we are doing in Northern Ireland. By sharing knowledge from across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland we have an opportunity to enhance and enrich our lives and to help ourselves to do things.

In Northern Ireland alone there are currently estimated to be some 1,300 children and young people living with life-shortening conditions. Many of those children have extremely complex and unpredictable conditions, and they are under the pressure of requiring round-the-clock care seven days a week. Due to medical advances and improved care, that prevalence is growing and more of those children are living into adulthood.

The hon. Member for Pudsey and my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to families and how important it is for children under pressure and in need of medical assistance to have family support. It is about their parents, their siblings, their grandparents, their family circle and their friends coming together to give support and help at the right time. Because the proportion of young people and children in the Province with life-shortening conditions is less than 1%, people might be inclined to believe that they are an underfunded and perhaps neglected section of the population, but fortunately they would be wrong. More can always be done, but in Northern Ireland the work to support young people and children affected by life-shortening conditions has been positive and is ongoing.

Health may be a devolved matter, and this debate may be most pertinent to NHS England, but such conditions affect British children across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and it is therefore important to make such points. It is important to link the work of Government institutions across the United Kingdom to determine what is best practice and what is not, and to share ideas on the way forward. Hopefully this debate will give us an opportunity to do just that.

David Simpson: We have discussed palliative care. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that complete, wrap-around palliative care is given to those affected? What happens to children with life-shortening illnesses post-19 has been an issue across the whole United Kingdom for far too long, and we need to address it.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend has hit on the kernel of the issue.

We need to exchange medical advances among all regions of the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that we in Northern Ireland have information about what is happening in London, Scotland, Cardiff or wherever it may be. I also want to put on the record my thanks to all the doctors, nurses and consultants involved, and to all the other people who genuinely, consistently, honestly and energetically give their time for the children affected. I have some constituents who have attended Great Ormond Street children's hospital, not only for life-threatening conditions but for life-changing ones, and we thank everyone for what they do.

Mr Robin Walker: May I add to that list hospital chaplains, who play an important role in supporting bereaved relatives of all religions and of none?
Jim Shannon: That is absolutely right. It is so important in a time of physical, emotional and spiritual need.

Although it is critical for the Government to provide appropriate support, non-profit organisations and charities are often the most innovative and forward-thinking, because they are made up of people who are motivated and dedicated to making a difference. The Government need to resource those people properly so that their efforts can bear fruit and those affected by their work can receive the benefits of such support.

The hon. Member for Pudsey referred to the changes in disability living allowance. I will not repeat his words, but I wholeheartedly support what he said. How important it would be if we had a realistic disability living allowance system in place for those from nought to three, as well as from three onwards. It would only be a small change. The Minister knows that I respect him greatly—he is responsible and positive, and others want to hear from him today—and I say respectfully to him that he could use his position to make that change. It would make a hands-on difference, as my colleague the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) said earlier.

Northern Ireland Children’s Hospice and Together for Short Lives are just two of the many organisations that make a difference in Northern Ireland. I commend them for their efforts not only to provide support for young people and children with life-shortening conditions but to research and produce realistic and helpful ways forward. They make a positive contribution.

I will quote testimony from an anonymous parent who went through palliative care for their young child in Northern Ireland. It sheds some light on what the experience can be like for normal, everyday people in the unfortunate position of having to live through such circumstances:

“Having had a child born with very complex needs, we found ourselves in the horrendous position of spending the first and last seven months of our child’s life in a neonatal unit and children’s ward. Our daughter was only able to come home for two separate days during this period. This involved ambulance transportation and two nurses. The process of getting her home for good was so complex and arduous it could not be completed before she died. Although hospital staff were brilliant, a busy general ward is not appropriate for end of life care.”

That puts things into perspective and reminds us that we are dealing with real people’s lives in this House. What we do and say has an impact on people across the country.

The same charities that I mentioned earlier have published a set of recommendations for the Northern Ireland Assembly—it has responsibility for the issue, and the Minister has recently changed—that will, in their view, transform the lives of children and young people with life-shortening conditions. Among the seven recommendations are calls for a dedicated children’s palliative care consultant in Northern Ireland, improved access to multidisciplinary services for children who need palliative care and high-quality planning to support young people as they transition to adult services. Although we are doing those three things in Northern Ireland, if they were in place here on the mainland as well, it would be a step in the right direction to improve things.

Critically, the recommendations also call for a fully funded children’s palliative care strategy for Northern Ireland, which would address many of the core gaps and provide a framework for appropriate and consistent children’s palliative care services for every family who needs them in Northern Ireland in the future. In Northern Ireland at present, a growing number of doctors, paediatricians and GPs are interested in children’s palliative care and are gaining vital knowledge and experience every day. However, the number of senior paediatricians with the necessary qualifications to be considered expert remains in the single figures.

The recommendation for Northern Ireland—again, I hope it will happen on the mainland as well—is to have a regional consultant. That is vital, but just one consultant for Northern Ireland would not be enough. A better option would be to have two part-time consultants who could overlap in looking after patients. It would mean that someone would always be available, 52 weeks of the year.

Mr Percy, I realise that I have overstepped my time, and I apologise. I will end with these two paragraphs. We know all too well that the purse strings have been tightened, but those are just a few of the ideas put forward by people working on the front line. They are the ones who know best, the ones closest to the reality of palliative care for young people and the ones who must live and work with the medical and financial implications of Government policy. They are the ones we need to listen to if we wish to make the difference that I think everyone in this Chamber, this House and across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland wants.

No child should have to suffer as a result of being diagnosed with a condition through no fault of their own, and no family should have to live through such suffering. We are in a position to make a difference. If national Government liaise constantly with charities and those affected, surely progress is possible.

9.56 am

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) on instigating this debate. Life-shortening illness is an issue that many hon. Friends will have experience of from their surgeries; it is invariably moving and humbling.

I felt driven to speak in this debate because of a constituent of mine, a truly inspirational young woman called Lucy Watts. Lucy is 22 and suffers from a rare genetic condition called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome—I hope that I have pronounced it correctly—with life-limiting complications. It has left her disabled and wheelchair-bound since she was 14. She is hooked up to intravenous drips almost 24 hours a day and is largely bed-bound.

Nevertheless, Lucy does not allow her illness to rule her. She is a writer, a speaker, a charity ambassador and trustee, a blogger, a patient-leader and a spokesperson. She has appeared in filmed and recorded work, including on TV and the radio, campaigning for young people with life-limiting disease. Lucy was awarded an MBE by Her Majesty in the new year honours list—all this at 22, and with a life-shortening illness. Those are achievements that many of us could not hope to realise in an entire lifetime. I am immensely proud of Lucy, and I urge hon. Members to take time to visit her amazing website, “Lucy’s Light”.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours, I know too well the dreadful impact of severe illness on younger people and their loved ones, as
brain tumours are the largest cancer killer of children and young people under 40. Only a few weeks ago, we had a debate in this Chamber highlighting the impact of brain tumours and the fact that they receive only about 2% of research spending, despite their effect on reducing lifespans.

Through Lucy, I have also been introduced to the work of the charity Together for Short Lives. As has been said, the charity does incredible work with young people such as Lucy who are diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses. Unfortunately, but understandably, our society often feels uncomfortable discussing sick and dying children. Of course it is uncomfortable; as a mother, I can think of no greater horror. We would like to brush it aside and not focus on it, but we cannot afford to ignore the topic. My parents lost an older brother of mine, so I know some of the impact of being with and losing a sick child. It lasts a lifetime, and it affects the whole family.

Lucy has been keen to make it clear to me that young people desperately need care packages that bring together all three services—health, social care and education—in an age-appropriate way. I am glad to see that we are making some steps towards reforming the health and social care mix in this country, but much more needs to be done, and much faster.

A recent study suggests that the figure of 49,000 children and young people across the UK with life-shortening conditions could be underestimated by as much as 50%. The current population is not being adequately recognised, supported and funded by local authorities and clinical commissioning groups. The research suggests that a further 25,000 children and young people are effectively being ignored. In addition, that is reflected in the policy environment, where too often children’s palliative care needs are inappropriately coupled with those of adults. Children’s needs are much more complex, and must focus on quality of life as well as quality of death.

As we know, two weeks ago it was Hospice Care Week. Hospices are lifelines for families such as the Watts family. The work of hospices, such as Little Havens hospice in Daws Heath in my constituency, is invaluable for those who need support and advice. However, as Lucy has found, a children’s hospice such as Little Havens is not geared up to support a young adult and nor is the local adult hospice, meaning that Lucy is forced to travel from Essex as far as Winchester, despite the complications and difficulties of her illness, to access age-appropriate hospice care. That cannot be right.

I am proud that the Conservative-led Government ensured that there was a £60 million boost for hospice care and I hope that hospice care will continue to receive the vital funding it requires. As I have said, hospices really are a lifeline for families during the most heart-breaking of times. However, we must do more to support hospices such as Little Havens. The cost of palliative care for children is estimated to be £200 million a year, yet the grant for these services is just £11 million a year.

We owe it to Lucy and to thousands of other young people in similar situations to face up to the issue and not only see that that grant is increased, but ensure that research funding is directed more towards the illnesses that impact on the young and that take away the greatest number of years from young people’s lives. Too often we see research funding and care funding being focused on the most common illnesses, which are often less complex and have fewer implications for life expectancy. We have not got our focus right in this area and we need to adjust it.

It is very encouraging to see so many hon. Members here in Westminster Hall today and I look forward to working with the Government to ensure that we provide much more age-appropriate care for young people with complicated illnesses.

10.1 am

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy, in your new appointment.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) on securing this debate and I apologise in advance that I may need to leave a little bit early to attend the Women and Equalities Committee.

The provision of support for children whose lives are shortened by illness is a difficult issue to discuss. No parent wants to think that their child will not reach full adulthood or that they will spend their whole life being ill. However, that is the reality for too many parents. Therefore, we must do all we can to support families with sick children, to allow them to make the most of their time together.

My own experience of this issue comes from supporting many families with a loved one who experienced a short life. Through the young carers service, I volunteered to support the families of children living short lives, including their siblings. Those families were brave and inspiring, triumphing over what was probably the saddest time of their lives. Those siblings overcame those periods and went on to be incredible young adults themselves.

I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who thanked the medical professionals and practitioners, the organisations and the charities, in this area. They provide constant support and care throughout this sad experience and, in many cases, afterwards, as the families go through the bereavement process.

As we have already heard, the charity Together for Short Lives has estimated that 49,000 children and young people in the UK have life-shortening conditions. However, the charity itself admits that that number could fall short of the true number of children affected by these conditions. I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds): he is no longer in his place, but he discussed the need for robust data collection to ensure that the support necessary for families is available and that we quantify that support in an adequate way. Although I recognise the challenges that all Governments face, for someone to have to explain to a family that they simply cannot support them in their time of need because of a funding issue is not sufficient; indeed, for those families, it is simply not good enough.

Investment in research is absolutely crucial to medical advancement, and it can also increase the life chances of many children and improve the experience of many families. The reality is that Governments, the NHS and local authorities are currently unable to budget sufficiently to ensure that there is enough money to meet the needs of these children because there is simply an unknown number of them. As I say, that goes back to the point made earlier about the need for correct data to ensure
that adequate funds are provided. I put it to the Minister that this situation must be rectified so that we can adequately respond to the demand to close gaps in services and ensure that there is welfare provision for children in palliative care.

Funding is vital. Surveys have revealed that 89% of children’s hospices could be forced to reduce their services if their funding from Government was stopped, so I urge the Minister to consider the best way to support those valuable services, to ensure that there is continued funding for them; I hope that he will consider that issue.

The Scottish Government are committed to ensuring that people can access high-quality palliative care, regardless of their age, diagnosis, socioeconomic background or where they live. As part of that commitment, funding for children’s hospices has parity with that for adult hospices, and I hope that the UK Government will make the same commitment to provide such parity. The Scottish Government’s strategic framework encourages support and promotes the further development of holistic palliative care for those in the birth to 25 age group. I urge the UK Government to make the same commitment to children and young people across the UK.

I will touch briefly on the issue of welfare and the UK Government’s attitude to it. Many families who have children suffering from life-limiting illnesses will be hardest hit by the welfare reforms. At present, families with a disabled child in receipt of disability living allowance may be entitled to £60 per week. Under universal credit, that sum will be cut to £29 per week. In other words, the families of thousands of children will have their household budgets slashed at a time when they absolutely need such support.

Any parent of a child with a life-limiting illness wants to spend as much quality time as possible with their family. Instead, families affected by welfare changes will face substantial additional costs, as a result of having to pay for specialist aids and adaptations for their home, not to mention the additional visits to health services and the associated travel costs.

For many of the families across the UK who are caring for sick children, one of the greatest challenges that they face is accessing appropriate transport. We have already heard how vital it is that the Government consider the impact of their policy and ensure that mobility aid for families of children under the age of three is also in place, because we simply cannot discriminate on the basis of age. Those families need that vital support, but children under the age of three who have life-limiting conditions are currently ineligible to receive it. I hope that the Government will reconsider that.

A growing number of children within that age range require extra medical care, including palliative care. Some babies and their families have permanent wheelchairs and are unable to use them, or specialist buggies, without the necessary transport provision. Without specialist adapted vehicles, those families are unable to transport their young children to and from hospital, which obviously disrupts family life. It also means that families will miss out on making valued—in fact, cherished—memories with their children.

In closing, I must highlight that the burden of providing care for sick children can push families into poverty. In Scotland, and indeed in my constituency, 25% of children and young people with life-limiting illnesses live in the areas of highest deprivation. Providing equal access to sources of support is of paramount importance, to ensure that those children get the most out of their short lives. Helping them to achieve that is dependent on our giving as much support to their families as is required, so I urge the Government to take all measures necessary to provide that support as much as they can.

10.7 am

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) for securing this debate, which, as Members know, is on an issue that I feel very strongly about. It was heartening to hear about the work of the Hope House hospice that serves my constituents, although it is based over the border in Shropshire, and about the work of Claire House, which is a very effective children’s hospice on the Wirral.

Other hon. Members have spoken powerfully about the transport issues and the transition issues, so I will concentrate on the families and the role that they play. It is particularly important to do so this week because it is Carers Week, and we know the vital role that parents play.

My hon. Friend made an important point about the 2% funding that was mentioned in the Chancellor’s Budget and the fact that that funding is limited to adult social care. There is no justifiable reason for that discrimination. It is clear that local councils have cut their funding for services, particularly for short breaks. The impact of that on families is devastating. Thirty-six per cent. of families with children who have life-limiting conditions experience family breakdown. Therefore, it is vital that the Minister recognises that cuts by local authorities to the funding for those short breaks lead to increased burdens on Government elsewhere and that it is short-sighted not to fund those short breaks, which give the families and the siblings the vital respite that is often needed to ensure that they stay together as a cohesive unit and get the break from some quite onerous caring responsibilities. I do not say that in a negative way. All the parents absolutely love their children and want to give them the best they can in the short lives they have, but they need that break and the time for themselves.

Stuart Andrew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point and I would like to give an example. I always remember speaking to a father at the hospice who said that if he got up eight times in the night he considered that a good night’s sleep. Does that not highlight just how important it is that the families get the respite that they need?

Antoinette Sandbach: It is absolutely critical. I have experienced the situation in which, because of advances in medical science, the doctors cannot say whether someone will fall on one side or the other of the line of likely life expectancy—fewer or more than 25 years—and they do not qualify for support from the voluntary sector. Hospices play such an important role in supporting families and I give credit to the Government for funding children’s hospices, albeit not at the same level as adult hospice care.
There is, however, a cross-border issue, which Claire House neatly exemplifies. The hospice treats a number of Welsh patients—it will not turn children away—but it does not get funded for any of the treatment it gives to them. I urge the Minister to consider having National Institute for Health and Care Excellence clinical guidance that would apply nationally and help to iron out some of the wrinkles, perhaps taking some of the best practice in the devolved nations. We have heard powerful contributions about some of the efforts being made in Northern Ireland. There is some learning that can be gained from across the devolved nations, but guidelines would ensure that hospices were put on a sustainable footing.

On that point, I support the call for joint commissioning and ask the Minister to consider what happens after the death of a child. I am here partly in my capacity as the chair of the all-party group on baby loss, and the subject has been debated elsewhere. There is important counselling support that could be put in place before the loss of a child and, indeed, afterwards. Hope House, for example, has a dedicated counselling centre and I am delighted that recently—in fact, just this week—I got confirmation from the Treasury that the Alder Centre could apply for LIBOR funding. The centre provides vital bereavement support for families in the north-west and I very much hope that it puts in an application before August. That is a beacon of light perhaps in the north-west and in the debate.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I wanted to pick up on my hon. Friend’s extremely well-made point about sustainable funding. Chestnut Tree House in east Sussex provides the most extraordinary care for children and young people with life-shortening conditions but, despite the huge merit of its work, it has only 7% Government funding, and it is not confident about securing even that, year on year. The local efforts are magnificent. For example, just last month, 700 women walked the seafront in Eastbourne and raised more than £70,000, but that equates to just 11 days of care at that extraordinary place. The hospice wants to increase its services—it is not looking to retract any. It says that there are many more families it can support.

Antoinette Sandbach: That is typical of the hospice movement. St Luke’s hospice, which provides adult care in my constituency, is looking to expand its services, and hospices such as Hope House and Claire House are also happy to do so. I know that the Minister has a new per-patient funding currency for children’s palliative care, which will come in next April, but in the meantime hospices need certainty of funding so that they can commission services. I urge the Minister to impose some requirements on clinical commissioning groups, to ensure that there is not that cliff edge that has been spoken about today and that we have joined-up provision from, literally, the cradle to the grave, with support afterwards for families who need it.

10.15 am

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) not only on securing the important debate but on his work for and support of Martin House hospice in west Yorkshire. As he knows, our part of the world in Yorkshire is very well served indeed. I have the Forget Me Not children’s hospice in Huddersfield supporting 185 local children and their families. We have identified, however, that there are probably more than 1,300 who need our support. The hospice has been up and running for only about three years, under the inspirational leadership of Peter Branson.

As we have heard, funding is an important issue and a big challenge for our children’s hospices. The Forget Me Not children’s hospice needs to raise £3.8 million every year, with only 6% of that coming from Government funding. It was nice to hear about the wonderful fundraising efforts for the local hospice of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell). A couple of weeks ago, more than 1,000 people took part in a colour run. They raised thousands of pounds for the Forget Me Not children’s hospice by running through the beautiful fields of west Yorkshire and having coloured paint thrown at them. I have done my bit for the hospice by running the London marathon twice, but I would probably rather have paint thrown at me than run around the streets of London for four and a half hours—actually, 4 hours 44 minutes.

Some important issues have been highlighted this morning, and having been out with the wonderful nursing team from the Forget Me Not children’s hospice the one thing that has really struck me—we have talked about this—is the importance of respite care and short breaks for families. I remember visiting a single mum whose young daughter with muscular dystrophy had a breathing tube. I asked the mum what it was like caring for her daughter and we talked about the lack of sleep. She had not had more than two and a half hours of unbroken sleep at night for four years. I could see the tiredness in her eyes, but she was incredibly uplifting and made no complaint whatsoever. She was very inspirational; I think about her a lot. The nursing team would visit her twice a week, not only to care for the daughter but to give the mum an opportunity to have her hair done, go shopping for herself or have a coffee with friends. That was important to her, as a mum and as a person, and it helped her to give even better care to her daughter. I say to the Minister that finding an opportunity for short breaks and respite care is so important.

We have mentioned the funding element, and I have talked about the Forget Me Not children’s hospice, but we also need to think about the workforce and the specialist skills the hospice teams need to provide palliative care. We must ensure that we have a sustainable workforce, with specialist skills, experience, knowledge and competence, so that the wonderful children’s hospices can continue to give wonderful care, not only to children but to their families.

I finish by thanking all my colleagues here for making their wonderful contributions. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) for raising the issue and securing the debate.

10.18 am

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) has brought the debate to the House. I raised
The matter at business questions during Children’s Hospice Week, and I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in a debate about it.

There have been many interesting contributions today, and I am pleased that so many people have taken so much time not just to research the matter but to go and meet people, hear their real-life stories and bring them to the House. That is really important: it is not just about numbers, it is about the impact on people’s lives, and the debate has been good at highlighting that.

I thank Together for Short Lives, which prepared a briefing that many of us have seen, and the Aberdeen charity Charlie House, which has provided me with a lot of information in advance of the debate so that I can speak on behalf of families. It is key that we get as much information as possible, including about real-life scenarios. In paediatric palliative care, we are pretty much having to make things up as we go along. That is not any kind of criticism of those who work incredibly hard and do a huge amount of research to try to make lives better, but it is a situation we have not been in before.

The Children’s Hospice Association Scotland produced a report in 2015 that explained that we are seeing an increase in the prevalence of children and young people with life-limiting conditions, which is projected to grow further. As a result, the situation throughout the UK and the world is uncharted territory. We cannot just say, “This is best practice” and lift it, because we are all having to find our way in this scenario. As a result, Governments throughout the UK—the devolved Governments and the Westminster Government—are not necessarily getting everything right, because this is a new scenario for all of us. The best way to ensure that we get this right and provide the best support is to listen and speak to the families and ask them about what they need and the hurdles they are facing.

When a family has a baby with such a condition, it is an unforeseen circumstance. They do not imagine that that child will not learn to sleep through the night, will not learn to crawl and walk and will not go through a weening process and begin to eat solid food. It is an unforeseen and unforeseeable situation. A lot of the conditions that such children have are totally unplanned for and could not have been predicted beforehand.

One thing that has been touched on, but not explored in a huge amount of detail, is the financial impact on families. My hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) mentioned that 25% of families with children with life-limiting conditions live in the most deprived areas of our communities. Those families start from a position of not having a huge amount of money in the bank, and they are then faced with a situation in which more than 60% of mothers and more than 20% of fathers have to stop work. They require support from the Government, because it is impossible for them to survive otherwise.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case. I visited the Children’s Hospice Association Scotland, and it said that some of the families that it deals with are not even aware of the benefits they are entitled to and get support on that from CHAS. Could the Government do more to encourage people to take up the benefits they are entitled to for their children?

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely agree; that is something that the Government could do better. Again, that is not just the Westminster Government; it is an issue for Governments across the UK. It is very difficult when a family is suddenly thrown into a situation where they have a child who requires an incredible amount of support. They are trying to find out about children’s hospices and medical support and trying to work out what condition their child has. They are trying to swim through all that while keeping the family financially afloat. If the Government have not been proactive in providing and signposting all that support, it is even more difficult for families already dealing with an incredibly difficult situation. As the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) said, in a lot of cases they have to do it with next to no sleep. The situation is almost impossible, and it is incumbent on us to ensure that we do all we can to help those families.

I want to touch on a couple of other points that Members have mentioned. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) mentioned the importance of families having a break and respire. I underline the point made earlier that children’s hospices are not like adult ones. They provide support from diagnosis, or from the time when it is realised that the child may not survive childhood. Some 75% of the support provided by children’s hospices is through short breaks. We cannot overstate the difference between adult hospices and children’s hospices. There is a requirement that the Government provide them with different levels of statutory support, because they are a totally different kettle of fish.

The children we are talking about have 24/7 care needs, as a number of Members have mentioned. The importance of respite care cannot be overstated. The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned sharing the knowledge we have of best practice in the devolved nations and spreading what works. One problem we have in Scotland is the lack of children’s hospice care. We have only two children’s hospices in Scotland, and they have a total of about 15 beds. Families in my constituency have to do a 200-mile round trip to access a hospice, and that is on the weekends that work for the hospice, because there is such a big waiting list. I do not think that is appropriate. We need to work on that. In previous years and decades gone by, it was not necessarily so much of an issue, because there were fewer such children and families. It is now increasingly becoming an issue. That is why Charlie House in my constituency is working hard to get a hospice built in Aberdeen so that there is local access. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East said, the Scottish Government are committed to trying to ensure that we have a geographic spread of services, as well as the spread of services needed for children with all the different conditions.

I appreciate the fact that we have had this debate so that we can discuss these matters, and I appreciate the feeling in the room about working together to try to find a way forward that helps everyone.

One point I will briefly mention, because it has been mentioned a number of times, is the issue of transport for those aged nought to three. That would be relatively
easy for the Government to fix and would make a massive difference to the financial impact on families, particularly those who are struggling financially as it is. It would be a massive help.

Thank you, Mr Percy, for your chairmanship, and I once again thank the hon. Member for Pudsey for securing the debate.

10.26 am

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Mr Percy. I also thank the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) for securing this important debate, to which he has been able to bring considerable knowledge. I congratulate him on how he opened the debate. We have had many important contributions this morning from the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney). We have also had some shorter contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and the hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), for Foyle (Mark Durkan), for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) and for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss).

Many of us have talked about the charity Together for Short Lives. We thank it for its input to the debate, which it has welcomed. It feels that discussion of children who are dying and the support they need is hindered by a public taboo. The palliative care needs of children can be coupled inappropriately with those of adults, when, as we have heard, their needs are much more complex and focused as much on quality of life as on quality of death.

A key point that has been made in this debate is that we do not have enough data to commission and fund appropriate services to support children with life-shortening illnesses and their families. The most recent estimate is that 49,000 children under the age of 19 are living with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions, although I understand that that is based on data from 2009-10. Without Government monitoring of changes in the data, there are real difficulties in providing the care and support needed by children, young people and their families. Local authorities and CCGs already find it challenging to commission and provide palliative care locally because relatively few children in any given area will need that care. Without more accurate data, it is harder to commission and provide the services needed. Cross-departmental collaboration and better co-ordination among organisations are also needed.

The issue with funding is clear. There are different funding streams from different Departments and from local organisations. As we have heard, a remarkable amount comes from fundraising. We have specialised children’s palliative care commissioning, general children’s palliative care commissioning and the commissioning of children’s social services. NHS England, CCGs and local authorities all have a part to play in funding palliative care services for children, but as we have heard it is often unclear who is responsible for funding different services. There is terrible uncertainty about the availability of future funding for services. Indeed, Together for Short Lives found that CCGs contribute just 10% on average to the cost of the care that children receive in hospices, compared with an average contribution of around 30% to the cost of care in adult hospices. As we have heard from the hon. Member for Eddisbury, the Department of Health is testing per-patient funding for children’s palliative care for commissioners to use in 2017, but I understand that is not going to be mandated, so there will be no obligation for clinical commissioning groups to adopt that level of funding. Will the Minister clarify how the Government plan to ensure that adequate funding will be provided in future for palliative care services for children?

We know that funding from local authorities for children’s social care has become even more stretched. Local authorities can of course raise additional funds for adult social care through the social care precept, but that does not apply to children’s services. We also know there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to children’s social services since 2009. The Local Government Association has raised concerns that the 40% real-terms reduction in core Government funding over the previous Parliament and subsequent budget cuts have meant that local authority services are being reduced significantly. The 2014-15 budget figures show a reduction of 20% for spending on children’s homes and early-years services since 2010.

We have heard quite a bit about breaks. Although local authorities are required to provide short breaks for disabled children, the funding for this has decreased, which means families are receiving less support, despite having significant caring responsibilities. We have heard about the extent of the caring responsibilities for carers of children with life-limiting conditions. The Every Disabled Child Matters partnership found that 58% of local authorities had cut their short-breaks spending by an average of 15% between 2011 and 2015, with some councils cutting this funding by up to 26%. In carers week, the fact that family carers are receiving less support and fewer short breaks should be of real concern to us. I do not often go to my iPad for notes, but I had a look at Lucy’s blog; what she says about her mother as her carer is important.

“In reality, it is all down to my mum. She phones person after person, arranges blood tests and appointments and sorts out all of my medication, one of which has to be couriered down from London every few months, and when I’m on intravenous antibiotics, she drives to the hospital to pick up the drugs and picks up the equipment from the district nurses. My mum does my TPN and medication every day, she administers IVs and takes blood from my Hickman line, gives injections, dresses wounds, can catheterise me, mixes and prepares medication, and so much more; she can do things many nurses can’t do...She liaises between consultants and departments. She sorts out my prescription and collects medication. She deals with my personal budget and pays my carers. She’s my mum, nurse, carer, PA and best friend. It’s all down to her. She’s given up her life to keep me alive, not having a holiday or break in 6 years.”

She should be able to have a holiday and a break.

As has been said in this debate, we need to find a way to hold local authorities to account for the money to spend on short breaks for disabled children. I hope the Minister can tell us what action he will take to make sure that seriously ill or disabled children and their family carers can access short breaks.

In March 2015, the Health Committee published a report of its inquiry into palliative and end-of-life care. It called on the Government to ensure that future funding proposals fully recognise the importance of the
voluntary sector. The report also called on the Government to set out how they intend to ensure the sustainable long-term funding that we have talked about in this debate. It is clear from the many contributions today that improvement is needed to ensure a sustainable funding settlement for children’s palliative care in future.

I want to touch briefly on the importance of social and community palliative care and support services. Hospices do a wonderful job, but children are not always in a hospice. The Rainbow Trust children’s charity supports more than 2,000 families across England whose children have a terminal or life-threatening illness. This includes families in my constituency. The trust supports 99 families in Greater Manchester, including nine families in Salford. The family support officer for the team in Greater Manchester says that the most common concern raised by parents is the reduction in the statutory hours of support they receive. Increasingly, families are reporting having the number of hours of support reduced with no alternative service offered. It is important that the support provided by charities such as the Rainbow Trust should not be seen as a substitute for inadequate statutory support. The Greater Manchester Rainbow Trust team works closely with the Diana nursing team in Salford to provide all-round support to children’s families at home and in hospital. Both services are vital.

Charities such as the Rainbow Trust provide an essential service to families outside a hospice setting, and we must make sure that those community palliative care services are supported. I can tell the Minister that the statistics are very impressive for a small charity. In 2014-15, the Rainbow Trust provided nearly 3,000 hours of sibling support, more than 10,000 hours of home support, 7,700 hours of hospital support and more than 1,000 hours of bereavement support. Members have referred to the importance of bereavement support, which is a key aspect of the issue. Sadly, the Rainbow Trust receives only 3% of the funding needed for all those services from statutory authorities. I hope the Government will recognise the value of community palliative care and support and how it can work alongside hospice care to provide families with the support they need from the moment a diagnosis is made.

Children’s services provide excellent care in an age-appropriate environment, but, as we have heard, young adults tend to have different needs from young children and older adults. As more children with life-shortening conditions live longer—we are all grateful that they do—they are more likely to make the transition into adult care settings. Unless suitable age-appropriate services are offered to help with this transition, young adults may be lost in the system. The hon. Member for Castle Point spoke of the impact on Lucy and the travel she had to do to find services. What will the Minister do to ensure that young adults making the transition to adult palliative care services have the support that they need?

As we have heard in this debate—like everyone else, I want to touch on this—changes in benefit eligibility could also help to ensure that families get the level of support they need. Most people would not think of the importance of the mobility component of the disability living allowance and perhaps not register that the fact that it does not apply to children under three was such an issue, but of course those children need special equipment such as ventilators or the permanent wheelchairs that we have heard about, and families need to transport that equipment. It is a dreadful thought that with precious and limited time for children and families to spend together, the families are unable to get out and are stuck at home because of equipment issues. Will the Minister raise with his colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions the need to change the eligibility criteria of the DLA mobility component so that the families of children under three with life-shortening conditions can access it? It has been said that it is easy to fix: I hope that he thinks it is.

Many hospices, hospitals, social care providers and charities provide excellent care and support for children with life-limiting conditions and their families. I want to join others in this debate in thanking them for all that they do, but it is clear that more needs to be done to develop a sustainable funding system that can provide a fully integrated service for families at all stages of their child’s illness. The importance of those services for families with a child who has a life-limiting illness cannot be overestimated. We are talking about people who give up their lives to provide support, as Lucy’s mum has done. We are talking about parents who get very little sleep. We should really think that through during carers week. I hope the Minister will assure us that more will be done in future to make sure that every family with a child living with a life-limiting condition can access the support that they need when they need it.

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I am sure we have all found the debate that you have conducted enlightening, interesting and extremely collaborative. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) on securing it. He has a long history of championing the children’s hospice sector as a fundraiser for Martin House and has been at the forefront of efforts in Parliament to publicise the needs of children with life-limiting conditions. I thank him for that, as others have done.

I apologise for the absence of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), in whose portfolio this subject normally sits. She is overcommitted and trying to be in two places at the one time, so I am delighted to have the chance to respond to the debate. In a lengthy and varied ministerial career I have had the pleasure most of the time of being in a position where I can work with the House rather than deal with confrontational situations. Occasionally politics intervenes, but most of the time I have had the opportunity to do what I am going to do this morning, and I appreciate the way in which the debate has been handled and dealt with.

I shall briefly pick out some of the points made in individual speeches. With his usual courtesy and kindness, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) told some personal stories and made an important point about sharing experience. He also helped us out with some information from Northern Ireland, as he so often does. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) spoke of the inspiration of people such as Lucy, whom I shall quote in a moment. She made several points about transition and the need for
people to have a voice. The hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) and others raised the issue of mobility, which I shall address in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) is very much involved in these issues, and I am pleased that she talked about carers during Carers Week. There is still time for carers who are listening to get involved in the call for evidence on the new carers strategy. On the back of this debate, some information from carers for those with children with life-shortening illnesses would be particularly welcome. If carers could submit their information—they have until the end of June—that would be great. My hon. Friend also spoke about the need for counselling and issues relating to the end of life.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) gave us moving stories about lack of sleep and illustrated the sort of lives carers lead when looking after their children. That personal insight really brings it home, as do those of other colleagues. I appreciated the interventions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) and other colleagues.

Of the two Front-Bench spokespersons, I know the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) well and, with her background in caring, her contributions are always to be listened to. She touched on several issues, including data and the funding of short breaks. I shall come to them all. I have not had the pleasure of listening to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) before, as our portfolios have not crossed, but I really appreciated how she approached the subject, and particularly what she said about our being in uncharted territory. That is the truth.

A generation ago, the Minister in my position would probably not have been having this debate, or it would have been very different. Now, because of advances in medical science, we are working with children and families with whom we would not previously have been working. That gives rise to a whole series of new issues for all of us, and to a certain extent we are all feeling our way. The financial pressures are obvious, whatever the Government—whether it is devolved or in Westminster—but new work is being done all the time to tie up the different elements and agencies that handle packages of care. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North was particularly good on that, and I appreciated what she said. We can always learn from those around us.

I picked up in the debate issues such as data, social care, short breaks, mobility, transition and integration, about which I shall say a little in the course of my remarks. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South read out a quote from Lucy, who has been mentioned several times—and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North mentioned the importance of listening, which is the bit I wanted to pick out from what Lucy said. I had experience of that many years ago as Minister with responsibility for disabled people, and it has come up again and again. I shall read from Lucy’s piece on the website of Together for Short Lives, which I commend for its work on this issue. I would be grateful if the House would take a moment to hear Lucy’s voice:

“All throughout my illness, and my life in general, the one thing I’ve always wanted is to be listened to. That is extremely important. I have very little control in my life, being dependent on others for almost everything. The only bit of control I have is my opinion and my ability to make decisions. I value this greatly. However, I am not in control over whether people listen to my opinion. My opinion or decision is only in my control if people listen to it and take it on board. It’s hard for some people to understand why I get so upset if someone makes a decision on my behalf without my consent and prior knowledge, but when it’s the only thing I have control over, you can understand why. Healthy people make decisions all the time and everyone has their own opinion. But when you’re sick and/or disabled, suddenly some people think it’s ok to make decisions for you, as if, somehow, being sick or disabled makes your opinion worthless or unnecessary. Others do it to be kind, but it still can be upsetting. I am perfectly capable of making my own decisions, and so I should be involved in all decisions that concern me or affect my life. My decision, no matter what it may be, should be supported. Be it what clothes I want to wear, where I want to go or even down to things like whether I want to be kept alive by machines or if I choose not to have life-prolonging treatment. However hard or important the decision, the individual should be listened to—even if you don’t agree with what they’re saying.”

That is a remarkable personal statement from an obviously remarkable young woman, to whom we have all paid tribute during the debate.

Turning to the main part of my speech, I shall start with some remarks about funding before using the generous time I have been allowed by tackling some of the individual issues that have come up. Some children and young people have very complex health needs, which may be the result of congenital conditions, long-term, life-limiting or life-threatening conditions, disability or the after-effects of serious illness or injury. The NHS and related services support such children in a range of ways, but the role of children’s hospices is crucial, and it is right that we focus on it today. I am grateful that so many individual hospices and organisations have been mentioned in the debate, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey in his opening speech. I pay tribute to Keech hospice, which is based just outside my constituency on the outskirts of Luton. It covers Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, and I thank the staff there for the work they do.

I also thank St John’s hospice in Moggerhanger, a Sue Ryder organisation for which I have run a couple of marathons. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley mentioned a time of four and a half hours; my time the other week was six hours. Obviously age is getting to me. I shall have to work on cutting down my time next time, but I did appreciate seeing the Sue Ryder cheering team on the Embankment about a mile away from the finish. A hug at that time of the day was most welcome. I thank all those who partake in fundraising efforts for children’s and adult hospices throughout the country. Those efforts cannot be overstated and are really appreciated.

As hon. Members will recall, the coalition Government initiated work to look at the basis on which palliative care services are commissioned for people of all ages. That work continued under this Government, reflecting the importance that we attach to these services. The aim of the work was to have a more transparent and local approach to commissioning services. Children’s hospices in particular have not always enjoyed a very close relationship with local health commissioners—neither primary care trusts nor clinical commissioning groups. That is largely a reflection of their history. They developed as voluntary sector organisations, driven by people’s time, good will and charitable donations.

Of course, many commissioners do support local children’s hospices and hospice-at-home services, and we have heard of some good relationships today, but there is variation in commissioners’ awareness of the
valuable role of children’s hospices, and in the extent to which commissioners—both local authorities and CCGs—fund them. That has been usefully highlighted by research undertaken by Hospice UK and Together for Short Lives, as was mentioned earlier.

Children’s hospices are not just a vital resource for care and support to children with life-limiting conditions; there is also a clear role for hospices and hospice-at-home services in supporting families by providing respite care for children and young people with complex needs and disability. We want that to be encouraged as part of a more strategic approach to children’s health outcomes. We now have new statutory requirements in relation to children with special educational needs and disability that require CCGs and local authorities to work together. Such a model of integrated arrangements would provide a framework for wider support to children and young people with complex or life-limiting conditions, so it is an opportunity we should support.

In supporting more integrated arrangements for commissioning for children and young people, we want to emphasise the role of the hospice sector as a provider of respite care, and how such provision can dovetail with other specialised and universal services in a co-ordinated way. That can be supported through far greater transparency about the nature of care and its costs. As colleagues have mentioned, the coalition Government agreement pledged to introduce a new per-patient funding system for hospices by 2015 to cover care for adults and children, regardless of which organisation provides it. The aim was to have transparency about services and costs, which would allow local commissioning of palliative care.

The long process of data collection and costing—I will come back to data shortly—was a model of co-production with the sector. It identified considerable complexity in developing a new system that is sufficiently responsive to the varied needs of palliative care, particularly in the case of children’s hospices. It resulted in a draft palliative care currency, which is being used and tested locally, and the aim is to publish a final currency next year. As the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South said, it is not a mandatory payment system but a first attempt to group specialised palliative care into packages that are similar in the resources needed and, in particular, in workforce requirements. It does not attribute prices to the packages, as they are for local negotiation in the usual way as part of the commissioning process.

There are concerns that the currency approach does not reflect all the services provided by hospices and that a young person and their family might need, and that it perhaps lacks the flexibility that I mentioned. The currency is a useful basis for local discussions between providers and commissioners, but it is work in progress. It is clearly not the end point, although we have moved on from where we were.

NHS England recently convened a round table on children’s palliative care, which included representatives from the children’s hospice sector. It identified that the varied nature of children’s palliative care requires us to consider other funding models. NHS England and Public Health England recognise that a per-patient tariff—the principle behind the currencies for palliative care—may not be the only or the most suitable funding model for palliative care, particularly given the diverse range of the needs of children and young people with life-limiting conditions. NHS England will review with stakeholders a range of potential approaches to palliative care funding for children and young people, using the existing currencies as a basis for different models. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey will be glad to know that the children’s hospice sector will be part of that work. The aim is to identify the most practical approach to funding, which will allow strategic discussions between CCGs and providers and transparency about the care packages that are being secured.

I am glad to say that we are able to provide more direct support in the form of the £11 million grant that NHS England makes available to children’s hospices. The future of the central grant is a topic to which we return regularly. I appreciate that it is a source of uncertainty and frustration to children’s hospices that NHS England is not able to provide a long-term guarantee or a multi-year confirmation of the grant. We should recognise, however, that it is not dissimilar to other areas of health funding and that, in that respect, children’s hospices are no different from other providers of health services. NHS England itself does not have a long-term allocation, so it cannot in turn make long-term commitments about grant funding to children’s hospices. However, NHS England, on behalf of the Government, has made a clear, ongoing commitment to continue to support children’s hospices. There is no question of the abrupt cessation of that support if there is no sustainable local commissioning alternative in place. I know the children’s hospice sector will welcome local commissioning arrangements, and ultimately their success should mean an end to a rather unusual central grant, but the former must be in place before we can have the latter. My Department and NHS England are equally keen to ensure that the transitional process is smooth and that it is achieved by working closely with the sector.

There are a number of imaginative funding developments and ideas. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who was unable to take part in the debate, reminded me of a submission from Naomi House in his constituency. It talked about the very successful 30% contribution contract arrangements that exist across the south-west, including in Wiltshire, Dorset and Bournemouth and Poole. It stated that in many ways, the model in the south-west is a great example of Government policies in action, with services being funded by pooled budgets of health and social funds. It continued by saying that the system of a contribution, rather than full cost recovery, is an example of third sector and public bodies working together to achieve value for money and the delivery of quality services, which helps to avoid family breakdown and unnecessary admissions to hospital, leading to further savings. I know a lot about data collection from my other portfolio—mental health services—because the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), has made it a specialist subject on which she could speak on “Mastermind.” She has helped me to encourage the Department to do better on data collection. As I outlined, the NHS and the Government have been through a process to determine a new funding model, which has assisted in uncovering more of the necessary data. I am assured by my officials that further work will go on.
The identification by commissioners of children with a life-limiting condition is essential to ensure the efficacy of commissioning plans. There is also a need to ensure that professionals who are not usually in contact with children with life-limiting conditions, such as in primary care, are fully aware of the child's needs. The Department is exploring the potential for a flag on general practice information technology systems to allow practitioners to note when a child or a young person has a life-limiting condition. More data collection is certainly on the cards. Effective conditioning has to start with effective identification. In 2014, the Department of Health issued guidance for health and wellbeing boards on children's complex needs, which provides key insights on effective needs assessments. That work will continue.

On social care funding and short breaks, a question was asked about local authorities, council tax and the adult social care model. Local authorities have to make complex choices about how to target resources more effectively. With my adult social care hat on, I am well aware of the social care precept. The Department for Communities and Local Government is undertaking a comprehensive and thorough review to devise a new formula to assess councils' needs and to provide fair funding for every type of local authority ahead of the introduction of 100% business rate retention by the end of this Parliament. There is clearly a lot of work to do over the coming months to work out the details of the new system. The DCLG will consult with local government more widely on the issue shortly. I encourage my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey to make representations to the DCLG about funding children's social care in the same way as the adult social care precept works. Perhaps he and other colleagues will take advantage of that review.

Since 2011, the Government have made it a statutory requirement for all local authorities to provide a variety of short break services. Regulations require them to publish a short breaks duty statement describing what short break services are on offer in their area and how they can be accessed. It must form part of the local offer of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Government contend that that transparency is really important. When asked about their implementation of special educational needs and disability reforms in February 2015, the vast majority of authorities reported that they were keeping their short break budgets the same as for 2014-15, but I am aware of the pressure that exists. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, will certainly review the debate, and I have heard what colleagues have said.

I will also draw my hon. Friend's attention to the issue of mobility, which virtually every Member has mentioned. When I was the Minister responsible for disability some years ago, I was in charge of mobility, so I am well aware of the benefit and impact of mobility assistance. Concerns have been raised about the age limit, which is an issue for the Department for Work and Pensions. There was a meeting between Together for Short Lives and my noble Friend Lord Freud in February 2016. The response, which is on its way to Together for Short Lives, indicates that my noble Friend the Minister listened very carefully. It says that, if there is to be a change, it will involve primary legislation. That is perhaps not quite the short and simple answer that we all want, but he committed to ask his officials to explore whether there are other ways in which the Department can provide support. I will certainly report to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea how important mobility is to those with very young children.

The Government provided £420,000 in grant funding to Together for Short Lives to help the transition taskforce look at how the transition between children's and adult services can be eased. I know that is an important factor for many families and will be increasingly important in the future.

I hope I have covered all the issues that colleagues have raised. If there is anything that I have not covered, I will write to the colleagues who raised it. If it is something substantive, I will put a letter in the Library so that colleagues present in the debate can pick it up there. I am grateful to all Members who spoke and to the constituents who involved them in what they are doing. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey for raising this issue and colleagues for the way in which they have debated it. This is an important issue, and I hope the debate has reflected that.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).
Conveyancing

11 am

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I beg to move.

That this House has considered the conveyancing process.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy, and I thank the Minister for being present today to respond on behalf of the Government. I refer you to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, because Spicerhaart estate agent kindly provides a regular donation in kind by printing my parliamentary “Reporting Back” publication. I was also a practising property solicitor, although I gave that up on election to this place.

As a nation, we have long held home ownership to be a valued tradition. This Government have done much to promote home ownership and to make it easier for people to get on to the property ladder. Once someone has saved a sufficient sum for a deposit, perhaps utilised a Government scheme such as Help to Buy, and found a house to purchase, however, the conveyancing process kicks in, and recent mortgage research from Which? suggests that seven in 10 people who have bought or sold a home have found it to be nerve-racking and the biggest source of stress apart from getting a divorce. Having a child, changing jobs and arranging care for an elderly relative are all said to be less stressful than getting involved in the property market.

Are we surprised by that? A person or couple have put in their offer and instructed a conveyancer. They pay a retainer to the conveyancer to cover the cost of searches, which is about £200; for a survey, which is between £200 and £600; and any fee due to their mortgage adviser. They also complete a load of paperwork, and then wait and wait until their conveyancer informs them that they are in a position to exchange contracts. If one gets to that point, the house is under contract and people can breathe a sigh of relief. To be clear, up to and until that point, either party may pull out of the transaction, and usually no costs are recoverable. But is that okay because such cases are rare? No. More than one in five property transactions fall through each year—around 200,000—and about £270 million is wasted annually on legal fees and surveys for failed house purchases.

As I mentioned, by way of background, I was a practising solicitor specialising in residential property, so I worked in this area of law and have first-hand experience of the frustration of the conveyancing process in England and Wales. I am not, however, a poacher turned gamekeeper, because although conveyancers are far from blame free, the issues that need addressing are largely with the system and the process. Conveyancers are often demonised, because they are the day-to-day contact with their clients and the venting point for frustration, but in many cases they are not responsible for the numerous obstacles that can arise as part of the house-buying or selling process.

At the end of last year, I was pleased to see that Her Majesty’s Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills announced plans for a call for evidence to explore “options to deliver better value and make the experience of buying a home more consumer-friendly.”

This is no easy task, but I am delighted that the Government are taking it up. Recognising the issue is the first step, although I fear that finding possible solutions will not be as easy.

I will touch on some of the obstacles and frustrations in the conveyancing process, with my observations. Residential conveyancing is covered by the doctrine of caveat emptor—let the buyer beware. The purchaser’s conveyancer is therefore responsible for checking the title and undertaking relevant searches and surveys. That leads to detailed inquiries and, despite the Law Society trying to curb them where they are general, they still represent a considerable administrative burden. The burden is also on the purchaser’s conveyancer to be satisfied on behalf of purchasers and, in most cases, their mortgage lender. There would therefore be considerable merit in clarifying the extent of a conveyancer’s obligation to the client and mortgage lender.

Gazumping is the practice of buyers outbidding those who have already had an offer accepted. The practice causes huge frustration and disappointment for buyers who think they have secured their dream home, only to find that they lose it in a heartbeat to someone with deeper pockets. It also means that those buyers, who lose out regularly, end up paying for abortive legal costs, mortgage consultant fees and survey fees, which can run into thousands of pounds, adding insult to injury. Gazumping accounts for 21% of collapsed sales, while only 15% are because the buyer pulls out at the last minute. The answer could be a financial commitment pre-contract, which would be forfeit should the seller, without warning, raise the price or pull out of the sale.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. The last time a Government looked at gazumping was under Labour, which set out to tackle it, but actually tackled a completely different problem and introduced the ill-fated home information pack. Does he agree that any proposal to change legislation should involve the industry, including estate agents—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests—and the legal profession, to ensure that any changes are beneficial to the process?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, because he is right: any change that the Government make has to be in association and after consultation with the industry, which is estate agents, solicitors, licensed conveyancers and surveyors—everyone involved. If we do not take them with us, any change will simply not work.

Long chains are commonplace in the conveyancing process. They can cause considerable delays to buying and selling. Although chains can be and do get broken, it is not easy, and action such as encouraging short-term lets could provide an answer. There is no question in my mind but that the simplification and standardisation of the mortgage application process would be a good first measure to consider, potentially including an industry standard of instructions and documents for the conveyancers to deal with. I recall the minefield that, in practice, is the Council of Mortgage Lenders handbook, with parts 1, 2 and 3, and all lenders having differing requirements. Reducing or standardising that handbook would lead to a reduction in the work that a conveyancer has to do, therefore considerably speeding up the process.

There is a strong argument for deciding on agreed protocols and procedures in the conveyancing process. I recall that, in practice, it was only when a sale was
agreed, conveyancers instructed and a retainer paid that property information protocol forms would be sent out to clients. Those forms are far from simple and take several hours, if not days, to complete, which means at least a week of delay before they are returned to the conveyancer to be sent on to the purchaser's conveyancer. Comprehensive and standardised questionnaires would create consistency, and enable those selling a property to complete the forms when the property is originally put on the market.

Furthermore, I argue that estate agents have a part to play. They could be obliged to obtain basic information when a property is first marketed, and they could provide more detailed standardised property questionnaires from the conveyancer for the seller to complete while a buyer is being sought for the property. That might shave at least a week off the conveyancing process.

To remain on estate agents, several pieces of legislation affect them, in particular the Estate Agents Act 1979 and the Property Misdescriptions Act 1991. However, things have clearly moved on since then, and I suggest that we might need to review the existing legislation to make it fit for purpose. If, for example, estate agents were licensed—a potential option—the other regulated professionals, such as surveyors and solicitors, would have more confidence in relying on them to manage their part of the conveyancing process.

Currently, landlords and managing agents charge for information about leasehold properties and, in my experience, it often took weeks to receive the information. That causes considerable delays, especially when there is a chain of leasehold properties, which in our great capital city is commonplace. Regulation of the sector dealing with leasehold properties could be the answer, including, for example, minimum response times and a centrally held database of management packs, particularly for large blocks.

Finally, I will reserve some of my fire for my former profession. The move towards factory conveyancing with ridiculously low fees is not only leading to delays, but potentially costing clients. As fees fall, the margins fall and firms need to take on more and more work to remain profitable. That means that many conveyancers are reactive instead of proactive not out of choice but out of necessity. It is the client who then suffers as conveyancers cannot meet their rightly high expectations. Trade bodies have tried to address that by introducing specialist conveyancing credentials such as the kitemark. They have played some part in driving consumer choice, but ultimately—this is my experience and I think the industry would support me in this—the vast majority of clients are primarily motivated by the fee instead of the credentials of the conveyancer. That often leads to lots of complaints being made retrospectively—"I wish I'd used another firm. I wish I'd looked into it."

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The Scottish system certainly has merit, but we should not see it as a panacea. It front-loads a lot of the obligations and costs on to the seller. In the current market, where properties sell easily and quickly, that process can work quite well. However, in a more stagnant market, where sellers are having to cover those costs up front, there is often a lot of frustration there. We should certainly look at the Scottish model, but we should not look only at that. Our system in England and Wales needs fundamental reform not just mirroring the Scottish system.

Technology may be part of the solution. People search online for a property and it is reasonable to expect that they would also like to contract and correspond online with their conveyancer if that speeds up the process—if I had a pound for every solicitor who still sends out letter after letter by post, I would be a very wealthy man. I am aware that systems such as Veyo and Free2Convey are in the pipeline, but I question whether they will actually fix the underlying issues in the process.

I very much welcome the plans of Her Majesty's Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to undertake a call for evidence to explore options to deliver better value and to make the experience of buying a home more consumer friendly and I eagerly await that response. However, unless the Government are willing to change fundamentally our antiquated conveyancing process root and branch, we will not see the improvements that those buying and selling residential property are so desperate to see.

11.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy, for the first time—

Andrew Percy (in the Chair): Let's minute that.

Mr Raab: —with glorious sunshine outside and in. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) on securing a debate on this important topic. It seems like only yesterday that I was responding to him on a different debate that he secured, which shows what an assiduous MP he is on behalf of his constituents.

There were some 1.1 million completed property transactions in England and Wales in 2014–15. About a million of those—the vast majority—were residential sales and the amount of human as well as monetary capital caught up in and reliant on the conveyancing process at any one time is difficult to overestimate. The process, which delivers a secure and marketable titled property, is important to the parties to the transactions and to our underlying competitiveness as an economy.

The broad purpose of the conveyancing process is first to deliver a good and marketable title, free from unexpected encumbrances, to the buyer and to the lender funding the process in order that it can be registered at the Land Registry without difficulty. The investigation of title is only part of that process. Secondly, conveyancers must interrogate the seller and public records for information affecting the property and, once obtained, information must be analysed and any uncertainties clarified. The buyer and lender must, at
the end of the day, both be content to proceed. They will both rely on their conveyancer, who is normally the same person, and, in the event of negligence, the conveyancer’s professional indemnity insurers.

Thirdly, conveyancers must know their clients and satisfy the money laundering regulations. Fourthly, conveyancers must co-ordinate their transactions so that they proceed only when their clients both want to proceed and are able to proceed. Finally, conveyancers should support their clients through an emotionally charged process that in most cases they will encounter only a few times in the course of their lives.

As if that was not complicated enough, residential cases can be even more convoluted. The reality is that most individual residential transactions are linked by virtue of chains and without simultaneous transactions sellers and buyers would have to move into temporary accommodation. That carries the additional risk of the market moving before they can re-enter it or having to take out potentially open-ended bridging loans with the risk of unaffordable interest. The conveyancing process as we know it today in England and Wales is a result of the complex interplay of pressures and pressures and pressures.

The process is not mandated in detail by law. Rather, the law tries to provide a broad framework in which the parties are free to decide how to shape their own transactions, although in practice most of those transactions follow fairly straightforward—or at least common—standard industry protocol. Sales may proceed by auction, tender or private treaty, with several different approaches available in each of those courses, but in practice the vast majority of transactions proceed by private treaty, which in layman’s language is really private contract, and it is that experience that shapes their views.

Opinions on the conveyancing process vary. They are sometimes negative, as we have heard from my hon. Friend. There are complaints about the time taken and the costs involved. Transactions can be prone to delay and all parties can get frustrated about the lack of transparency in the process. Estimates vary, but anecdotal sources suggest that the fall-through rate is roughly between a quarter and a third, which can amount to additional costs to both consumers and the wider economy of about £270 million each year. Millions more may be lost to estate agents and conveyancers operating on a no sale, no fee basis, who incur costs they cannot recoup directly if a transaction falls through.

It is important to say that not every failed transaction is as a result of some form of bad faith, but the practices of gazumping and gazundering, even if relatively rare, do little to improve the reputation of the business. There is no clear cause, or at least no single cause for those problems or the fluidity of the underlying market, which is inherent in a free market system. Many people point to the length of time needed to get from an agreement subject to contract to a binding legal commitment as the key problem. Often the solution proposed is a requirement to enter an early conditional contract along the lines of the traditional Scottish model. However, the truth is that, at least at present, few people in England and Wales seem to be keen to use conditional contracts as a matter of voluntary practice.

In the same way, few people try to protect themselves despite the risk of the transaction failing: they do not seem to make great use of either cost guarantee agreements, where the party that breaks off the deal forfeits a specified sum to the other, or lock-out and lock-in agreements that can secure exclusive negotiating rights. That may be due to lack of costs or awareness or the likelihood of being able to secure those terms—it is true that that is not clear. I think the lack of use or take-up should at least give us some pause for thought before we prescribe a single mandatory remedy as the silver bullet.

Another complaint that we hear is that certain parts of the process—most commonly the local authority search—take too long. Where there is an essential process within an overall conveyancing framework, steps to improve response times will assist in reducing delays. Examples include inquiries of the seller, inquiries of the landlord in leasehold situations, or Land Registry and local authority searches. There may also be wider benefits in making property information more accessible online, and the Land Registry, which holds 24 million titles, has moved from a paper-based system to an electronic approach. That has at least helped to make quicker transaction times possible. The Land Registry has successfully developed certain digital products—most notably the award-winning MapSearch and Property Alert services, which will further modernise and digitise the services that consumers receive. The Land Registry is also taking over the local land charges register from local authorities, so that we deliver a single digital local land charges register in England. That should help to reduce overheads and also eliminate regional variations in practice.

Speed of communication between the principal participants is also sometimes flagged as a problem. Obviously, improved communication between the various parties involved could only be beneficial. However, I have to say that my impression is that the office procedures within the conveyancing process today are generally computerised and likely to become more so in response to consumer expectation and, indeed, competition. Chains of transactions of course present their own communications challenges, almost inherently, but attempts so far to provide an all-embracing, all-encompassing, secure electronic environment, in which members of the chain can communicate seamlessly, have founder. That happened most recently, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester mentioned, with the Law Society’s Veyo project. That is clearly a difficult nut to crack.

Finally, Mr Speaker—

Andrew Percy (in the Chair): Oh!

Mr Raab: It is only a matter of time. Finally, Mr Percy, we should not forget, when looking for the causes of procedural problems in the system, that the conveyancing process has to deal with some pretty difficult areas of law, and simplification and modernisation of the substantive, underlying law has a part to play in improving the overall effect of the conveyancing process. Work on the Law Commission’s recommendations to reform the laws relating to easements and covenants, as announced in the context of the Queen’s Speech, shows the Government’s commitment to improving the underlying substantive law in the area, which should have a knock-on effect for consumers, in terms of process.

The Government of course also announced at the time of the autumn statement last year that they would publish a call for evidence on home buying, exploring
options to modernise the process and provide consumers with different and potentially quicker, simpler, cheaper and more effective ways to buy and sell a home. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester made reference to that. The call for evidence will be published by BIS later this year. It will invite evidence and proposals for innovation from all aspects of industry, but also from consumers. I am sure—I certainly hope—that my hon. Friend will be engaged and involved in making sure we get the right evidence in, and that the right conclusions will be drawn from the evidence throughout the process.

I pay tribute once again to my hon. Friend for bringing this topic before the House, and I am sure that I will be back again to respond to him in debate soon. I hope that in the light of my comments he will be reassured that the Government are aware of the multiple concerns he has raised, and that they are endeavouring to take the right action to address them.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 am

Sitting suspended.

Diabetes-related Complications

[Mark Pritchard in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered diabetes-related complications.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am particularly pleased to have secured a debate on this topic because of its profound importance to all those with diabetes, and because support for those with long-term conditions is vital to the future of the NHS.

There are 4 million people living with diabetes in the UK today, and it is estimated that more than half a million people are undiagnosed, living with the condition without being aware they have it. Since 1996, the number of people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK has more than doubled, from 1.4 million to almost 3.5 million. About 700 people a day are diagnosed with diabetes, which is the equivalent of one person every two minutes. The NHS spends about £10 billion on diabetes every single year, which equals around 10% of its budget. Critically, it is estimated that 80% of that cost is spent on complications that are largely avoidable through better care.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. She referred to the fact that 80% of NHS spending on diabetes is on avoidable complications. Does she agree that a greater focus on early intervention is needed, to ensure that the budget, resources and staffing are better targeted?

Paula Sherriff: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I absolutely agree. As with so many other conditions, early intervention is crucial.

The total direct and indirect costs associated with diabetes in the UK are estimated at £23.7 billion. That is predicted to rise to £39.8 billion by 2035. Earlier this year, the Public Accounts Committee said that the cost of diabetes to the NHS would continue to rise.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I absolutely agree. As with so many other conditions, early intervention is crucial.

The hon. Member for Colchester introduced this subject. It is a subject to which I am particularly committed, having had a long-standing interest in it. I am also a team member of the all-party group on diabetes, and it is one of the causes I am particularly strongly committed to. I have heard much from my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury, and I would like to make one or two points.

The total direct and indirect costs associated with diabetes in the UK are estimated at £23.7 billion. That is predicted to rise to £39.8 billion by 2035. Earlier this year, the Public Accounts Committee said that the cost of diabetes to the NHS would continue to rise.

John Howell: The hon. Lady is shaking her head. I am a living example of someone who has cured diabetes. I wonder whether more patient-centred education would be a big help to the NHS.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. While I acknowledge that some people may be cured of the condition, we must not be complacent about the causes of it or, indeed, the impact it can have on many people’s lives.
Liz McInnes: I wish to make the point that the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) is talking about type 2 diabetes, which can be cured by weight loss. Type 1 diabetes, which is insulin-dependent, cannot.

John Howell: I did mean type 2 diabetes.

Paula Sherriff: I thank hon. Members for their contributions, and I will now try to make a little progress.

Earlier this year, the Public Accounts Committee said that "the costs of diabetes to the NHS will continue to rise. In order to control these costs, the Department and NHS must take significant action to improve prevention and treatment for diabetes patients in the next couple of years."

The wider impact on people’s health is significant. One in five hospital admissions for heart failure, heart attack and stroke are among people with diabetes. The condition is responsible for more than 135 amputations per week. It is the leading cause of preventable sight loss in people of working age and the single most common cause of kidney failure.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. I declare an interest as a type 2 diabetic. I lost almost 4 stone and I am still a type 2 diabetic. I still need tablets to keep me right, and many type 2 diabetics are the same. Experts at Queen’s University Belfast are spearheading a new major research project aimed at ascertaining why thousands of diabetics around the world suffer kidney failure, which she referred to. They have examined DNA samples from 20,000 diabetics to help identify the genetic factors in diabetic kidney disease. The project could enable personalised procedures for those at risk. Does she agree that such research is the key to unlocking life-changing advances for diabetics?

Paula Sherriff: I absolutely agree, and it is encouraging to learn that such research and development is being carried out. I will later share details of a visit that my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and I undertook recently, which proved very interesting.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Lady has been most generous in taking interventions. I congratulate her on securing this vital debate. Does she agree that education is a key part of ensuring that individuals with diabetes can manage their condition and limit the complications that she mentions? In my constituency we have a diabetes support group that was established way back in 1994. It meets nine times a year, often hears from experts, and provides advice and support. Will she reflect on the role of support groups in helping people to combat diabetes?

Paula Sherriff: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that relevant contribution, and I absolutely agree. It is worth noting that, as with many conditions, education is often the key, and I will allude to that later in my speech.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Paula Sherriff: I will make some progress and then take further interventions.
an unacceptable number of in-patients experience diabetes-related harm while staying in hospital. Diabetes UK has pointed to evidence showing that specialist diabetes in-patient teams save three times what they cost the NHS to provide. Specialist teams make fewer prescribing errors and deliver better outcomes for their patients, so there are fewer expensive complications in hospital and shorter stays. Although most hospitals report increasing referrals and patient contacts, there has been no increase in staffing levels in diabetes teams.

I do not think that the number of in-patients who suffer diabetes complications while in hospital is acceptable, and I hope the Minister agrees. The national diabetes in-patient audit showed that 38% of in-patient drug charts had at least one diabetes medication error and 22% had at least one prescription error; that 30% of in-patients had one or more hypoglycaemic episodes, with nearly a third being severe; that 33% of people with diabetes did not think the staff looking after them knew enough about the condition; and that one in 10 hospital sites did not have any consultant time for diabetes in-patient care. Will the Minister tell us what action she intends to take to reduce those figures, assuming that the Government do not think they are acceptable?

David Simpson: We have heard education and early intervention mentioned. Does the hon. Lady agree that in order to help patients, and especially children—there is a reluctance for teachers to give insulin to young people within nursery provision and at primary school level—the mindset needs to change? We need to make sure that there is preventive medication as well as early intervention for children.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention; once again, I agree with those points.

It makes sense both clinically and financially to improve access to diabetes self-management education. Managing diabetes well is time-consuming and can be complicated, but 69% of diabetics said they did not fully understand their condition. On average, people with diabetes spend only three hours a year with a healthcare professional. For the remaining 8,757 hours they manage their diabetes themselves, for which they need the right skills and knowledge—not to mention confidence. Diabetes self-management courses empower people with diabetes to take charge of their own care. Nine out of 10 people with diabetes who attended a course stated that they felt more confident about managing their diabetes afterwards.

Evidence collated by Diabetes UK shows that diabetes education courses reduce an individual’s risk of developing serious and costly complications and prove very cost-effective. However, more than a third of CCGs do not currently commission specific courses for people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, despite national guidance, and less than 2% of people newly diagnosed with type 1 diabetes—and just 5.9% with type 2 diabetes—attend a diabetes education course. Investing in diabetes education is the big missed opportunity in diabetes care. Will the Minister agree to look at what can be done to ensure that we do not continue to miss it?

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): My hon. Friend for his contribution; he speaks with a great deal of experience, having experienced diabetes himself. That is an incredibly interesting point, and I hope that the Minister will give her views on that issue.

Finally, we must tackle the significant variations in the care and support received by people living with diabetes. The postcode lottery is exacerbated by additional differences according to age and the type of diabetes. Will one of not just a growth type but sometimes receive considerably worse routine care than other people with diabetes. For example, although 41% of people with type 2 diabetes achieve the three treatment targets—on blood pressure, HbA1C, or haemoglobin A1c, and cholesterol—less than 20% of people with type 1 diabetes achieved them in 2014-15. Because of that variation, far too many people are experiencing short and long-term complications that have a huge impact on their health and quality of life and prove incredibly costly to our NHS.

The universal provision of healthcare is one of the founding principles of the NHS, and we have warned of the impact of wider Government policies on that, but there is also a specific issue in the case of diabetes. We should acknowledge that the Government have recently made some steps to improve care and address wider problems through the new improvement and assessment framework, but those measures will require sustained resources and national leadership. I hope that the Minister can outline not just a commitment, but some detail on how she will ensure that those intentions result in long-term action. In particular, will she tell us more about what support will be provided to CCGs that are identified as poor performers as part of the new improvement and assessment framework?

As well as better care to reduce complications and enable people with diabetes to live long and fulfilling lives, urgent action is needed to tackle the rise in type 2 diabetes. Nearly 12 million people are currently at increased risk of developing it. As obesity accounts for 80% to 85% of the risk for type 2 diabetes, the main strategy for reducing the rising prevalence of type 2 diabetes must be to tackle the rise in obesity. I welcome the NHS diabetes prevention programme—a joint commitment from NHS England, Public Health England and Diabetes UK—which will identify those at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes and refer them to evidence-based behaviour change programmes to help reduce that risk.

The first wave of 27 areas in that programme covers 45% of England’s population, with the aim of supporting 20,000 individuals to reduce their risk of type 2 diabetes. Can the Minister give us any assessment of the programme’s record to date? Will she confirm that it is due to cover the whole country by 2020 and that she still expects a full 100,000 places to be available on the programme each year?

The Obesity Health Alliance identifies three other priority areas for action that should be fundamental components of the forthcoming governmental childhood
obesity strategy. They are restrictions on unhealthy food marketing, including a 9 pm watershed for TV advertising of junk food; the implementation of independent and mandatory reformulation targets to reduce the sugar, saturated fat and salt content in our foods; and the implementation of a levy on sugary drinks manufacturers. We have, of course, recently had some progress on the last of those, although the levy that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is implementing perhaps does not quite match up to that envisaged by public health campaigns. Perhaps the Minister can tell us more about that strategy and about the Government’s views on the other policies put forward by the alliance.

The Government have also promised to take action to reduce childhood obesity, with the aim of publishing a childhood obesity strategy. The strategy was initially due for publication in autumn 2015 but has been delayed. The latest indication is that it is to be released in summer 2016, but quite frankly, they have been holding off for far too long already. Can the Minister give us a specific date for exactly when the strategy will be published?

I know that other hon. Members are keen to speak, so I will conclude by saying that, both as a former NHS worker for many years and as a member of the Select Committee on Health, I see this issue as absolutely critical for the future of our health service as a whole, as well as for the many thousands of my constituents who live with diabetes. There are a disproportionate number of diabetics in my constituency, so this is a big issue for the people of Dewsbury, Mirfield, Denby Dale and Kirkburton. I hope that the Minister has some answers today for them and for everyone who relies on our NHS.

2.49 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on securing this vital debate on diabetes and related complications. This is important to me because my constituency, in particular, has a high level of diabetes-related amputations. As we have heard, diabetes is a significant problem for the UK, and it is right that the Government and the Department of Health have identified tackling diabetes as a priority for this Parliament.

The cost to people’s quality of life is dramatic and an increasing number are having to manage the condition, which can make holding down a job or going about their normal daily business very difficult. Some 3.5 million people have been diagnosed with diabetes and a further 500,000 may have it but have not yet been diagnosed.

Diabetes costs the NHS approximately 10% of its budget, with one in five hospital admissions for heart failure, heart attack and stroke involving people with diabetes. However, the cost of supporting people with diabetes goes far wider when we start to consider the costs associated with adapting people’s homes and workplaces following amputation or sight loss, for example.

The UK is a civilised, wealthy country and if more can be done there is no real excuse for not doing it. We know that for many people the longer term complications of diabetes can be reduced through good diet and exercise, but this message must be communicated positively and early. Much more must be done to encourage outdoor physical education and activity from an early age. We will not be forgiven for having a nation of children who accomplish good results in year 6 SATS, only for many of them to live with life-limiting conditions. For me, physical education is as valuable as numeracy and literacy.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): On childhood obesity, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need a generational change so that from this generation on we will raise young children with clear knowledge of the issues and the unfortunate and inevitable consequences of a sugary diet—so that we can try to prevent diabetes and make sure this is the last generation to suffer from this horrible affliction.

Derek Thomas: That is true, and I welcome that intervention. It is right to make the distinction between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Type 1 often occurs in younger people and there is little, if anything, we can do about it other than manage the condition well. General practitioners in my area have teenagers and adolescents presenting with type 2 diabetes. The hon. Gentleman is right that to address the issue in the long term we must be positive and provide information and education that is sensitive, but honest and truthful. We cannot pussyfoot around when people’s lives are at stake.

We have a responsibility to ensure that both those with type 1 diabetes and those with type 2 diabetes that cannot be avoided have easy access to the best treatment available and the best support, and can access modern devices that manage diabetes and reduce the development of further complications. Since arriving in this place in May 2015, I have attended several meetings and seen all sorts of innovations and devices that can be used, particularly by young people, to help them to manage their condition better.

In the past, I spent some time as a youth worker and I know it is a huge challenge to help young people with diabetes to manage their condition through finger prick tests and regular injections, and parents are frustrated that young people often do not realise the consequences of not looking after their condition well. New innovations and new devices must be made more available to them now because I believe they will embrace smart technology, which could be life-changing for children and young people who are managing a life-limiting condition.

We know that when diabetes is not well managed, it is associated with serious complications. I have referred to the cost of health and social care for diabetic patients. The tragedy is not just that 80% of these costs are spent on complications that are largely avoidable through better care, but that people’s health and quality of life are unnecessarily deteriorating because sufferers are not always able to access the care that we know they need.

I was keen to take part in this vital debate and I appreciate the opportunity because the situation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly gives cause for concern. One of the most serious diabetes-related complications is amputation. Nationally, an average of 2.6 diabetics in every 1,000 have a diabetes-related amputation. In Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, the average is 4.4 amputations per 1,000 people with the condition. This suggests that in my constituency alone eight people each year have a lower limb amputation as a result of diabetes. Last year, 40 people in Cornwall had a lower limb amputation as a result of diabetes. We know that four in five of these
amputations could be prevented through better care, so six people in my constituency today could have avoided having a lower limb amputation in 2015 if everything we know about managing diabetes had been correctly applied. Six people’s lives have been changed dramatically and their outcome is grave indeed. It is essential that we reduce the number of amputations, not least because we know that up to 80% of people die within five years of having a lower limb removed.

As the hon. Member for Dewsbury said, NICE is very clear about what CCGs should do to improve treatment for diabetic patients. Earlier this year I wrote to my clinical commissioning group in Cornwall, Kernow CCG, to argue that it should ensure the NICE recommendations are properly implemented. I am encouraged by the action it is taking, which it set out in its response to me. It says that figures to be released this month demonstrate that its efforts have reduced the level of amputations in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. That achievement would be a phenomenal and significant success, and something to celebrate.

However, there is a role for the Government in improving patient outcomes and it is not fair to leave everything to the CCGs. I have referred to the need for a positive message about how to improve our own health to reduce the risk of developing diabetes, but those who have diabetes and are at risk of a lower limb amputation need to benefit from a cultural shift in the profession. We need to get to a place where major lower limb amputations associated with diabetes or vascular disease is considered a failure of treatment rather than a treatment choice. A functioning foot with minimal surgery should be a success.

The Government must do more to ensure that patients with a diabetic foot are diagnosed earlier and are on the right patient pathway. More must be done to ensure the right professionals are in place. If patients are seen by podiatrists, diabetologists and interventional radiologists as early as possible, patients can be treated appropriately and their leg can be saved. This means ensuring everyone with diabetes gets quality annual foot checks. We have talked about what that might mean and perhaps we need clarity on what an annual foot check entails. Everyone with a foot infection should be urgently referred to those specialists.

The best way for patients to have access to those specialists is through a multidisciplinary team, where healthcare professionals meet to discuss patients and treatment choices. That sounds simple, but too often different parts of the healthcare system operate in silos and that is particularly the case in some parts of the healthcare profession in Cornwall. It is crucial that the right members of the team meet regularly and that multidisciplinary teams are fit for purpose. It must not just be a tick-box exercise for NHS trusts.

Clinicians also need access to the right technologies when they intervene on patients with advanced forms of diabetic foot and critical limb ischaemia. Data show that the use of drug-eluting technologies, when used by vascular specialists, can improve outcomes for diabetic patients to the equivalent of those patients without diabetes. NICE is about to review its clinical guidelines for peripheral arterial disease and I hope the updated guidance will include recommendations for the use of drug-eluting technologies for critical limb ischaemia and intermittent claudication.

In conclusion, the Department of Health has said it will assess CCGs on their provision of structured diabetes education as part of the new CCG improvement and assessment framework. I would like the Minister to say today what support the Department will provide to ensure that CCGs identified as underperforming are able to improve access to structured education, and thereby increase the number of people with diabetes who have the skills and confidence to manage their own condition. As was said earlier in the debate, many people with diabetes across the UK could manage their condition with the right support, education and resources. It is absolutely right that we do everything we can to give every person with the condition the support that should be available to them and that they deserve to have.
Although physical education lessons in schools often focus on competitive sports such as football, hockey, rugby and netball, they should also put emphasis on general fitness training. Schools should also be given the tools and resources that they need to encourage after-school sports clubs in addition to community-run sports clubs. The Rhymney Valley athletics club, based in my constituency, is a fantastic example of a community-run sports club for children and young people. On the occasions when I have had the opportunity to visit it, I have always been impressed by the enthusiasm of the coaches and the positive atmosphere that they create, which is impressed on the children. The number of children taking part is growing quickly, simply because they enjoy going. Whether they know it or not, by taking part in physical activity, they will be reducing their risk of type 2 diabetes and, more importantly, having fun along the way.

However, parents must bear much of the responsibility for ensuring that children lead a healthy and active lifestyle. It may be easier for parents to allow children and teenagers to eat sugary, high-fat treats with low nutritional value and drink sugary pop, but that puts their health at risk in the long term. The new tax on high-sugar drinks that was announced in March is a welcome step in the direction of tackling child obesity, and I hope that parents will take the message on board by encouraging children and teenagers to drink and eat more healthily. One of the most important skills taught to me by my mother was the ability to cook my own food—not to rely on ready meals, a takeaway or the fish shop, but to go home of a night and make myself a meal.

If young people do not develop a healthy lifestyle while they are at school, it is reasonable to expect that they will find it much harder to do so once they have left. If we make a serious effort to point children in a healthy direction from an early age, we will give them the best possible chance to avoid becoming overweight. It follows that, if they do not become overweight, they are less likely to develop diabetes and, as a result, less likely to suffer health complications caused by the disease.

Adult obesity in the United Kingdom is showing a sustained upwards trend. By 2014, more than 28% of adults were considered clinically obese, and that is expected to rise to one third by 2020. Overall, 62% of adults in the UK—a significant majority—are classed as overweight or obese. That is the third highest level in western Europe, and it is not a league table we particularly want to be at the top of. It is clear that, if we are to tackle excess weight and obesity to tackle diabetes, radical public action must be taken to reduce the UK’s average waistline.

A key reason for increasingly sedentary lifestyles is the rapid growth of office and desk work during the past few decades. Employees stuck behind a computer screen for most of the day do not get the opportunity to exercise, which we know is vital to maintaining a healthy weight. Perhaps great benefit would be gained if employers were incentivised to incorporate physical activity into office work or to set aside time during the working day for the desk-bound to exercise. The expansion of accessible after-work exercise clubs for all would also be a huge and radical step forward.

Incentives should be given for healthy eating. When living on a budget, as so many people are, it is often cheaper to eat unhealthily than healthily. That extraordinary situation must be turned on its head. Equally, disincentives such as the sugar tax should be used to discourage unhealthy eating. Only once we as a country have truly got to grips with our weight and obesity problem will we be able to prevent the very serious health complications caused by diabetes.

As my hon. Friend said, we recently visited the excellent diabetic foot clinic at King’s College hospital. I will be honest: when I received the invitation, it was only my interest in diabetes that led to my accepting it. I did not expect to come away from a diabetic foot clinic feeling inspired, but inspired I most certainly was. I spoke to the doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants, researchers and, most importantly, the patients. I heard from patients whose limbs had been saved from amputation by the amazingly skilled, dedicated and knowledgeable staff—patients who had arrived at the foot clinic clutching letters from their doctors that stated, “There is no alternative other than to amputate this limb.” Those patients were lucky because they had talked to people such as diabetes specialist nurses, who had suggested that they consult the diabetic foot clinic to get a second opinion.

We spoke to a farmer from Kent who had been kicked by one of his cows. He had a wound on his foot that would not heal and he had been advised by the hospital that a below-knee amputation was the only solution. The farmer talked to us about his family farm, about how he would have been unable to carry on working had the amputation gone ahead and about how grateful he was for his referral to the foot clinic. The staff there had been able to treat the wound and it was well on the way to recovery by the time we saw it. They had saved his limb and consequently his business and his family’s livelihood, with all the concomitant savings to the NHS. So many of the people we spoke to told us stories like that; he was just one of them.

I was absolutely blown away by the incredible work done by that clinic, but, as has been pointed out, the care provided there is not universal and there are currently no national drivers to lower amputation rates across the country. It has already been stated that four out of five of these amputations are avoidable. I particularly liked the comment by the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) that we should aim to get to a point at which amputation is seen as a failure rather than as a form of treatment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury has quoted quite a lot of my speech. [Laughter.] So I will be brief. She referred to this, but it deserves repetition. In 2013, the Health Secretary committed to reducing the rate of diabetes-related amputations by 50% over five years.
The amputation rate has in fact remained steady. Little progress appears to have been made towards the commitment. I do not think it does any harm to repeat that point and to hope for a response.

Mr Jamie Reed: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Does she agree that there is a regional dimension? There is a GP shortfall of 40% across the north of England. If the gateway treatment for type 1 and type 2 diabetes is through primary care and accessibility is limited in certain parts of this country, clearly, we will get much worse outcomes.

Liz McInnes: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is absolutely right. In my own constituency of Heywood and Middleton, I have also come across the problem of people being unable to get access to GPs. I am a member of the all-party group on diabetes and we have come across the problem time and again.

Patients have told the APPG that, when they first went to see the GP with the full-blown symptoms of diabetes, the GP took weeks to diagnose them. We have a real problem with GPs’ awareness of the condition of diabetes, even though it is common. Perhaps it is just the patients who come to our APPGs, but they all seem to come with the same tale, so perhaps there is a job of work to be done to standardise GPs’ education on diabetes.

We have touched on the subject of variations in care around the country. Because of the regional variations, far too many people are experiencing short and long-term complications, which can have a huge impact on their and their family’s quality of life. It is also very costly to the NHS.

I want to talk about a major clinical audit that is going on at the moment, the national diabetes audit, which measures the effectiveness of diabetes healthcare against NICE clinical guidelines and NICE quality standards in England and Wales. That audit provides an overview of the quality of diabetes care at national, clinical commissioning group, acute trust and GP practice levels. Through the collection of the data, the national diabetes audit can produce reports for a range of stakeholders to drive changes and improve the quality of services and health outcomes for people with diabetes.

Again, we see regional variations in participation in the national diabetes audit. The latest NDA report produced in January this year showed that participation in the audit had dropped to 57%; it is thought that that can be attributed to a change from an opt-out to an opt-in system for GP practices, plus variations in the ease of use of the three different IT systems used by GP practices. I am very disappointed to say that, in my constituency, which is covered by the Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale CCG, not one GP practice is participating in the national diabetes audit. It is really important that participation be improved; better data help CCGs to more effectively set priorities and evaluate improvements. If we are not collecting the data, there is no way we can plan for improving the outcomes for people with diabetes.

NHS England should make participation in the national diabetes audit mandatory as an important step towards improving diabetes care.

Several Members have already talked about the importance of education. An important aspect of avoidance and prevention of complications of diabetes lies in educating diabetics to help them to better understand and therefore manage their condition. With 69% of diabetics saying they do not fully understand their condition, there is clearly a need for education to be made available and accessible.

As has already been pointed out, more than a third of CCGs do not currently commission specific courses for people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, despite national guidance. In my own constituency, only about 20% of people with diabetes are offered a course, and the take-up is alarmingly low, at around 6% to 7%. One reason that people give for not taking up the offer of a course is that their employer will not give them time off to attend. There is a real job of work to be done to persuade employers that supporting their employees to attend the courses will have all-round benefits for the employer and the employee in terms of reduced sickness absence and a healthier and more productive employee.

I know that the Minister shares my interest in promoting diabetes education, which is key to preventing the major complications of diabetes. I am interested to hear her views and whether she has any plans to improve access to education.

3.15 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) for securing this debate.

I unashamedly turned to a much more informed source of information than me while putting this speech together. My sister, Linda Irvine, has been an insulin-dependent diabetic for 36 years. She knows the system inside out and has experienced the good and the bad of the NHS. In that time, she has seen many changes in the treatments provided. In 1980, she was fortunate to be diagnosed on what she considered the cusp of change. She had been subjected to horror stories of painful injections and severe restrictions in diet, along with a lack of understanding from doctors and nurses not familiar with the medical condition. In those days, injections were delivered in glass syringes with barbaric steel needles, which had to be kept steeped in methylated spirit and which obviously restricted away from home activities. Insulin was bovine or porcine and the peak effect of it was three to four hours after administration, making the timing of meals a bit of guesswork.

Shortly after my sister’s diagnosis, a new synthetic form of insulin, termed human insulin, was laboratory-developed. That made it cheaper to produce in larger quantities. From 1982, human insulin started to replace animal insulin as the primary treatment. It was developed further in the 1990s and now starts to take effect within 30 minutes of injection, making control of blood sugars more predictable. Syringes also became plastic, smaller and had finer needles: much easier to carry on you if you were out. Syringes have now been replaced by pre-loaded pens that are much more convenient and easier to draw up.

The introduction of insulin pumps is also an increasingly available initiative that Linda benefited from during her last two pregnancies, but she was unable to keep them because of an allergic reaction to the needle. She was not born lucky. Food was also a big problem in those days, with no light or sugar-free options on the market.
and diabetic drinks or biscuits available only in chemist shops. They were overpriced and frequently unpalatable. Nowadays, there are many options and most are readily available in high street stores.

We might think that nowadays it is all plain sailing, but unfortunately it is not. Diabetes complicates life immeasurably. It takes the spontaneity out of everyday activities, particularly with children and grandchildren.

“Can we go to the park?” “Wait till I’ve checked my blood sugar.” “Can we go swimming?” “I need something to eat first.” “Why do we have to leave? We’ve only just got here.” “I’m due a meal soon.” On occasions, after she had injected, usually in a public toilet, and when the restaurant service was very slow, she would slip into a hypo. “Why are you sliding down the seat, mum, and heading for the floor?” It is not only mums who suffer from diabetes. All four of my sister’s children were able to dial 999 and tell the operator that she was diabetic by the age of three.

If we are leaving the house now, Linda carries a large bag with two insulin pens, needles, blood monitor, testing strips, lancets, a bottle of Lucozade—other drinks are available—and some kind of carbohydrate such as a packet of crisps or a sandwich to have in case her blood sugars go too low. She always carries a card explaining that she has diabetes and two emergency phone numbers in case she collapses.

Travelling abroad through different time zones can really complicate matters, too—not to mention the embarrassment of carrying syringes through airport security. As for dietary requirements on airlines—don’t go there. Of course, another area of concern is driving. As with most medical problems, insurance is always steeper and more complicated, DVLA requirements more stringent, and licences harder to acquire and keep.

What does my sister have to look forward to? The long-term problems of diabetes are well documented: cardiovascular disease, kidney damage, foot problems, eye disease, nerve damage, tooth and gum disease, thyroid problems, skin problems, constant infections and, unsurprisingly, mental health issues. It is therefore a cause close to Linda’s heart that the treatment of children with type 1 diabetes should be as up-to-date as possible, to ensure that their exposure to long-term problems is minimised.

Linda is now waiting for a kidney and pancreas transplant. Current research involves stem cell transplantation and chimera pigs where embryos are created with organs hopefully compatible for human transplant. Of course that is controversial and raises all kinds of ethical questions. But what if it was your child? What if it was your sister?

3.20 pm

MARTYN DAY (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on bringing forward this timely debate. It is encouraging to hear such consensus across the Chamber today. She gave an informed and comprehensive presentation, and I was grateful to hear it. I speak, obviously, as a Scottish Member, and many things are devolved there, but the scale of the problem is remarkably similar in Scotland; 10% of our NHS budget is likewise devoted to treatment of preventable diabetes-related conditions, and those costs continue to rise, as has been noted for England.

I was somewhat shocked by the figure for the number of deaths, which I had not considered before. I am sure that that will strike many people. We think of the life-affecting changes that people go through, and the fact that lives are shortened, but not necessarily of the resulting deaths. The hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) summed things up in her short comment about the need for early intervention; she hit the nail on the head. That, undoubtedly, is what we need. I was impressed, also, by the remarks of the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). I thank him for the figures he gave about the one in five heart and stroke-related admissions to hospital, and for what he said about costs, adaptations that are required, and effect on quality of life. It is important to consider those things together. One of the few optimistic comments that I have taken from the debate is the statistic that four in five amputations are avoidable. I hope that that message will get out to people.

I have not been diagnosed as diabetic, but my lifestyle is somewhat appalling, and perhaps I should get myself checked. Obviously people of both genders should be checked, but perhaps males in particular should take more care. Maybe there are lessons for other people. I was somewhat cheered by the comments of the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans). It made me slightly more optimistic to hear about the 40.2 inch waistline. I thought, “I’m a bit below that.” However, it does not fully mitigate the diet. I think perhaps that there are many others who will not consider 40.2 inches as a particularly large waistline. When we think about the connection to obesity, which is important, we tend not to think of ourselves as obese even when there is an issue. Several years ago, I was 6 inches bigger than I am now: I did not think I was large at the time. My mother, of course, always commented that I was, and she was probably proved correct. If those figures got through to the wider public they might think, “Yes, that does affect me”—or whoever they know who is in that position. It is important that people see that.

We can probably agree that diabetes is the fastest growing health threat of our time. That is certainly how it appears. The Scottish National party is committed to ensuring that in Scotland people with diabetes have access to the best possible care, and it aims to reduce the risks of complications. There have been a number of reports, an action plan in 2010 and an improvement plan in 2014. The statistics are very similar to those we have heard. One in 16 people has diabetes—diagnosed or undiagnosed. Since 2008 we have seen a 25% increase in the number of Scots with the condition, which accounts for 5.2% of the population. That is largely in line with figures from England and Wales. However, a more frightening aspect of the Scottish dimension is the fact that a further 500,000 are at high risk of developing type 2, and a further 1.1 million are at an increased risk as a result of their waist circumference. I am grateful that I now have a set of statistics to put that in perspective. That figure represents one in five adults, which seems typical, going by figures for elsewhere in the UK. Of course, the connection with obesity cannot be underlined strongly enough. Similarly, 80% of our
NHS spending on diabetes is invested in treating avoidable complications—amounting to the same 10% of the budget.

One of the keys to avoiding manageable complications through diabetes is, as has been said, early prevention. Approximately 80% of complications in Scotland are estimated to be preventable, or can be significantly delayed through early detection, good care and access to appropriate self-management. That involves reaching the people who are at risk and supporting them in knowing the risks of poor diet and low levels of physical activity. Among the positive things that are happening are volunteer groups, including the Diabetes UK West Lothian group in my area, which supports people living with the condition through several different schemes. It has NHS support through St. John’s hospital in Livingston. Exercise groups are provided, and they include a session of seated exercise for people who have limited mobility. There is also a GP referral service entitling people to free or heavily discounted memberships at Xcite West Lothian gyms. Again, that is probably not well enough known about in my area and it could be taken up more. That is all part of the push to support people, and to further prevent complications arising from diabetes.

There is much we can agree on, and much good practice, as well as many frightening statistics out there.

3.26 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on securing this important debate and on the eloquent and powerful way she set out the issues in her opening speech. Several hon. Members have echoed what she said, and I will no doubt repeat it to an extent. After just a year as an MP she has established herself as one of the most effective campaigners in this place, and she is a passionate advocate on a range of issues—particularly public health matters. She spoke of her visit to King’s College with my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), and described the excellent care there, as well as mentioning the fact that, sadly, that experience is not replicated throughout the country. She highlighted the cost of diabetes and described education as a missed opportunity to reduce complications. That is a theme that has come through in several of the contributions today.

I also want to mention the contribution from the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton spoke with great experience of health. It was great to hear that she had been inspired by her visit to King’s College. She spoke about the national diabetes audit, and the importance of using the data collected to drive improvements. Again, she highlighted the need for more education. It was interesting to hear that some of her constituents have difficulty attending some education courses because employers are not agreeing to give them the time off. It will be interesting to hear the Minister’s reflections on that and it comes back to the point about a healthy workforce being a more productive one. We really need to get that message across to employers.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) spoke about his family’s experience and gave us a useful personal insight into the everyday challenges faced. We can all reel off the figures but hearing from someone who has had a close relationship with the condition for a considerable length of time brings home some of the practical challenges that people face.

There is a consensus, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) said. All hon. Members acknowledge that diabetes is one of the most significant healthcare challenges, given the impact that it has on NHS resources and, more importantly, the impact it has on people. We heard very powerful details of that today.

To put the condition in perspective statistically, 45 people in the UK will have been diagnosed with diabetes in the time it takes to complete today’s debate. In that time, one person will have undergone a diabetes-related amputation and four people will have died prematurely due to diabetes-related complications. According to figures produced by Diabetes UK, there are currently 4 million people living with diabetes in the UK, of whom 549,000 are undiagnosed.

The number of people with diabetes is increasing, as various hon. Members have said, and it has more than doubled since 1996. More than doubling the number of people with any condition in 20 years is bound to lead to serious questions about how our society is operating. Indeed, several hon. Members have given some good examples of the challenges we face. Part of our role is to question and support, where possible, how the Government respond to those challenges, particularly when we are talking about something that can be preventable. The level of interest shown by hon. Members today shows that there is at least recognition and agreement that the issue demands significant attention.

The number of people with a diagnosis is huge, as is the cost to the health service. The NHS now spends about £10 billion on diabetes each year, which is equivalent to about 10% of its budget, and £8 billion of that is estimated to be spent on complications, which, as we have discussed, are largely avoidable. Diabetes is an
Mr Jamie Reed: Does the shadow Minister agree that some consideration ought to be given to the funding allocation for CCGs with particularly large concentrations of people with type 2 diabetes, which is, after all, linked to obesity and lifestyle, especially considering that obesity is increasingly statistically linked—there is a clear correlation—with the incidence of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage? Does he agree that CCGs with those significant populations should have their funding allocation reviewed?

Justin Madders: I agree that that needs due consideration. In some written answers, the percentages of people with diabetes per constituency are shown, and there are some definite peaks and troughs. If we are to get the issue under control, we must think more strategically about where the resources are put.

At the moment, a third of CCGs do not commission specific courses, which is contrary to national guidance. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us what she will do to try to end the postcode lottery. One of the most convenient and effective sources of education for many people with diabetes is their local pharmacy. There is a need—possibly, a demand—for expanding the role that pharmacies play in supporting people with diabetes. What are the opportunities and possibilities for thinking again about the Government’s plans to slash the community pharmacy budget, which may lead to the closure of up to 3,000 sites?

More significant than the variation in education is the variation in the levels of care and support offered depending on location, the age of the patient and the type of diabetes. There is evidence of markedly different routine care throughout the country, which has a huge impact on the quality of life of diabetics, as well as being costly to the NHS. One in six people in hospital has diabetes, yet one in three hospitals has no diabetes specialist nurse. The national diabetes in-patient audit paints a worrying picture of the variations in the way in which the condition is managed by hospitals, and the unacceptable number of in-patients suffering avoidable complications.

Some of the most serious diabetes-related complications are avoidable amputations and foot ulcers. We have heard that £1 in every £150 that the NHS spends is in that area, and such action has a dramatic, life-changing impact on individuals and their families. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury said, in 2013 the Health Secretary committed to reducing the rate of amputations by 50% in five years. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made towards achieving that goal, particularly given that Diabetes UK has said that no progress has really been made? Will she confirm that she still hopes to meet that target?

NICE recommends that all people with diabetes undergo an annual foot check but, in the worst performing CCGs, one in four people are not receiving a foot check at all. Part of the reason for that is the shortage in the number of podiatrists, particularly following a recent reduction in the number of students from 361 to 326. I am concerned that the plan to scrap bursaries for podiatry students and to push them into about £50,000 of debt will make the situation even worse. I ask the Minister to reconsider the direction of travel on this policy. Will she advise us what assessment has been made of the likely number of podiatrists who will be trained each year under the new funding regime?

I will close by making a few remarks about prevention. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the number of people suffering from diabetes continues to rise. The primary driver of that is, of course, lifestyle. Some 11.9 million people are currently at an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes as a result of their waist circumference or weight. Two in every three people in hospital are avoidable amputations and foot ulcers. We have heard that £1 in every £150 that the NHS spends is in that area, and such action has a dramatic, life-changing impact on individuals and their families. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury said, in 2013 the Health Secretary committed to reducing the rate of amputations by 50% in five years. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made towards achieving that goal, particularly given that Diabetes UK has said that no progress has really been made? Will she confirm that she still hopes to meet that target?

NICE recommends that all people with diabetes undergo an annual foot check but, in the worst performing CCGs, one in four people are not receiving a foot check at all. Part of the reason for that is the shortage in the number of podiatrists, particularly following a recent reduction in the number of students from 361 to 326. I am concerned that the plan to scrap bursaries for podiatry students and to push them into about £50,000 of debt will make the situation even worse. I ask the Minister to reconsider the direction of travel on this policy. Will she advise us what assessment has been made of the likely number of podiatrists who will be trained each year under the new funding regime?

I will close by making a few remarks about prevention. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the number of people suffering from diabetes continues to rise. The primary driver of that is, of course, lifestyle. Some 11.9 million people are currently at an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes as a result of their waist circumference or weight. Two in every three people in hospital are avoidable amputations and foot ulcers. We have heard that £1 in every £150 that the NHS spends is in that area, and such action has a dramatic, life-changing impact on individuals and their families. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury said, in 2013 the Health Secretary committed to reducing the rate of amputations by 50% in five years. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made towards achieving that goal, particularly given that Diabetes UK has said that no progress has really been made? Will she confirm that she still hopes to meet that target?

NICE recommends that all people with diabetes undergo an annual foot check but, in the worst performing CCGs, one in four people are not receiving a foot check at all. Part of the reason for that is the shortage in the number of podiatrists, particularly following a recent reduction in the number of students from 361 to 326. I am concerned that the plan to scrap bursaries for podiatry students and to push them into about £50,000 of debt will make the situation even worse. I ask the Minister to reconsider the direction of travel on this policy. Will she advise us what assessment has been made of the likely number of podiatrists who will be trained each year under the new funding regime?
We welcome the Government’s announcement of a sugar tax in the Budget, but that measure will only be effective as part of a wider strategy to address childhood obesity. I do not know whether the Minister will be able to tell us, but what is holding back the publication of the strategy? Is there disagreement on what will be in it? Is it at all possible for her to give us a date for when it will be published? [Interruption.] I suspect I have my answer from the grin on her face.

Both sides of the House are alert to, and supportive of, the need to get on top of this challenge but, as with all such matters, the Government will be judged by the results, on which we will keep a close eye in the coming years.

3.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. What an excellent debate we have had, and I thank the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) for securing it. She is a passionate health campaigner and has made her mark in a very short time in the House. This is the second time I have seen her today, as I gave evidence to the Select Committee on Health this morning. It is excellent to see so many colleagues from both sides of the House in the Chamber today.

Diabetes-related complications are a vital issue and, sitting here, I agreed violently with much of what was said about the scale of the challenge, the need to step up and, indeed, some of the things that we need to do. I hope to use my time, as much as possible, to update the House on practical measures that the NHS and the Government are taking, as well as to hint, where I can, at policy yet to come. There is more to be said later in the summer on some areas. One reason why it is so important to have such debates is to keep up a drumbeat of discussion. One thing I have realised as a Minister is that momentum is a funny thing in politics.

Mr Jamie Reed: It certainly is.

Jane Ellison: I make no comment. Political momentum is important because it drives change in a way that is hard to pin down. We now have momentum on obesity and diabetes in a way that we did not a few years ago. The level of interest in this House is a good measure of that, so it is vital that we have such debates. It is also a measure of how seriously we take diabetes that we have included reducing diabetes care variation and preventing diabetes in the NHS’s mandate—it is right at the heart of our big asks of NHS England.

Before I continue, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the many NHS staff who provide invaluable support to patients. Inevitably, in a debate where we are rightly stress-testing the system and asking where we can improve, it is easy to forget that masses of people out there are doing brilliant work. We have heard inspiring words today from two colleagues about their visit to see real specialists in action. Across the country there are people supporting patients with diabetes. There are also excellent third sector organisations such as Diabetes UK, with which we work closely, and JDRF, which does such great work on type 1. They both work with and independently challenge the Government, all with the aim of improving the lives of those with diabetes or at risk of it.

Paula Sherriff: Although I appreciate that the Minister undoubtedly has an incredibly busy schedule, I encourage her to contact the diabetes foot clinic at King’s College hospital in London to arrange a visit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) said, our visit was inspiring. I came away with much knowledge and real hope that we can make improvements.

Jane Ellison: I sat here thinking how interesting the visit sounded. My team has made a note of that. We had heard about the visit and how it had gone well, so it is great to hear that first-hand from the hon. Lady. I will not repeat the shocking facts on diabetes, which have been well rehearsed and explained by Members in this debate, but suffice it to say that the impact is huge. My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) and others have made notable contributions drawing out the human cost of diabetes. People tend not to understand how devastating diabetes can be for patients and families, as well as the cost to the NHS, which in England we estimate to be £3.6 billion a year.

We have to work together to address diabetes. Before I talk about the action we are taking now and the progress we need to make, it is worth noting that we have come a long way. I have discussed that in some detail with our national clinical director, Dr Jonathan Valabhai, over the past year. The progress we have made through the quality and outcomes framework over the past decade has driven a step change in delivering better management and care for people in GP practices. Last year’s National Audit Office report showed that the relative risk of someone with type 1 or type 2 diabetes developing a diabetes-related complication has not changed, and indeed has fallen for most complications, despite the growing number of people with diabetes, so we have made progress. Clearly, the question now is how we can go much further. Diabetes is a key priority for us, and we want to see a measurable difference in the lifetime of this Parliament. There are four main areas in which we are taking action.

Mr Jamie Reed: Before the Minister moves on to the progress that is being made—she is right that we have come a long way over the past 10 years—will she undertake that the Department will consider not just the cost to the NHS of all diabetes-related complications, because we have been talking about this from a very NHS-centric point of view, but the cost to the economy of such complications?

Jane Ellison: We have been preparing and working on the childhood obesity strategy for some months, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have been looking at the wider cost to society and, obviously, projecting that forward, as has been done by many other economies in the developed world. There is an interesting piece by the McKinsey Global Institute on the cost to the developed world.

Specifically in the NHS, and going to the heart of the debate, there are four main areas in which we are taking action that we expect to deliver reductions in complications:
reducing variation in the delivery of the three NICE treatment targets for blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol control; improving the take-up of structured education; improving foot care; and improving in-patient care. Reducing variation is always a theme of health debates and, frankly, it is a constant challenge in any system. The question is how we drive out variation, and Members have made a good point about how we support people to drive out variation. One of our goals for 2020 is a reduction in such variation in the management and care of people with diabetes.

The newly established CCG improvement and assessment framework has been mentioned by a number of Members. Diabetes is one of the clinical priorities in that framework, which will play a key role in delivering the challenge to variation. The chief executive of Diabetes UK is the chair of the panel of independent experts who are involved in the assurance process for that rating system. Diabetes is high on the IAF agenda. The framework will identify CCGs in need of improvement, and then NHS England will work with those CCGs to identify the nature of the changes needed and the type of support required to facilitate those changes.

To give some idea of the support available, we will be working with CCGs to consider the nature of the tasks they need to address. A key focus will be to help CCGs to map how their services compare with those in similar areas, to help them look at best practice from which they can learn and to introduce specific peer support through other programmes. CCGs will be supported in practical, hands-on ways. As we build the data picture of what is going on, we obviously need to support CCGs as they discover that they have variation, of which they may not even have been fully aware.

There are other areas not covered by the IAF that the Public Health England “Healthier Lives” website addresses. I encourage people to look at the vast amount of publicly available data for their local area. NHS Right Care is an important programme that has reducing variation at its core, and it is there to help CCGs and other partners to make step changes in the way they improve care. It will be very focused on diabetes care, and it has been improving services. It will be rolled out to all CCGs over the next 18 months, with practical support and sharing best practice at its heart.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and I have discussed structured education, and I share her frustration. Essentially, we know that structured education works and that it is being offered to far more people, but that take-up is low. We cannot keep doing the same thing; we must look at things differently. For example, working people with diabetes straight away pose a challenge involving the amount of time that they can take to attend a course. We want to improve take-up. We know that structured education makes a difference to people’s quality of life and, importantly, reduces their risk of developing complications, but we also know that we are not where we need to be.

It is one of my personal priorities to change that. The Department is working with NHS England and Diabetes UK on ways to improve the take-up of structured education, particularly by considering more diversity of provision through digital and web-based approaches, as well as what can be done to improve access to more traditional forms of support. Again, the improvement and assessment framework includes an indicator for the number of newly diagnosed diabetes patients who attend a course. However, we have to make it possible for CCGs to refer people to a course that they think is likely to be taken up. There is something in why such courses are not commissioned as much as they should be: people are aware of low take-up and it is a vicious circle. We need to address that. Next week, an expert round table is taking place with the national clinical director. It will consider options to update structured education, potentially including working with employers, and practical actions that we can take to overcome barriers. I expect to be able to say more about it in due course.

We regularly discuss improving foot care. Particularly for people with late-stage diabetes, it is a challenge and a threat, for reasons that have been well explained. The number of amputations is unacceptably high, and we want to reduce it. NHS England is working with a number of key stakeholders to publish a new framework to improve the delivery of hospital-based diabetic foot services. The framework makes it clear that all patients with diabetic foot problems should have rapid and equal access to services, and describes for commissioners what key elements are in place that they need to commission. The new national diabetes foot care audit provides data on all diabetic foot care services so they can measure their performance against the NICE clinical guidelines.

I note the concern expressed about the survey and the lack of take-up. NHS England is taking action on the issue of GP participation, but I might ask NHS England to write directly to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton to say specifically what it is doing, because I share her concerns about having the fullest possible picture. Again, transparency of information, along with improvement support through initiatives such as Right Care, will drive improvement. Interestingly, the variation on amputations does not follow many of the traditional patterns in terms of the burden of disease that we see in some other areas. We need to be able to examine the information at quite a local level, as support for patients is variable even within local areas, and we must expose that.

On inpatient care, the NHS’s focus is on ensuring that all hospitals have inpatient specialist teams to assess and help to manage inpatients with diabetes. Again, if we get that right, it can lead to a significant reduction in complications.

I will say a few words about prevention, as it is at the heart of any public health Minister’s agenda. Preventing people from developing type 2 diabetes in the first place helps to take them off the conveyor belt that can lead ultimately to complications and all the burden of disease that we have been discussing. At all points along that conveyor belt, there are things that we can and must do, and are doing, to make life better for people with diabetes. For example, I welcome the increasing focus of our major charities on prevention and explaining the role of prevention in fending off some of the most serious diseases from which people suffer.

Healthier You, the NHS diabetes prevention programme, goes to the heart of tackling the rising prevalence of diabetes. Around 90% of adults with diabetes have type 2, and an estimated 80% of cases of type 2 are related to lifestyle; as Members have said, it is a huge
factor. The national diabetes prevention programme is, we think, the first at-scale diabetes prevention programme to be delivered anywhere in the world. This year it will refer at least 10,000 people to an evidence-based behaviour change intervention that has been proven through randomised controlled trials to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

I can confirm that the programme will be made available to up to 100,000 people by 2020. I know that there is great interest in it. We are learning from the seven demonstrator sites, which tested different approaches over the past year. Although the nature of the intervention is essentially common, there are different ways to deliver it, and we have learned a great deal. We are taking a phased approach, and the first wave of 27 areas covering 26 million people, or half the population, will open their doors to patients in the next few months and throughout 2016.

We are building up at pace. The interventions offer tailored, personalised help to reduce risk, including education on healthy eating and lifestyle and bespoke physical exercise programmes. If there is one thing that I ask of Members, it is to encourage their constituents to attend their NHS health check when invited to do so, as it is one of the gateways into the national diabetes prevention programme.

Of course, that is only part of a wider public health programme of preventing disease in the first place. Members have mentioned children. It is absolutely right that we should go way upstream to consider what we can do to tackle overweight and obesity in children. We will be launching our childhood obesity strategy in the summer. It will examine everything that contributes to children becoming overweight and obese and set out what can be done by all. We are looking at the entire environment around a child, so everything that Members have said that they hope will be considered as part of the strategy is being considered.

All parts of society, the public health system, Government and local government and industry have a part to play. The soft drinks industry levy announced by the Chancellor in the Budget is an important first step, and it has turbo-charged our discussions on the childhood obesity strategy. Its introduction in 2018 is driving reformulation of product, which every expert identifies as a key way to tackle obesity at population level. That is why there is a delay. I cannot comment in detail, but I assure hon. Members that we care about the same things that they do, and that all are being considered extensively.

Mr Jamie Reed: There are approximately 500,000 type 1 diabetics in the UK. Will the Minister undertake to ensure that continuous glucose monitors, flash glucose monitors and other emerging diabetic technologies are made available as a right on the NHS for people with type 1 diabetes?

Jane Ellison: Yes, I should say that many of my remarks have addressed type 2 diabetes, but that is not to say in any way that type 1 is less important. I will undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman on that, because there is work going on. As I said, many of my comments have dealt with type 2, but that is not to say that we are not also interested in addressing the challenges of type 1.

I am hugely heartened by the continuing parliamentary interest in this important subject. We will introduce the childhood obesity strategy and I have described all the other work on diabetes. It is good to know that there is so much parliamentary support from all parties for doing more, and particularly on investigating how to prevent diabetes from developing, to ensure that the next generation does not carry the same burden of disease as this one. It is a big challenge, but an unprecedented level of activity is taking place across our health system and the wider public health system, and in government at all levels. I look forward to updating Parliament further.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved.
That this House has considered diabetes-related complications.
UN Peacekeeping Week 2016

3.59 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I beg to move.

That this House has considered UN Peacekeeping Week 2016.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Pritchard, and it is a privilege to have secured a debate on United Nations peacekeeping in a week when British troops have arrived in South Sudan as part of a UN peacekeeping mission.

UN peacekeeping began in 1948, when the Security Council authorised the deployment of UN military observers to the middle east. The mission’s role was to monitor the armistice agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Since then the UN has undertaken 69 peacekeeping operations, and at present there are 16 peacekeeping operations under way across the world, with troops deployed in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the middle east. In the years since 1948, hundreds of thousands of military personnel, along with tens of thousands of UN police and civilian support workers, from more than 120 countries, have taken part in UN peacekeeping operations.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers was on 29 May, and last week was UN Peacekeeping Week. Those events were established to honour the memory of UN peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the cause of peace and to pay tribute to all those who have served, and who continue to serve, in UN peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage.

I was at the Cenotaph on 25 May, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) and other Members of this House, to attend the UN peacekeepers memorial ceremony and commemorate more than 3,400 peacekeepers from some 120 countries who have died from acts of violence, accidents or disease while serving under the UN flag. It was striking to see the variety of nations represented at the ceremony; it was a clear illustration of the global nature of peacekeeping and of the danger facing those who enter challenging situations to support peace and a better future.

The group at the Cenotaph commemorating the lives of those who had died was diverse in many ways, which reflects the profile of the peacekeepers themselves. Six women lead peacekeeping missions across the world. In Cyprus, Kristin Lund is the first woman to be a force commander. It was positive to hear about the recent proposals by the UN for Scotland to provide support for the training of female Syrian peacekeepers, which illustrates the importance of engaging as widely as possible in the name of peace.

Peacekeeping is truly a global concern. Many of the 193 member states of the UN have contributed personnel, equipment or funds in support of the common goal of peace. In March 2015, 128 nations were contributing troops, police or civilian support personnel to the UN. The 2015 leaders summit heard about the 125,000 peacekeepers who are deployed across the globe.

The principles that underpin the operation of UN peacekeeping require the deployment of UN peacekeepers to happen only with the consent of the main parties involved in a conflict. Those parties must commit to a political process, and that consent and commitment give the UN the freedom to act politically and physically to undertake a peacekeeping operation in a situation where there may be significant instability.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the brave members of the armed forces who get involved in the UN peacekeeping forces do so out of a commitment to world peace and stability, and that they are truly an inspiration to all of us?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend. Friend for that intervention. He makes an important point that we must reflect on, namely that the people who go and serve in dangerous situations in pursuit of peace are very brave and deserve our admiration.

The idea that UN peacekeepers are impartial is also vital for them to continue to receive support from the parties involved in a conflict, which cannot be underestimated. A study by the RAND Corporation found that deploying peacekeepers reduces the risk of a country sliding back into all-out war by 50%. Of course, there can be genuine difficulty in maintaining impartiality when the peacekeepers are called upon to act in one direction or another. Often, UN peacekeeping missions have to perform a dual role, providing the agreed impartiality but also the robustness required to stand up for what is right for agreements, international law and human rights. That is highly challenging, but UN peacekeepers deal with such situations every day.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend recognise the early work done by Andrew Carnegie, who was born in my constituency, in funding the Peace Palace in The Hague, and does she think that establishing a link between The Hague and Carnegie’s home town of Dunfermline would encourage young people to take an interest in peacekeeping initiatives, which would be important, and in honouring peacekeepers worldwide?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend. Anything that we can do to encourage young people to work in the pursuit of peace is absolutely admirable, and I echo his remarks entirely.

Fifteen years ago, the UN deployed 40,000 military and police personnel. Today, there are more than 125,000 personnel, including civilian staff and UN volunteers, and they put themselves in highly dangerous situations to help countries progress from conflict to stability. In fact, if UN peacekeepers are considered collectively, they represent the largest deployed military force in the world. It is striking, therefore, that UN peacekeeping accounts for less than 0.5% of the world’s military expenditure.

Not for the first time, I find myself asking the House to consider priorities in military expenditure. Many countries, including the UK, are enthusiastic about spending eye-watering sums on the most offensive of weapons. They are sometimes much more reluctant to provide proper training, kit and conditions for their troops, and in the case of UN peacekeepers they are much less keen to provide resources to foster and sustain peace than they are to provide the capacity for war.
The UK Government’s commitment in deploying 70 British military personnel to Somalia, in addition to the personnel who were sent to South Sudan yesterday, is very welcome, particularly because it represents a doubling of the commitment of British personnel to UN peacekeeping forces. I note that the Minister for Armed Forces has said that she believes this represents a turning point in UK involvement in global peacekeeping operations; I hope so.

It is interesting to examine the detail behind how countries co-operate to facilitate UN peacekeeping operations. The cost of peacekeeping is allocated using a complicated formula, and I commend the USA, Japan, and China in particular for their willingness to provide funds. In the case of personnel, however, the pattern is very different. The 10 biggest budget contributors are estimated to supply just 6% of peacekeeping troops. Although China features in both top ten lists and has committed to significant increases in the funding that it provides to the UN, there is a clear pattern of African and Asian countries providing the UN with the vast majority of troops. In fact, peacekeeping can be relatively lucrative for some countries, with the UN paying more than $1,300 per soldier per month. For instance, Rwanda contributes more than 6,000 troops to the UN but contributes just $16,500 in funds every year. The scope for nations to provide the support they can for the maintenance of peace in the way they can best manage is therefore important.

Looking at the bigger picture, however, the UN peacekeeping budget of about £8 billion annually, which protects more than 125 million people globally, is less than the annual budget of Transport for London. Moreover, because the peacekeeping personnel put their lives on the line to try to bring stability to some of the world’s most vulnerable populations, the scope and complexity of the tasks they undertake have increased significantly. The risks that they face have also increased. The blue helmets of UN peacekeepers are increasingly being targeted directly. Last year saw 129 fatalities of peacekeepers, who came from 46 countries.

When UN peacekeepers first began operations, the Security Council often froze into inaction as the cold war began to bite. Initially, peacekeeping operations often involved supporting the maintenance of ceasefires and stabilising situations on the ground, so that there was the opportunity to resolve conflict peacefully by political means. Consequently, peacekeepers tended to be unarmed observers with a remit to monitor and report what was happening.

Some of that early activity continues to this day. The deployment of peacekeepers to India and Pakistan continues, and their deployment to Cyprus is long-standing. However, as global issues changed, the UN continued to develop its approach to peacekeeping. The Congo operation, launched in 1960, was the first large-scale mission, with nearly 20,000 military personnel deployed. Sadly, that operation demonstrated all too well the risks involved in trying to bring stability to war-torn regions. In total, 250 UN personnel died, including the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld.

In 1999 the UN returned to the Congo, which by that time was the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, in a country the size of western Europe that has just 300 miles of modern road, the challenge and cost of long-term deployment are immense. The DRC is one country that illustrates the need for a twin-track approach of both peace and development if countries are to be stabilised.

In 1988, UN peacekeepers were awarded the Nobel peace prize. At that time, the Nobel prize committee stated that “the Peacekeeping Forces through their efforts have made important contributions towards the realization of one of the fundamental tenets of the United Nations. Thus, the world organization has endeavoured to play a more central part in world affairs and has been invested with increasing trust.”

With the end of the cold war, the strategic context for peacekeeping changed dramatically and the focus of peacekeeping missions shifted as the nature of conflicts changed. There was also more of a focus on laying the foundations for sustainable peace. The range of tasks carried out by peacekeepers broadened significantly, with peacekeepers helping to build sustainable institutions of governance and carrying out human rights monitoring and the reintegration of former combatants.

Of course, the military personnel who were deployed remained, and still remain, the key focus of peacekeeping operations, but a wider array of other functions were coming to the fore, as the breadth of the task that was now required became apparent. There is now a need for those with skills in humanitarian work, economics, law and mine clearance to name but a few.

In tandem with the increased scope of peacekeeping operations, the number of operations continued to increase after the end of the cold war. Sometimes the peacekeepers faced action in locations where the guns had not yet fallen silent. It was not possible to keep the peace in the former Yugoslavia, or in Somalia and Rwanda, because peace did not exist in those places at those times. It is no wonder that there was no success in areas where warring factions continued to do battle.

The missions, and the situations surrounding the conflicts, underscored the necessity for clear parameters and robust support for peacekeeping forces. Peacekeepers were dispatched to areas as diverse as Angola, Bosnia and Haiti in the ’90s, and Cyprus has seen continued deployment, with 64 soldiers from 1 Scots recently receiving medals at a ceremony in Nicosia for service as UN peacekeepers on the island.

UN peacekeepers have acted as administrators in Kosovo—in the former Yugoslavia—and in East Timor, as it progressed towards independence from Indonesia. In East Timor, the responsibility to protect human rights came to the fore, which is particularly important when there is a vast disparity in the size of the power of adjoining nations. One of the roles of UN peacekeepers can be to underpin the process by which a new country joins the international community. This new country, East Timor, was for hundreds of years part of the Portuguese empire. After world war two Portugal reassessed control, but the Dutch were unable to do the same in all their former colonies and an independent Indonesia emerged. As Portugal abandoned its former colonies in 1974, Indonesia incorporated East Timor. An Indonesian invasion then started a brutal occupation in East Timor and, after many years of the world looking away, international pressure, including from this House, led to Indonesia agreeing to hold a referendum, in which the Timorese overwhelmingly backed independence. The Indonesian military and local militia began an orgy of
destruction, which ended only after UN peacekeepers, led by Australian troops, arrived to supervise the Indonesian withdrawal.

The international community faces many peacekeeping challenges, including in East Timor, and there is rightly increasing scrutiny of the work of peacekeepers and of the problems and concerns that arise when they are deployed. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon tasked a high-level independent panel on UN peace operations with making a comprehensive assessment of the state of peace operations and the emerging needs of the future. He said:

“The world is changing and UN peace operations must change with it if they are to remain an indispensable and effective tool in promoting international peace and security.”

He imposed a zero tolerance policy following allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers in host countries. I strongly urge the UN to ensure that it deals properly and robustly with such allegations, for instance against peacekeeping troops in the Central African Republic. To do otherwise not only damages victims who are already in the most vulnerable of situations but devalues the work and reputation of UN peacekeeping.

It is vital that the UN learns lessons and uses that learning to develop further capability in planning, increasing participation and working towards positive and sustainable outcomes. The most vulnerable people in the world rely on the good work of peacekeepers to improve their future, and we must work with others to ensure that that key aim remains at the centre of the work. The British troops setting off to undertake peacekeeping duties in South Sudan will join 12,000 UN troops from more than 50 nations, and they will undoubtedly face challenges as the fractured country looks to the future, with the need to strengthen infrastructure being apparent.

With such missions, UN peacekeeping finds itself stretched like never before and increasingly called upon to deploy to remote, uncertain operating environments. In the increasingly complicated global framework, the work of the UN and its peacekeepers has never been more important, and peacekeeping missions will continue to be needed to deal with a multitude of challenges and increasingly to focus on capacity building for sustainable societies.

The benefits are more than the obvious ones. The World Bank assesses that UN peacekeeping missions have a positive effect on GDP, with growth rates nearly 2.5% higher in post-conflict countries where peacekeepers are present. Although the numbers of UN peacekeepers have recently fallen slightly, they represent a significant increase on the numbers deployed 20 or so years ago. However, that by no means indicates that the challenges faced by the UN are diminishing.

4.13 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.29 pm

On resuming—

Kirsten Oswald: To continue where I left off, although the number of military peacekeepers may be decreasing slightly, the demand for field missions will remain high and peacekeeping will continue to be one of the UN’s most complex, specialised and demanding operational tasks. Moreover, the political complexity that peacekeeping operations face and the scope of their mandates, including on the civilian side, remain very broad. There are strong indications that certain specialised capabilities, including policing, will be in especially high demand over the coming years.

UN peacekeeping missions operate in the most dangerous and difficult environments in the world, dealing with the conflicts, and their aftermaths, that others cannot or will not address. We can achieve what others cannot, but the success of our contributions is never guaranteed. In future, multidimensional peacekeeping will face many demands, including with regard to the political process, protecting civilians, assisting in disarmament, the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants, supporting the organisation of elections, promoting human rights and restoring the rule of law.

Peacekeeping has always been highly dynamic and has evolved in the face of new challenges. UN peacekeeping is a unique global partnership, with its strength being in the broad spread of contributing countries that participate and provide precious resources. I wish the peacekeepers well with their important task. The people they protect depend on them, and those who rely on their bravery and hard work also wish them well.

4.30 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on securing the debate and welcome the opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by UN peacekeeping operations and how we should try to address them. She spoke very well about the scale of the task that UN peacekeeping missions face in some of the most dangerous operating environments around the world, and about the vital role they play in trying to keep vulnerable civilians safe in the face of some of the most appalling threats of violence that any society can be confronted with. I was pleased that she was able to attend the Cenotaph ceremony on 25 May, at which my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Anelay of St John’s laid a wreath on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government as a demonstration of the Government’s support for the work of United Nations peacekeeping missions past and present.

Peacekeeping remains a vital tool of the UN, and one on which the international community depends heavily. The past five years have seen an increase in both the number and the type of threats faced by UN peacekeepers. I echo the tribute that my noble Friend Baroness Anelay paid on 25 May to the men and women in blue helmets who put their lives on the line in order to protect the vulnerable.

UN peacekeeping operations are under strain, and peacekeepers are increasingly being asked to do more than they did in the past. In addition to protecting civilians and helping to restore the rule of law, we now look to them to try to ensure the safe transit of humanitarian aid supplies. Changes are needed to respond to those evolving demands. The Secretary-General’s review of peace operations, which took place last year, highlighted the need for reform. The Government welcomed that review, which provided us and our international
partners with the opportunity to reflect on our approach to UN peacekeeping. This country already provides it with significant support, both through our permanent seat on the Security Council and through our financial contributions. We provide £303.6 million towards UN peacekeeping as part of our assessed United Nations contribution. Additionally, we have committed £1 million of programme funding to specific priorities identified by the UN on which more work or help is needed.

However, we are committed to doing more. I acknowledge the kindness of the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire in referring to the extra commitments that the Government have made as part of the Secretary-General’s review, and at and since the leaders summit hosted by President Obama in 2015. At that summit, the UK pledged our support, along with more than 50 nations and international organisations, for Ban Ki-moon’s efforts to strengthen UN peacekeeping for the future. The Prime Minister pledged to double our military contribution to peacekeeping by sending up to 70 troops to support the peace operations in Somalia and between 250 and 300 to South Sudan.

The first of those personnel deployed to Somalia last month, as the hon. Lady said, and we are preparing the ground for the bulk of our deployment over the next few months. We are offering logistical, medical and engineering expertise and short-term training teams, all in support of enhancing the capability of the UN operation, as well as to support troops from the African Union Mission in Somalia and the Somali national army. In South Sudan, the United Kingdom will make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping mission. We plan to stagger our deployment, as the hon. Lady said, we have just deployed our first troops to South Sudan, and we intend that the main contingent should arrive at the end of the year. We are working with the UN now to identify exactly where this country’s expertise will be most effective. That may well include vital engineering work, which is one area in which it seems both to us and to the UN that we could make a particular contribution.

Our pledge to double our military commitment is part of a wider approach designed to help improve UN peacekeeping operations. We want to ensure that the UN is able to get the right people and equipment to the right place at the right time. I can boil that down to three overall objectives: first, encouraging more countries to pledge additional support; secondly, securing improvements in UN planning procedures; and thirdly, boosting the overall quality of troop and mission performance.

I shall say a little more about each of those three objectives. First, on pledges, our vision is that the UN should be able to draw upon a bigger pool of troop-contributing countries than is currently possible. That pool of potential contributions should have a wider range of capabilities than currently exists, so that the UN can pick the right contributions to suit a particular mission in a particular part of the world. That will allow the UN to deploy peacekeeping missions with the resources and abilities to carry out their mandates and the confidence that those objectives can be achieved. We are delivering on the pledge we made last year, and it is vital that others do the same. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will host a ministerial-level meeting in London later this year, which we are looking forward to as, among other things, an opportunity to continue to press some of our international partners to deliver the pledges made at President Obama’s meeting last year.

Secondly, on planning, there is increasingly a gap between the expectation that the United Nations should intervene in difficult operating environments and the ability of peacekeeping missions to meet difficult demands in practice. To improve the co-ordination of peacekeeping efforts and the ability to respond effectively to new missions, there needs to be better planning and analysis. That starts with design and goes through to the set-up of operations and the eventual drawdown and conclusion of a peacekeeping operation. A mission needs at all times to have a clear focus on what it is seeking to achieve. We have already begun funding a new unit in the UN Secretary-General’s office to support improvements in planning and analysis.

Finally, better planning must be matched by improved performance. Increasing the number of available peacekeepers and improving the planning of missions will help, but that will work only if all peacekeepers, wherever in the world they come from, are appropriately trained, fully equipped and properly vetted before they are deployed. All countries that contribute either troops or police officers should deploy peacekeepers who have been trained to the highest standards. We will continue to push for that and for poor performance to be tackled constructively.

The hon. Lady mentioned the very serious allegations in respect of members of the peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic. As part of our objective of improving the performance of the UN peacekeeping operations, it is a United Kingdom priority to work with the Secretary-General to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse, which, sadly, has been carried out by a small minority of peacekeepers. We welcome Ban Ki-moon’s recent report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and his appointment of Dr Jane Holl Lute as his special co-ordinator in improving the UN’s response. The extra £1 million of programme funding, which I referred to earlier, is being targeted in particular at efforts to help countries in the capability of deployed peacekeepers to design a reporting system that local communities and potential complainants feel able to trust, and to ensure that, in the future, we get a stronger and swifter UN response to proven allegations.

The Government are committed to working with others around the world to achieve those reforms. As I said, my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary will host a follow-up meeting to President Obama’s summit here in London in September.

Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): I am delighted to hear about all the contributions that the British Government and the British military are making not only to UN peacekeeping on the ground but to future planning so that UN peacekeeping forces can better deliver their missions. To which regions of the world should Britain and the UN be looking to make further and bigger contributions? The Minister says that some are not doing as much as they could. I do not want him to identify countries, but which regions should be doing more, along the lines of the excellent work of our British Government?
Mr Lidington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for not inviting me to point the finger at particular Governments. I do not think it would be helpful for me to do that in public—it is something better done through intensive diplomatic work, including at the forthcoming meeting. One has to look both at developed countries and at some of the emerging economies that are looking to take a more active role in international affairs and politics, and say to them, “As part of that, we think that it would be a very good contribution for you to make resources available to the United Nations.” Looking around the world, it is striking that a country does not have to be one of the so-called great powers to make an effective contribution. Countries such as Norway or Finland have made some very effective contributions to different UN operations over the years. There are some fine examples that other countries can look at.

The UN peacekeeping defence ministerial will take stock of pledges delivered since the last summit and encourage others to make good on their pledges, but it will also focus on how to improve UN peacekeeping and make real progress on reform, including on how to include more women in delivering peace and security. I hope that the London meeting will make a critical contribution to improving UN peacekeeping efforts and, in doing so, deliver better protection for those most at risk and in most need.

The United Kingdom wants to see more effective, more responsive and better resourced peacekeeping operations. We have identified the areas where we can best support the United Nations and have a positive effect, and we have already started to work on them. Most importantly, we are asking others to join us. We are determined to lead the work to help deliver real change, to make a real difference to the quality of UN peacekeeping and to enable the United Nations to meet the challenges that it will face in the future.

Question put and agreed to.
will the pilot vaccination programme be available to? Is it to men identifying as MSM or men identifying as MSM who request the vaccine? What if a man who does not identify as MSM asks for the vaccine? Will it be available to heterosexual males?

How will the pilot be evaluated? For example, will it simply be from the take-up of MSM patients registered, or will it measure the adherence rate, because the programme requires three doses, and for all three to be taken, to be effective? So will the evaluation include adherence to the dosage requirements? Is there a timescale to measure the impact on HPV-related cancers and genital warts? Will the results and any mid-pilot indicators be reported to the Minister and, eventually, made public?

I must also ask whether the vaccination programme will include adolescent boys if they turn up at a sexual health clinic. They might not technically or legally be men, but if they are at risk and go to a sexual health clinic, will the HPV vaccination be available to them because they are at risk, and if a clinician deems it necessary? Finally, I cannot miss the opportunity to nudge the Minister on whether we may have an update on when HPV vaccinations will be widely available to all boys in the UK.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate is due to finish no later than 5.45 pm. The recommended time limits for the Front Benchers are five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty’s Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. The time between now and the first of the Front Benchers being called is open to Back Benchers, and the first person on my list is Jim Shannon.

4.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Hollobone, and it is a pleasure to be able to speak in the debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing a debate on such an important issue. He has been a stalwart speaker on the issue in this Parliament and the previous one. He never lets his subject matter fall, and I thank him for his commitment and his energy.

It is good to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), in his place again. It is also especially nice to see the Minister in her place again—she is spending a great deal of her afternoon in Westminster Hall, but it is always a pleasure to have her here. I look forward to her response to this debate.

For years, often due to stigma and attitudes, the issue was ignored, so it is welcome that we can now give it the attention that it deserves, not only in Parliament, as today and in the past, but in all walks of life, because it is now part of national conversations on advancing healthcare. As the Democratic Unionist party health spokesperson at Westminster, I am pleased to participate in the debate, to encourage and support the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green in what he is talking about today, and to comment on what we have done in Northern Ireland, as I always do in such debates, hopefully adding to our general knowledge of the subject.

Genital warts are the most common viral sexually transmitted infection and are caused by the human papilloma virus. In September 2008, Northern Ireland introduced an HPV vaccination programme targeting 12 and 13-year-old girls in schools. It primarily vaccinated against HPV 16 and 18, which are associated with more than 70% of cervical cancers. From September 2012, 12 and 13-year-old girls were offered the quadrivalent vaccine, which protects against not only types 16 and 18, but types 6 and 11, which are mainly associated with the majority of genital wart viruses. It is expected that rates of first episodes of genital warts will be positively impacted by the introduction of the HPV vaccination programme.

In men, there is no reliable test for HPV infection. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is often difficult to diagnose, and there are no symptoms for high-risk HPV. People who are known to be at a high risk of having anal HPV and of developing anal cancer may be offered an anal smear, but nothing goes beyond that. It is frustrating to have some steps in the health process, but no steps to take things to the next stage and to do what the hon. Gentleman said. That is why we are having the debate today and why it is critical for men to start receiving equality with women in terms of the protection offered against HPV by the health service. Given the higher risk of HPV infection associated with men who have sex with men, surely the provision of a vaccine is a no-brainer.

In November 2015, following a review of the evidence, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation published a position statement recommending the introduction of a vaccination programme for men who have sex with men, are aged up to 45, and attend genitourinary and HIV clinics. Some steps forward have been taken, but larger steps are needed, with more ground being covered.

Since the JCVI recommendations, and in line with them, the Welsh and Scottish Governments have announced that they will roll out vaccination programmes. I hope that the Department of Health in Northern Ireland will follow suit—the matter is devolved, as the Minister knows—and that men throughout the United Kingdom will get the long-overdue support that they deserve. It is about fairness, and when there is clear evidence that a section of the population might be at particular risk of something, appropriate action should and must be taken.

Continued monitoring of results is also necessary to ensure that the recommendations, when implemented, have the desired results, and that any changes or extensions to the plans can be made to ensure the most full and proper protection available is afforded to all those affected.

To conclude, developments are long overdue. The debate has been welcome and an opportunity to highlight the issue—I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again. The fact that a goodly number of Members are participating is an indication that we, too, want to see change. It is about seeing the plans implemented and ensuring that the proposals work well in practice.

4.56 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I am delighted to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing the debate and on leaving enough time for a few of us to add a few words in a few minutes.
I need to declare a short list of potential interests. I am a small—by which I mean I have a small practice, not that I am small in stature, because I am afraid my overweight problem makes that rather redundant—and very part-time dentist. I am also chair of the all-party parliamentary groups for dentistry and oral health, and on skin, both of which have a link to and provide an interest in the debate.

My hon. Friend has explained all the disasters related to this ghastly virus, and what it does. I am more interested in head and neck cancers, for obvious reasons, which he touched on. The statistics on head and neck cancer related to HPV make for hideous reading. Up to 70% of oropharyngeal cancers are caused by HPV. In addition, recent research has found HPV in nearly 20% of large periapical dental abscesses—not as the cause, but probably as a co-contributor to the infection.

Treatment of head and neck cancers are often debilitating, disfiguring and destructive of the patients and their self-esteem. Unless the cancer is caught very early, most frequently radiology and/or surgery is required, involving the face, the jaw and teeth, the neck, the tongue, the pharynx, the larynx, the oesophagus, or combinations of them. Only think of that and we can think how debilitating it is for the patient. Physical disfigurement is common, and speech and eating can be significantly impaired. In the global ranking of cancer deaths, head and neck deaths rank fifth. Furthermore, the prevalence of head and neck cancer is higher in males than in females—a ratio of approximately 2:1.

The cost to the NHS of treatment is astronomical. The latest figure I am aware of is from 2011, when it was costing us £310 million. Since the growth in the frequency of head and neck cancer is one of the fastest of all cancers in the UK, the cost must be considerably higher now—I am sure the Minister will correct me and give the ghastly figure, if the opportunity arises.

Vaccination programmes can eliminate, or virtually eliminate, certain diseases. The anti-polio campaign is such an example. The aim in such programmes is to produce what is called herd immunity. The success of the HPV vaccination programme for adolescent girls in the United Kingdom is progressing and becoming evident, but it is not producing herd immunity. Not every teenage girl participates in the programme, let alone completes the programme. Furthermore, given that today’s debate features men who have sex with men, they are obviously outside any herd immunity that might arise from the inoculations.

I also contend that heterosexual men—quite a proportion of us are left in the community—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]. I thank hon. Members for the support. We are also vulnerable. Not every girl has the inoculation, as I said, and not every girl completes the programme—I believe the estimate is that 10% of girls do not get full vaccination cover. So if, as some research has suggested—I am not sure whose research this was—an estimated 20% of 16 to 24-year-old men have had 10 or more partners, that means, statistically, one of those partners has not been vaccinated, although it could be more or less.

I fully support vaccination for men who have sex with men. However, vaccination programmes for boys and girls would lead to herd immunity and in time pick up that group as well. I understand that that would cost about another £22 million per year more than the cost now for girls. That is small beer when set against the £58 million spent on treating genital warts and is well below the £300 million spent on head and neck cancer treatment—and we must add in the pain and suffering of cancer victims. As I said to the Minister in July 2014, “it is not fair, ethical or socially responsible to have a public health policy that leaves 50% of the population vulnerable”—[Official Report, 1 July 2014; Vol. 583, c. 866.]

to HPV and the dreadful diseases that so often relate to it.

What is important is not who is having sex with whom but the fact that we need herd immunity for the whole population. If Australia, Austria, Canada, Israel, Switzerland and the USA—and I suspect also New Zealand, but I have not asked—can achieve herd immunity across the board with excellent results, so can we.

5.1 pm

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing the debate. Vaccinations against HPV were introduced in the UK primarily to target cervical cancer. The HPV vaccination programme for girls aged between 11 and 13 has been in place since 2008, and last year the uptake of the vaccination was 89.5% across the UK. It has therefore been a huge success.

However, there are more than 100 types of HPV and it is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in the UK. HPV infections are highly contagious, as they are spread mainly by skin-to-skin contact, and nearly all sexually active people get infected at some point in their lives. Some HPV infections clear up with no treatment necessary; others will develop into treatable conditions, such as genital warts; and some will go on to cause cancer. Despite the fact that HPV vaccinations in schools are available only to girls, to target cervical cancer, not only women can be infected. As we have heard, among men, 80% to 85% of anal cancers and almost 50% of penile cancers are associated with the infection. Evidence that has emerged since the original HPV vaccination programme was introduced has shown that immunisation is likely to provide protection against a wide range of HPV-related diseases, including those cancers.

The widespread vaccination of girls was intended to create wholesale community immunity and prevent the spread of HPV to unvaccinated male sexual partners. In Australia, research has shown that to have been a success, with a 90% reduction in genital warts in heterosexual men and women under 21 years of age. However, the vaccination programme ignored a significant section of society, which is left defenceless against the dangers of HPV: men who have sex with men, for whom the burden of HPV-related diseases is significantly increased compared with heterosexual men. In particular, they experience a higher risk of suffering from HPV 16-associated anal cancers, with rates 15 times higher in men who have sex with men.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation’s recommendation that a vaccination programme should be introduced for men up to 45 years of age who have sex with men is therefore welcome. In March, the Scottish Government announced their intention to introduce a
targeted vaccination programme as soon as possible, and this month NHS England will begin a pilot vaccination programme at selected sexual health clinics to test delivery in those settings. However, the decision to implement a pilot has been described as “unnecessary” and “a cynical stalling tactic” by the Terrence Higgins Trust, which has pointed out that the London North West Healthcare NHS Trust already provides vaccinations to men who have sex with men, with impressive take-up and results. The Terrence Higgins Trust rightly does not want to see delayed a full national programme that could prevent serious illnesses and save lives. Its fears can possibly be traced back to NHS England’s decision not to commission PrEP, a preventive medication for those at risk of HIV, after an 18-month investigation. Instead, NHS England opted to run a number of test sites over two years to research how that treatment could be introduced in the most clinical and cost-effective way. That decision was described as “shameful” by the Terrence Higgins Trust and “astonishing” by the National AIDS Trust.

The pilot HPV vaccination programme is intended to immunise 40,000 people and be followed by a review of its impact. That is a welcome first step, but it is clear that immunisation will need to go beyond sexual health clinics. Those who do not attend such clinics will not be immunised and many may mistakenly believe that they do not need to be vaccinated if they use condoms. Significantly, the optimum age for men to receive the vaccine is as 12 to 13-year-old boys—in other words, at school, at the same time as their female classmates. That is the logical next step.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is currently considering this issue along with Public Health England and the University of Warwick, although it will not be in a position to provide its final advice until 2017. The Terrence Higgins Trust, HPV Action, the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, and the British Medical Association all support expanding vaccination to boys through the existing school-based programme. That would mirror the position in Australia, Canada and the United States, ensure that high vaccine coverage rates are achieved and protect all males and females, whatever their sexual orientation, from such serious diseases.

In public health debates, there will always be competing claims about money, priorities and whether proposed action has more positives than negatives, but in this debate the jury has delivered a clear verdict. The vaccine has saved the lives of countless girls and women. Is it not time that we showed some gumption and delivered the same benefits for young men?

5.7 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I am glad to be speaking today, and particularly glad that the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) has secured the debate. I started as a new boy in Parliament last year and this issue came across my desk in September. The one simple thing that really shocked me was that we were only immunising girls. I could not believe that we had chosen to go for just one side. The debate is therefore necessary.

I knew nothing about the subject, so we put forward an early-day motion, but I was shocked to find that a whole mass of people here do not sign such motions. We should all support that motion, so I send a message to people to please look through and sign early-day motions, not just ignore them as a policy. The more I looked into HPV, the more I was appalled by how horrific the diseases were. I went to the pop-up drop-in meeting and was shown photographs of genital warts and other unpleasant diseases. They are quite horrific. We should be helping everyone with such diseases, whatever the cost, and we must find the most important and economic way of doing so.

I was glad to see that my colleagues in Northern Ireland from every party had signed the early-day motion. That shows that although we are a part of the world that is sometimes known for avoiding this sort of subject or avoiding difficult things, we can lead. I was glad to hear the update from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on where we have got to, and I too will ensure that we push for everyone in Northern Ireland to be looked after and vaccinated. I ask the Minister to look at how we can get a vaccination programme in place as quickly and economically as possible, so that 400,000 boys a year can be vaccinated, the disease does not build up and get worse, and the vaccination is there for all people of every type. That is the message that I want to get across.

5.9 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing this important debate. I will concentrate on four points that I believe are fundamental: stigma, the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, implementation and lessons to be learned. I have no doubt that living with HPV can be similar to living with HIV/AIDS. Nobody wants to talk about it, even today, and that cultural silence embeds the stigmatisation of those living with HPV, while limiting our ability to improve access to services and to reduce the indices of, in this case, men who have sex with men who are infected with HPV.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) said, HPV is one of the most prevalent infections. Statistically, most of us in this room will have been infected by at least one of the differing strains at some point in our lives. Although the majority of us deal with that infection naturally, which has already been mentioned, challenges in removing the infection remain for those, critically, who smoke, and those with compromised immune systems—for example, people living with HIV/AIDS.

As for stigma, let us be frank. Discussing anal warts can be a conversation stopper. For men, in particular, addressing and discussing health-related issues is problematic in general. With that in mind, I encourage Members to reflect on research undertaken several years ago in Scotland on male cancers for Cahonas Scotland by John Docherty-Hughes of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. I must declare an interest: he happens to be my husband. Entitled, “Men, Masculinities and Male Cancer Awareness: a preliminary study”, it found that men felt uneasy when being open about their fears in relation to their own health, specifically in relation to cancer for that research, but also health in general. I recommend Members avail themselves of that research.
as it challenges those who seek to improve services for men, whether cancer or HPV specifically. It is critical that we reduce stigma in relation to male health and wellbeing.

Let us return to the recommendations of the JCVI. As a Scottish constituency MP, I am delighted that the Scottish Government earlier this year announced that they will make men who have sex with men eligible to receive the HPV vaccine without recourse to a pilot. They are working to ensure that the vaccine can be introduced for men who have sex with men as soon as possible, in contrast to the pilot programme being proposed by the UK Government in England. On implementation, the roll-out of the HPV vaccine has so far been a resounding success, with HPV immunisation uptake exceeding 80% in Scotland.

As to lessons learned—I do not want to detain the House for long—the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green has, by securing this debate, given us the opportunity to inform and educate not only the policy makers sitting behind the Minister, but colleagues and those watching the debate in the Public Gallery and on television. The key to improving the health and wellbeing of men, from my perspective and in much of the research I have read, is education based on their lived experience culturally, socially and economically. That is whether they have sex with other men—frankly, one can identify as being heterosexual and have sex with other men—are homeless, are black or from a minority ethnic community, identify as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, or are transgender, because even men in transition must deal with the consequences of male health.

The key question is this: are the UK Government and healthcare practitioners in the NHS and the charitable sector able to meet the challenge and listen to the lived experience of men who have sex with men living with HPV and those who support them? Will they begin the full implementation of the recommendations of the JCVI and start the full roll-out of that vaccination across England?

5.14 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):

It is good to see you in the Chair for the second sexual health debate of the day, Mr Hollobone, at which you have been present along with myself and other hon. Members. I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing this debate. He started by saying that it is perhaps not always nice to discuss unsavoury issues. Just imagine the lives we could have saved if we had discussed unsavoury issues a lot more a long time ago. I genuinely welcome this debate, and on the important cross-party work he has done on matters related to gay and bisexual men's sexual health, particularly PrEP, which we discussed in the House earlier today. He described this debate as an update request. I am afraid to tell the Minister I am going to go one further. I think we sometimes get too many updates and not enough action; it is action that we need to see.

We have had some incredibly thoughtful and well-researched contributions, including from, as usual, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). We have heard some excellent experience from the medical profession, and my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) quoted the Terrence Higgins Trust, which has called the pilot scheme a "stalling tactic".

I notice a pattern when it comes to these matters. There seems to be an attitude among the public that the Government—I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity on these issues; I genuinely mean that—do not appear to be taking LGBT sexual health as seriously as they should be. We have a situation, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) outlined, in which the Scottish Government have moved forward on this, the Welsh Government have moved forward on this, international partners have moved forward on this, but the largest constituent nation of the United Kingdom has decided to sit on its hands and go for an unnecessary pilot scheme. The message from sexual health charities and from the public is that that is just not good enough. I cannot understand, given the position we find ourselves in with this issue and with the PrEP issue, why we have not seen further progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire mentioned the important issue of stigma. We cannot go back to the days when stigma caused people not to have conversations, seek treatment or seek to have a healthier lifestyle. That would be disastrous for public health and for the public purse. There is an appetite across Europe and across the United Kingdom to move forward on this issue, which does not stop at any border. It is something that we all have to work together on. We want to see the UK Government get a bit of “gumption”, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire said, get off the fence, and start with some positive action on this issue and on the PrEP issue as well.

5.18 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing this debate, and on the important cross-party work he does in the House on championing the cause of men's sexual health. I also thank the hon. Members for their contributions.

I understand the importance of the quasi-independent nature of the JCVI, and I do not want to change that, but I believe the Minister has an important duty to the country to ensure that the JCVI operates efficiently and with the right priorities in mind. In that spirit, I have a series of questions to ask her on this important matter, some of which have been covered in the debate. First, I will raise the long delay in the decision on whether all boys should be vaccinated. The JCVI began its assessment on whether boys should be included in the national vaccination programme in 2013. A decision was originally expected last year, but was subsequently rescheduled for 2017. Experts in the field are already convinced that boys should be vaccinated, and I urge the Minister to ask the JCVI to make its recommendation this year, so that implementation can begin as soon as possible.

Secondly, I want briefly to discuss the JCVI’s approach to making the decision. As we have said, other debates in this Chamber, the JCVI is far too constrained in its approach. Its analysis of cost-effectiveness focuses solely on the cost to the NHS and takes no account of social costs, the costs of care or welfare benefits, or the costs...
to employers and to individuals and families affected, in this case, by HPV-related diseases. For example, 50% of people with mouth cancer never return to work, so there really needs to be a wider assessment.

Thirdly, I would like to raise the issue of the implementation of the vaccination programme for men who have sex with men. The JCVI was right to recommend that men who have sex with men should be offered the vaccine via sexual health clinics, but since the recommendation was made in November last year, no announcement has been made about the implementation.

I asked the Public Health Minister about this matter in a written question last month. She replied that a pilot project was beginning this month, which I was pleased to hear. I would be grateful if she could explain what is being planned and the timetable to which that will happen. We already know that the vaccine works, and I have some fears that this could be an attempt to kick it into the long grass. I hope not and that she can offer some reassurances to Members today. Given the level of risk currently being faced by men who have sex with men because of HPV infection, including not least the very high rate of anal cancer in that group, there is surely a strong case for a national roll-out now so that as many men as possible can be vaccinated without delay.

Fourthly, I am concerned that the UK is in danger of being left behind other countries in its approach to HPV vaccination. As we have heard, Australia, Austria, Canada, Israel, Switzerland and the United States are among those now recommending gender-neutral vaccination. That is now under active consideration in the Republic of Ireland and Norway as well.

If I may, I will make a slightly tangential point. Is the Minister aware of the complaint made to the European Medicines Agency by the Nordic Cochrane Centre about the alleged maladministration of the safety review of the HPV vaccination? If side effects have been ignored or people more susceptible to side effects have been given the vaccine unnecessarily, that is a breach of trust and I expect that she will want to look into the matter.

Finally, I have been asked by HPV Action to announce that a letter from 13 eminent scientists and clinicians in the field of public health has been sent to the Secretary of State for Health, calling on him to ask the JCVI to accelerate its assessment of the vaccination of boys. The signatories include the director of the World Health Organisation collaborating centre for oral cancer, the president of the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV and the vice-president of the Royal College of Surgeons. Their views should carry weight in the corridors of Richmond House and I trust that the Secretary of State will listen very carefully to their points.

I also hope that the Minister has listened to the very valid points that hon. Members have made this afternoon. It has been a short but well-informed debate, and I am pleased that we have had the chance, thanks to the application made by the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green, to be able to debate this issue in such a timely manner.

5.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for giving me the opportunity to respond to the debate. I have to say at the outset that we are actually announcing good news in this debate. I accept that Members of this House wish to challenge me on a whole range of areas in which we might go further, but this is the announcement of a major pilot, and I will go on to talk about what we are discreetly doing. I really think that this is an important step forward and an important part of delivering on LGBT health. I just wanted to say that at the outset, because it was a bit hard to get that from some of the contributions. I will talk a bit about the issue of action, which I have been challenged on.

Let me start, as I should, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) not only on securing the debate, but on championing the issue so consistently and passionately. The point has been made that we should be talking about these issues more often—well, he has been talking about them consistently over many years and the persistence of parliamentary prioritisation is showing results. It is really good to see him in his place and I congratulate him on what he has done.

As hon. Members know, and as many people have mentioned, we are advised on all immunisation matters by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. Back in 2008, on the advice of the JCVI, an HPV vaccination programme for girls was introduced across the UK. It is worth reminding the House that the primary objective of that programme was to protect against cervical cancer. The latest data—just to remind people—shows that there are about 2,500 cervical cancer cases a year and up to 900 deaths from that terrible disease. To give some sense of comparison, there are around 300 anal cancer cases among all men in a year. Those are the origins of this programme.

The HPV vaccine has been given to more than 3 million teenage girls across the UK since the programme started, and coverage is actually among the highest in the world. Hon. Members have, again, made reference to international comparisons. I was recently in Geneva for the World Health Assembly, discussing HPV vaccination with a small group of other Health Ministers; our rates are the envy of much of the world, so we must accept that this is an important and world-leading programme. The number of young women with pre-cancerous lesions is falling, here and around the world, and we expect protection against cervical cancer to be long term, eventually saving hundreds of lives each year.

The vaccine has been subject to numerous safety reviews and I have gone over that in some detail in other debates. I will write to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), about the specific issues that he raised today, but I want to assure him about the EMA reviews and the WHO reviews, which are all publicly available.

Protecting girls against HPV has wider benefits and will result in fewer HPV infections and less disease in heterosexual males. However, I recognise, as the House has today, that men who have sex with men—MSM—receive little or no benefit from the programme for girls. It was the increasing evidence of the link between HPV and oral, throat, anal and penile cancers, alongside the incidence of genital warts, that led the JCVI to decide to consider the possibility of HPV vaccination for MSM, and to reconsider the case for HPV vaccination of boys. A project was beginning this month, which I was pleased to hear. I would be grateful if she could explain what is being planned and the timetable to which that will happen. We already know that the vaccine works, and I really think that this is an important step forward and an important part of delivering on LGBT health. I just wanted to say that at the outset, because it was a bit hard to get that from some of the contributions. I will talk a bit about the issue of action, which I have been challenged on.
I do not intend to include a lot of statistics in my speech, as my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green has set them out and described the context well. However, I want to point out, with regard to the detail behind the figures he quotes, that some of it is not directly relevant to an HPV/MSM programme, as the figures include both male and female cases and cases of cancer unrelated to HPV.

MSM are one of the groups at highest risk of sexually transmitted infections in the UK, and the Government are already taking a number of steps to improve their health and wellbeing. Again, I reject any suggestion that this issue is not a priority. It is quite the opposite: there has been a focus in the last year or so on MSM health and on LGBT health—that is something that we had previously not even begun to do. That includes, for example, the first LGBT health conference run by Public Health England and a number of other things that we have done. I am happy to speak to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) about that separately on another occasion.

The JCVI’s advice was that a targeted HPV vaccination should be introduced for MSM aged up to 45 who attend genito-urinary medicine and HIV clinics, if procurement of the vaccine and delivery of the programme is possible at a cost-effective price. Everything in that sentence is the JCVI’s advice. It is not just about the vaccine but about the delivery of the programme and the interrelationship between vaccination and attendance at GUM and HIV clinics, which is germane to the way that we are introducing this pilot.

In the JCVI’s formal advice to us, it acknowledged that commissioning and delivering such a programme would be complex and challenging. It made it clear that the Department of Health and Public Health England would need to work together, and with others, to consider the commissioning and delivery routes for the programme. Over the last few months that is exactly what we have been considering with stakeholders, and on several issues, Demand is one such issue, and we have had to consider whether the programme will result in a greater than expected increase in attendance by MSM at GUM clinics, and the impact of that on broader sexual health services.

We have also had to consider administration costs and what is a reasonable and realistic price to pay for administration of this vaccine in GUM and HIV clinics. Stakeholders raised that during the consultation on the original JCVI advice. How do we monitor the success of a three-dose programme when data collected in GUM and HIV clinics are anonymised and MSM could go to different clinics, and what is a reasonable and realistic price to pay for services.

In terms of evaluation, which my hon. Friend also referred to, data collected by clinics will be used to monitor coverage of the HPV vaccine and the proportion of MSM completing the course of vaccine. The impact of the vaccine on HPV-related cancers will obviously take many years to emerge, but the impact on the diagnosis of genital warts will be a useful proxy for that and will be seen much sooner. I expect to be updated regularly on the pilot’s progress. My hon. Friend knows that I have taken a strong personal interest in this programme, and I will of course consider how best to share the information.

I understand that some stakeholders are disappointed that we are not rolling out the programme nationally immediately—and some hon. Members here today have noted that Scotland and Wales have committed to implementing the JCVI’s advice in full. However, they have yet to confirm how or when they will start. Scotland has not started yet, and we are happy to share lessons from the pilot as it is no doubt considering how to move forward. Officials from the Department, Public Health England and the devolved Administrations meet regularly on this issue and will continue to do so to share experience and learning. Health is a devolved matter.

I confirm that Northern Ireland officials are on our project board, but they do not yet have a ministerial decision on how they will respond to the JCVI advice on MSM. Obviously there are issues to be raised with that devolved Administration.

The key thing to stress is that this is a large-scale pilot and I was somewhat disappointed by some of the stakeholders’ comments, particularly talk of stalling or of small pilots. This is a large-scale pilot that should eventually reach up to 40,000 MSM—more than 35% of those who attend GUM and HIV clinics annually. It will have a good geographical spread, including areas with the highest MSM populations, as well as rural areas with smaller MSM populations. That is relevant because, although there has been some piloting of vaccination in some clinics, it has been in a very limited geographical area and would not tell us enough about how this would work in practice in a national roll-out. The pilots will have a much broader spread. I can also confirm that the pilot will use the vaccine Gardasil-4 which was successful in the recent HPV procurement exercise.

I am pleased to announce that the pilot in England has already started. Two clinics went live in the pilot yesterday and others will come on board as soon as they are ready, hopefully over the next few months. There has been a positive and enthusiastic response from clinics invited to participate, and I am grateful to all those working on the ground to make this happen.
My hon. Friend asked how long the pilot will run. It will run during 2016-17 and decisions on next steps will be dependent on the progress and outcome of the pilot.

Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): Like other Members, I pay tribute to the leadership on this issue of my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) whose work is appreciated across the House.

I have been following the debate very carefully, but it is not clear in my mind how a pilot of MSM will act as some sort of proxy or in any way affect the decision on immunising schoolboys. I do not see how one will inform the other.

Jane Ellison: I have not claimed that one is dependent on the other. They are two separate recommendations from the JCVI, and I will explain what is happening with boys. There are many questions about extending the HPV vaccine to boys and I understand the wish for it to be available to all adolescents regardless of gender. The JCVI is reconsidering its initial advice on this and modelling is under way to inform its consideration.

Public Health England expects to complete the modelling by early 2017 and the JCVI’s advice is expected to follow soon after that, after which we can respond. We will look at that as a priority when we get it.

We have discussed in this Chamber whether we can speed that up. I recognise the frustration that people have expressed and I have talked personally to Public Health England officials who are involved in the modelling work. It would be a huge programme to roll out to adolescents and JCVI needs to base its advice on very robust analysis of cost-effectiveness. To do that, a complex model is being built. I have been assured that this is not about additional resource. I have asked whether it is a case of needing additional resource to speed the work up, but I am assured that it is not. It is because of the complexity of the model development and the fact that some of the models are time-consuming to run. Essentially, they are modelling behaviour over time, and to do that, one needs time in order to be able to understand how different aspects of the model interact with one another. I have been told—I have no reason to doubt this, because I have asked experts involved in it—that shortcuts could undermine the validity of the results and could not be supported by the JCVI. The model is building on the cervical screening model to create an integrated model of both HPV screening and vaccination, so that we get an understanding of what the interplay is between vaccination and screening programmes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HPV.

I am happy to write with more detail to hon. Members, but I hope that I have given them a sense of the fact that this is complex work: it is under way and we will look to respond to it as soon as we can. However, these are important decisions that the JCVI will take and, because the Government have always acted on its recommendations, it is important that it gets them right and they are based on the right data. This is a significant programme, but the work is well under way and I will look to report back to the House at every opportunity I can.

The HPV vaccination programme for girls is going very well, and there is now scope for an additional programme to make a difference to the lives of MSM, which this will. The pilot will provide answers to the questions that we still have and the answers that we need for a programme of this nature—I have hinted at some of the delivery complexities. We expect to see benefits from the pilot emerge relatively soon through the reduction in genital warts cases and through treatment in MSM, particularly by targeting relatively soon through the reduction in genital warts cases and through treatment in MSM, particularly by targeting higher-risk MSM.

I hope that that updates the House as fully as possible at this stage. As I said, I will be happy to update it in the future on how the pilots are going. I want to end by again congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green on initiating the debate and on his persistent campaigning, and to reassure and commit to the House my determination to improve the health and wellbeing of MSM and to see this pilot as a significant step forward in that task.

Mike Freer: First, I would like to put it on the record that this pilot is a success. Hon. Members need only go back and read the previous debates to see how the JCVI had simply set its face against extending HPV vaccinations to boys and MSM. It was implacably opposed, and it took a lot of badgering from Members of this House and from Ministers to get the JCVI to change its terms of reference. It has taken us three years to get to this point, but I welcome the pilot and I welcome the Minister’s explanation of the complexities and why we have to ensure that the pilot is robustly monitored before we can take the extension of the vaccinations any further.

I finish by thanking colleagues for joining the debate today and for the broad cross-party support. We covered all perspectives, including MSM, boys, the minority known as heterosexual men and dental health practitioners—have I missed anyone out? Men are notoriously bad at seeking help with their health, especially sexual health. Vaccination is the way forward. I welcome this positive step forward and thank colleagues for their attendance today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered HPV vaccinations for men who have sex with men.

5.40 pm

Sitting adjourned.
do not expect the three death sentences to be carried out, can he clarify whether the Government have officially asked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to commute them?

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does the hon. Lady know whether, once a decision for execution is made, there are a few days, a few hours or a few weeks before it is carried out? Or do we just not know, and therefore the big problem might be that executions are carried out secretly before we even know that they have happened?

Margaret Ferrier: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, and I believe that we do not know. I say that because at the beginning of this year 47 people were executed, and we did not know about those executions until after they had happened. I will talk more about those people later in my speech. I believe that the UK Government do not really have much clout when it comes to stopping death sentences being carried out.

Sadly, the cases I have mentioned are not isolated. There are countless similar cases, and each one points to a corrupt justice system that is being used as a tool for political oppression. Since the Arab spring, Saudi authorities have been purposely targeting civil rights activists and human rights defenders.

Issa al-Hamid, a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, has been sentenced to nine years in prison by the specialised criminal court in Riyadh. The charges against Issa relate to statements published online on a range of civil and human rights issues, such as the right to peaceful assembly. Freedom of speech is easily taken for granted in the United Kingdom, but it has not been afforded to Issa, nor to Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, another member of the association. The charges against Abdulaziz include communicating with foreign organisations, due to his passing information to Amnesty International for use in its reports. He now faces eight years in prison, and after his release he also faces an eight-year travel ban and will be forbidden from using social media. Clearly, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association is being targeted, as the Saudi authorities are determined to crush this movement.

All those things are being done to suppress any criticism of Saudi’s atrocious human rights record. I hope that the Minister will be able to inform me today of whether the Foreign Office has raised with the Saudi authorities the issue of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and the apparent targeting and imprisonment of its members.

Similarly, the website known as “Free Saudi Liberals” has felt the wrath of the Saudi regime. The man behind the website, Raif Badawi, received 50 lashes in public, purely for exercising free speech. He still languishes in a prison cell, awaiting the remainder of his sentence, which is another 950 lashes. International outcry has so far led to Raif being spared that ordeal, which he would be unlikely to survive and which still looms large over him.

Raif’s punishment has been described as a “gratuitous, violent sentence” by the international representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union at the UN’s Human Rights Council. Fearing for the safety of herself and her family, Raif’s wife Ensaf escaped to Canada with their three children, where she speaks out against the wide-scale oppression in her home country.
Ensaf’s voice is part of a growing international chorus that is extremely concerned at what is seemingly a worsening situation in the kingdom. Saudi Arabia has executed almost 100 people this year alone, 47 of them on the same day at the start of the year. One of those 47 people was the uncle of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a well-known Muslim cleric. Last year, the equivalent of one person every two days was executed in Saudi. Sadly, that number seems likely to be surpassed this year. Saudi’s record is ruthlessly regressive.

The UK Government have stressed that, despite not renewing their strategy for the global abolition of the death penalty during this Parliament, there is no change in policy and they continue to work towards its global abolition. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me today when the UK last raised concerns with Saudi Arabia about the number of executions being carried out in the country, and at what level those concerns were raised. Also, in light of the escalation in the number of executions in Saudi and in other countries, does the Government intend to look again at their decision and produce a renewed strategy for the abolition of the death penalty? It is only right that we use our supposed position of influence to lobby Saudi towards having more responsible domestic policy.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The hon. Lady is making a powerful and cogent case. May I tell her, as somebody who has campaigned all over the world against the use of the death penalty, that statements by this country actually mean a tremendous amount, both to those who are campaigning on the ground for the abolition of the death penalty and to the countries that still have the death penalty? Those countries will see any shift by this country away from a strong position on abolition as a move in their direction.

Margaret Ferrier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for his knowledge on the matter. We should also take a tougher stance on Saudi’s foreign policy. As one of Saudi Arabia’s major trading partners—we sell billions of pounds of weapons to Saudi each year—the UK should be bolder in its approach.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Is she as concerned as I am about the recent report by the United Nations called “Children and Armed Conflict”, which set out the escalating position in Yemen, including the increasing number of casualties among children, for which responsibility is ascribed to the Saudi-led regime? Is that not something that our Government need to take extremely seriously?

Margaret Ferrier: I will come on to that point later. The UN and others have brought out an extremely important document, and the Government need to take such things seriously.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Is the hon. Lady aware of the inquiry into the Yemen conflict by the Committees on Arms Export Controls, which have heard evidence from non-governmental organisations, the defence industry and Government? The report will be published before the summer recess. As she clearly states, there are serious concerns about violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Does she agree that the UK has international and domestic obligations on arms export controls and that we have to hold ourselves to the highest standards?

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that interventions should be short.

Margaret Ferrier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention and for his experience from the Committees. These things are important for the UK, and that is why we are here today. We should be an example to the rest of the world, and I would like to think that the Minister will take that on board.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Ferrier: I am sorry, but I would like to make some progress.

The Minister will no doubt contest that our relationship with Saudi Arabia is crucial in securing global and domestic security and that the intelligence we receive has helped to foil terror attacks. We cannot, however, continue to trade off our responsibilities like that. With a growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and mounting reports indicating that international humanitarian law has been seriously and repeatedly breached by all parties engaged in warfare in the country—including the Saudi-led coalition—the Government need to get their head out of the sand.

Yesterday morning, I attended a briefing kindly delivered by Amnesty International and heard both first and second-hand accounts of the use of cluster munitions in Yemen. Amnesty went on a fact-finding mission to Yemen last month and found evidence of UK-produced BL755 cluster munitions being dropped on farmland in the north of the country. It estimates that the munitions were dropped from the air in the last quarter of 2015 and provides a compelling case to back up that assertion. The Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre moved in to clear the cluster bombs from the farmland, but could not guarantee that it had been able to locate and remove all munitions. The de facto minefield means that the land is now unworkable, and the people who rely on working it have lost their means of providing.

YEMAC is not properly resourced to deal adequately with the problem. Rather than bombs being detonated in situ, they are being transported to a central facility in buckets of sand on trucks traversing uneven roads. Sadly, YEMAC recently lost three workers when a bomb exploded while being transported. The work that it carries out is crucial in helping to prevent deaths and injuries caused by munitions that are lying in wait in dangerous unexploded states. People will recall the fantastic work of Princess Diana in raising awareness of mines, leading to the success of the Ottawa mine ban treaty. Putting herself in danger in the process, she left behind a lasting legacy through her bold activism. If she were still here today, I have no doubt she would be a fierce advocate for the civilians suffering in the growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

In stark contrast, the UK goes to great lengths to ensure that the arms trade with Saudi Arabia continues unhampere. Back in 2014, when the Prime Minister
could not convince the Saudis to agree to the financing for a multibillion-pound defence deal, Prince Charles was dispatched to the middle east to a festival supported by BAE Systems to perform a sword dance in traditional Saudi attire. The next day, Saudi Arabia and BAE announced that the deal had been finalised. Great effort is put into maintaining our relationship and arms trade with Saudi Arabia.

Less effort seems to be going into supporting such organisations as YEMAC. The training for its workers is outdated—most dates back to 1998. It does not have the means to carry out controlled explosions in situ. Its workers lack proper personal safety equipment and are routinely being put in greater danger than they should be. Perhaps the Minister would care to address that. Has the UK offered to supply any funding, equipment or training to YEMAC? If so, has it been delivered? If not, will an undertaking be made to look at that urgently, taking the matter forward as appropriate with colleagues in the Department for International Development?

The use of cluster munitions in Yemen is scandalous. The country already faces an almost incomprehensible humanitarian crisis. The country has the greatest level of humanitarian need in the world, with 80% of the population in need of assistance.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is almost ridiculous that the Government refused 12 applications for asylum by people from Yemen, given the situation in that country?

Margaret Ferrier: Yes, the issue is tied up with the fact that the Government do not want to take that many refugees. With a country such as Yemen, where there is a humanitarian crisis, it would certainly be to the benefit of the people and those suffering children to be brought into our country, away from ever more danger.

The creation of de facto minefields through the dropping of cluster bombs will only deepen the crisis. Yesterday, I joined Amnesty International and Members from all main parties to deliver a petition to 10 Downing Street. Thousands signed the petition, which calls for action on the use of cluster munitions in Yemen. Other Members will no doubt have received many lobbying emails from constituents on this matter, as I have—the public care greatly about this issue.

Just a fortnight ago in the main Chamber, the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise responded to a topical question from the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). On the record, she stated that there is not yet evidence that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions. She added that the Government believe they have an assurance from Saudi Arabia that cluster munitions have not been used in the conflict, and that the Ministry of Defence was urgently investigating the allegations. Given the urgency of the matter, is the Minister in a position to give an update on the status of the MOD investigation? When is it expected to be completed, and will the findings be disclosed to Members?

Amnesty International has released photographs of the cluster munitions they claim to be of UK origin. In some of the photographs, serial numbers are visible on the bombs. Will the tracing of the transfer history of the bombs, based on the serial numbers, form part of any investigation? Why exactly are the UK Government so willing to accept assurances from Saudi Arabia without question? What specific evidence has Saudi Arabia provided to the UK or the international community to back up the veracity of the denials? What evidence is there that Saudi authorities are investigating breaches in international humanitarian law in Yemen?

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. It is certainly timely. Is she aware of the outcome by the International Development Committee, which suggested that an independent investigation should be undertaken, rather than Saudi Arabia investigating itself?

Margaret Ferrier: Yes, it seems crazy for a country to investigate itself. An independent organisation should come in to investigate all those tied up in violations of this sort.

Have any of the UK ground personnel based in Saudi Arabia witnessed the transfer or loading of cluster bombs? Are any of them in possession of intelligence indicating that cluster munitions have been deployed by Saudi in Yemen? The United States has subsequently halted its cluster bomb deliveries to Saudi Arabia in light of those reports. Commenting on that freeze in trade, a senior US official cited reports that “the Saudi-led coalition used cluster munitions in the armed conflict in Yemen...in areas in which civilians are alleged to have been present” as reason for that action.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful point. Does she agree that the failure to hold to account is leading to an “anything goes” attitude? The people who are really suffering are innocent civilians, many of whom are women and children.

Margaret Ferrier: It is dreadful to think of the suffering and targeting of civilians. We need to take the matter seriously and move it forward today.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Ferrier: I would like to make some progress.

A report from the UN panel of experts on Yemen published in January notes on page 37 that the military spokesman of Saudi Arabia, Brigadier General Ahmed Asiri, has indicated that Saudi has used cluster munitions on or against armoured vehicles in Yemen. In light of the position taken by the US and the overt admission contained in the UN report, has the UK updated its policy of denial about the Saudi use of cluster bombs? Will the Government put pressure on the coalition to release details, including GPS data, of air strikes involving cluster munitions? The data would be invaluable to organisations such as YEMAC and would allow for the creation of cluster bomb minefield heat maps that could be used to prioritise and deliver a de-mining process.

Furthermore, what information do the Government hold in relation to the stockpiling of cluster munitions? Is there an understanding of what is currently held by other countries that have not yet ratified the convention
on cluster munitions? What efforts are being made by the Government to encourage Saudi and other non-signatories to become parties to the convention?

I have mentioned the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and before I finish I would like to expand further.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): On that point, may I intervene?

Margaret Ferrier: No, I am sorry. I would like to make some progress and lots of Members want to take part in the debate today. I am sure they will give way to other Members.

I have mentioned the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. As I said, before I finish I want to expand further. Action on Armed Violence, a leading charity that charts the impact of explosive violence on civilians, estimates that 82% of those killed or injured by coalition air strikes in Yemen were civilians. A recent UN Security Council report on children and armed conflict documents a verified sixfold increase in the number of children killed and maimed in 2015 compared with the previous year, 60% of which are attributable to the Saudi-led coalition. The same report documents three verified incidents of coalition forces denying humanitarian access.

Save the Children, the largest international non-governmental organisation operating in Yemen, has issued grave concerns about the lack of an adequate Government response to credible allegations of international humanitarian and human rights law violations by all parties to the conflict in Yemen. This assertion is backed up through evidence collated and reported on by Campaign Against Arms Trade in its recent publication entitled, "A Shameful Relationship: UK Complicity in Saudi State Violence".

Helen Whately: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Ferrier: No, I am sorry; I am not giving way.

The response to the humanitarian crisis by the Department for International Development has been welcome. However, it highlights the complete and total policy incoherence between Government Departments. UK foreign policy is contributing to the disaster, with resources subsequently being used to deal with the consequences. The most worrying report on the crisis is that of the United Nations panel of experts on Yemen. Its recent 259-page report makes very uncomfortable reading. It claims:

"The panel has observed that not a single humanitarian pause to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people has been fully observed by any Yemeni party or by the coalition."

The special envoy brokered two separate humanitarian pauses, but within two hours of the announced start of the first pause, UN officials witnessed a coalition air strike in Sana’a. According to some press reports, fighting actually intensified during the second pause. The UN report worrying contains very well documented evidence that the Saudi-led coalition is violating the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in a widespread and systematic manner.

The panel has documented that the coalition had conducted air strikes targeting civilians and civilian objects, again in violation of international humanitarian law, including refugee camps, weddings, civilian buses, medical facilities, schools, mosques and markets, and essential civilian infrastructure. The targeting of seaports, airports and arterial transit routes has seriously hampered efforts to deliver humanitarian aid in the country. In May, the coalition declared the entire city of Sa’dah a military target, and, soon after, it faced systematic indiscriminate attacks, including on hospitals and schools, by the coalition. The UN report also documents incidents whereby humanitarian assistance is denied: something it overtly says is constitutive of a war crime.

Last November, three trucks, on behalf of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organisation, were unable to reach their final destinations owing to insecurity and delays in receiving security clearances from the coalition. The panel also documented coalition air strikes on five storage facilities for holding food aid, and air strikes on an Oxfam warehouse storing equipment for a water project funded by the European Union. Annex 47 of the report lists classified totals of many documented international humanitarian law violations from the coalition, including 41 individual air strikes on residential areas and villages, eight attacks on schools, 22 attacks on hospitals and health facilities, and seven attacks on humanitarian organisations and NGOs.

The Prime Minister is on record in the Chamber on 27 January as saying he would look at the report. Has he followed through on this promise, and what assessment has been made of the report by the Foreign Office? Will the Government support the establishment of an international independent investigation into alleged violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties engaged in conflict in Yemen? Have the UK Government ever suspended or revoked any arms export licence to Saudi Arabia? Finally, will the Government now, in the light of all this evidence, follow the examples set by Germany and Sweden and impose a ban on the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia while an investigation takes place?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): A large number of people have indicated that they wish to speak, and people not on the list are also rising, so I will probably have to impose a time limit. I will start with Sir Alan Duncan and I ask Members to be as brief and as succinct as they possibly can.

9.56 am

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I will impose my own time limit, Mrs Gillan, and chuck away my notes. First, I thank the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) for launching this debate. The issue is highly charged and it is important we discuss it. I declare an interest as chairman of the Conservative Middle East Council and I am the Government’s special envoy to Yemen. I have taken an interest in Yemen for 30 years. As a Minister for International Development, I tried to lift the significance of Yemen up the agenda of the National Security Council and in the House. I saw it as a country in serious danger that was at risk of becoming the Afghanistan of the Arabian peninsula. In that sense, one realises what a complicated issue this is.
I totally respect the passion—I refer to the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) and my attempt to complete the sentence in the Chamber the other day—that surrounds this issue. Be assured that all of us in this House are against cluster munitions, which is why the Government have banned them since 1989. We condemn their use totally. Let us park that to one side for a moment.

Margaret Ferrier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have hardly got going, but I will give way, even though the hon. Lady did not give way to me.

Margaret Ferrier: I knew the right hon. Gentleman would have his chance to speak. As I said in my speech, YEMAC has photographic evidence of cluster munitions being used in Yemen and they are not from the 1980s. If he wants proof, I have the photographs and so does YEMAC.

Sir Alan Duncan: If they are not from the 1980s, they are clearly not ours.

I want to try to set the context. We have two important duties in looking at this deeply important issue. We have to set the highest possible standards when we sell weapons and we have to monitor their subsequent use. We also have to understand the real dangers of the region and delve deeply into countries with which people are not wholly familiar. Yemen is probably one of the most complicated countries I have ever tried to get my head round. I have a deep understanding of the Gulf Co-operation Council countries, but anyone who thinks they understand Yemen does not. They only begin to understand when they realise how much they do not understand.

The thing about Yemen—the hon. Lady did not mention this at all—is that we are in conflict for a reason. The conflict started because a legitimate Government were displaced by highly armed Houthi rebels who had raided heavy weapons stores and used those weapons against the legitimate Government. They pushed them out of Sana’a and headed down towards Aden. The hon. Lady did not mention the human rights violations committed by the Houthis. They have rounded up teenagers, put them in rooms and blown them up.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen the evidence provided by Amnesty International? Is he suggesting for a second that Amnesty International does not understand what is going on in Yemen?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Lady gets too virulent in the way she puts things. I am not suggesting that Amnesty International does not understand; I am trying to explain the broad political and geopolitical context in which the conflict has arisen. That is not something we have heard in this debate so far—although we may—or that we heard in the main Chamber previously. There is a lot of Saudi bashing, but everyone needs to understand that a legitimate Government have been displaced. This is a coalition: for the first time ever, Arab countries are trying to address their own regional problems without western, co-operative joint intervention. We have been telling them for years to sort out their own problems, but as soon as they try to do so we round on them, as we are seeing in this debate.

Let me explain what is going on in Yemen. We are in the sixth week of some very crucial talks in Kuwait, during which there has been a cessation of hostilities. It has not held entirely—no cessation of hostilities ever does—but, broadly, it has happened. Remember where legitimacy lies: with the Government of Yemen, who have been forced out of the country into Saudi Arabia. The UN-sponsored talks are trying to get that legitimate Government back into Yemen.

Another point that has not yet been made is that, if we do not have the semblance of government in Yemen, we are going to have an enormous country, where there are more weapons than people, that is ungoverned. We know what happens in ungoverned space: the rise of terrorism, which affects the ungoverned country but also spreads elsewhere. Yemen is beneath Saudi Arabia and 350 Saudis have been killed inside Saudi Arabia in Houthi attacks over the southern border. That, too, has never been mentioned. If Yemen disintegrates even further, we are going to see the rise of al-Qaeda and ISIS, going across the Bab El Mandeb into the horn of Africa—

Margaret Ferrier: indicated dissent.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am astonished that the hon. Lady shakes her head at these points of crucial geopolitical and strategic importance.

Margaret Ferrier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will give way to the hon. Lady one more time, then I shall continue to make my point.

Margaret Ferrier: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point on his side of the argument, but does that justify the targeting of civilians? Earlier, I said that all parties should be investigated for violations of humanitarian law. He makes a point about the rise in weapons, but the UK is contributing to that rise with the arms sale.

Sir Alan Duncan: There are very different sorts of weapons. In Yemen, every teenager has a rifle on their shoulder. That is the sort of country we are dealing with. I question the hon. Lady’s bold assertion that there has been deliberate targeting of civilians. That is a very serious accusation.

Margaret Ferrier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I am not going to give way again. I am trying to say to the hon. Lady and her colleagues that they should appreciate the context in which the conflict has arisen.

Let me address something that the hon. Lady did touch on. If the peace talks are not successful and government is not restored to Yemen, we are going to see the most catastrophic combination of economic collapse and humanitarian need that we have seen in any country in our lifetime—even when compared with...
[Sir Alan Duncan]
some parts of Syria. My plea to this House today and to Members present for this debate is that we must understand the dangers of adopting a “we hate Saudi Arabia” point of view.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Lady will have the chance to answer back. I am sure that Mrs Gillan will allow everyone who wants to speak to do so. The less time I take, the more chance there is for others to speak.

This issue must be seen in the broader context of regional collapse, regional danger, humanitarian need and complete and total economic collapse in Yemen. That is what we are looking at. It is the duty of us all to understand the realities of the world and to try to ensure that we contribute to the success of the peace talks that are under way in Kuwait. We must not jeopardise them in any way by taking a singular view that does not understand the broader context of how the future of Yemen needs to be pieced together in those talks.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): There is a great deal of interest in this debate and some nine or 10 Members have indicated that they wish to speak, so I am terribly sorry but I have to impose a three-minute limit on speeches to try to get in as many colleagues as possible. I am sure the effort will be admirably led by Andy Slaughter.

10.5 am

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mrs Gillan, for calling me. Given the time constraint, I shall limit myself to one matter and try to bring us back to the topic of the debate: human rights and Saudi Arabia. The front page of The Times today has the headline, “British police accused of helping Saudi torturers”. I should say that the story is based on research by the BBC’s Chris Vallance and a report broadcast on “The World at One” yesterday, and, admirable though the article is, I wish he had been credited. Mr Vallance is admirable because he has done far better than I have in getting information released under freedom of information rules on the College of Policing’s relationship with the Saudi justice system.

As Members will remember—I am pleased to see almost 30 of them present, because it shows the level of interest in the subject—as Sir Alan Duncan said, the open door, even if it is open only very slightly, to address cluster munitions. Do we analyse the sophistication of information released under freedom of information rules on the College of Policing’s relationship with the Saudi justice system.

As Members will remember—I am pleased to see almost 30 of them present, because it shows the level of interest in the subject—as Sir Alan Duncan said, the open door, even if it is open only very slightly, to address cluster munitions. Do we analyse the sophistication of information released under freedom of information rules on the College of Policing’s relationship with the Saudi justice system.

However, within a couple of weeks of his saying that, the Foreign Secretary was in the Gulf saying that it was business as usual with Saudi Arabia.

Following the withdrawal from that contract, I attempted, unsuccessfully, through parliamentary questions and FOI requests, to find out what the College of Policing’s relationship with Saudi Arabia was. Mr Vallance was successful in his FOI request and obtained a referral by the College of Policing to the International Police Assistance Board. It is a very candid application to supply sophisticated forensic aid to the Saudis. It warns that “the skills being trained are used to identify individuals who later go on to be tortured or subjected to other human rights abuses”.

It also says that the application is motivated by “achieving ‘value-added’ for the College through providing an income generating business opportunity”.

The sophisticated de-encryption techniques referred to would easily allow the Saudi security forces to trace down exactly the sort of young people we have heard about who are now on death row in Saudi Arabia.

Will the Minister explain what is going on with the assistance that the Government are giving to the Saudi regime? Do the Government intend to continue it, and will they publish the memorandum of understanding with the College of Policing so that we can see exactly what is happening?

10.8 am

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing the debate.

I shall be brief. Will the Minister give some analysis of our relationship with Saudi Arabia and how we might be influencing or moderating its attitude towards human rights?

My concern is this. We have a trading and diplomatic relationship, which necessarily means, I hope, that Ministers are engaged with the Saudis. I have experience not in this particular area, but in conflict areas in the middle east, so I appreciate that having an open door and the ability to influence or moderate behaviour is precious. I seek reassurance because of what has been said about human rights abuses, and because today thousands of people will be saying “#humanrighs”—I hope that, in this country, Raif Badawi would never have been prosecuted or flogged for expressing his opinions online. I wish to be reassured that Ministers are constantly criticising public beheadings.

I declare an interest as a member of Amnesty International. Recently, we have been concerned about cluster bombs in the area, whether they were made in the 1980s or on the eve of when we signed the convention on cluster munitions. I wish to be reassured that Ministers are using the open door, even if it is only slightly, to address cluster munitions. Do we analyse where the stockpiles are? Are we helping to destroy them? If not, I fear that, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, the open door means that we may be complicit.

Mrs Helen Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the breaches of international humanitarian law, which she referred to, make the relief effort more difficult and
dangerous, and conflict with the very good work that the Department for International Development is doing in the area?

Dr Mathias: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend’s intervention. The UK should promote precision arms, which minimise civilian casualties. Are we complicit in causing more civilian casualties, especially given the humanitarian effort and the people who are clearing up?

I will not take up the extra time that my hon. Friend has kindly given me, but I seek reassurance. Are we complicit, or are we influencing with the open door? I worked elsewhere in the middle east, and I know that, when the negotiations end and the international observers go away, things happen that are beyond one’s imagination—they are so horrific. I am not advocating a closed door, but I need reassurance.

10.12 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Government regularly repeat the line, “the UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent export control regimes in the world”.

That may be true, but it is clearly not good enough. Since March 2015, no export licence applications to Saudi have been refused due to non-compliance with criterion 2 of the consolidated criteria, which refers to the respect of international humanitarian law in the country of final destination and the respect of IHL by it. Meanwhile, as hon. Members know, £2.8 billion of arms sales have gone to Saudi since the start of the Yemen conflict.

There is mounting evidence from a range of sources that the Saudis have committed international humanitarian law breaches, so either our Government are breaking their own law or their arms export controls are not working. I hope, therefore, that they will look positively at something that is happening in the House of Lords, where one of my colleagues is introducing a private Member’s Bill to create a register of arms brokers, which would enhance transparency and lead to a more rigorous implementation of UK transfer controls.

The evidence about international humanitarian law violations by the Saudis is mounting. During the air strikes on the al-Mazraq camp for internally displaced people, all structures hit, according to the UN humanitarian co-ordinator for Yemen, were civilian infrastructure. That must constitute at the very least an indiscriminate attack, and at worst a direct attack on civilians. As hon. Members know, there were also air strikes against the Oxfam storage facility and a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital. Again, they must constitute indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

Reference was also made to Sa’ada and Ma’aran. In answer to a letter from me, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), said that in Sa’ada all the strikes in the city “could be linked to a plausible military target.”

Clearly, the UN Security Council experts who looked at it think differently. How could a hospital or school be a plausible military target? How high a bar is plausible? Although it is noteworthy that the Saudis leafleted those two cities—the whole of which, as we have heard, were designated military targets—how realistic was it for the citizens to get out? In his reply, the Under-Secretary of State referred to Sa’ada, but not to what happened in Ma’aran. What exactly has the analysis there revealed?

It is clearly difficult in the limited time I have to make all the points I want to make. Three Departments—the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—have played a role in this sorry episode. I think that, once IHL violations are confirmed, a ministerial head is going to have to roll.

10.15 am

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing this debate. I pay tribute to Save the Children, Oxfam and Amnesty International for their most excellent work. I draw the House’s attention to early-day motion 138, which I lodged in relation to the UN annual report on children and armed conflict, which was mentioned earlier.

The right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) talked about understanding geopolitics, but may I remind him that that is not the preserve of just the Conservative party? Nor have Conservative Members demonstrated by their actions in a number of international events that they have any great expertise in that. Mention was made of the realities of the world. Arguably, the influx of Scottish National party Members to the House of Commons has brought a number of realities of the world to the Chamber, which has only added to what we have been discussing.

This is not about whose side anyone is on in war. I cannot believe that anyone in this Chamber is in favour of armed conflict of any nature; we should not descend into a discussion about that. It is simply about whether we have knowledge, based on the evidence, that demonstrates that an investigation should take place.

I was pleased to be granted an urgent question last month, and I asked the MOD to make a statement on this pressing matter. We were told that UK weapons cannot have been used in this conflict because the Saudi Arabian military has told us so. What kind of investigation is that? We are asking a country to investigate itself. Let us bear in mind that that is the same Saudi Arabian Government whose human rights record is so bad that our own Ministry of Justice refused to do business with them.

There are a number of questions that need to be answered today, not least about the conflicting positions of different Government Departments. In Question Time, the Foreign Secretary stated that “the Ministry of Defence is urgently investigating the allegations”—[Official Report, 24 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 395.]

Then, in response to my urgent question just 10 minutes later, the Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), contradicted that statement by saying that the Government will simply be “seeking fresh assurances” from the Saudi Arabian Government.

It is clear that the UK Government will not conduct their own investigations into the issue. That was confirmed on the BBC World Service in an interview with an MOD official, who said: “We are not launching an investigation”.

125WH Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia 8 JUNE 2016 Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia 126WH
I have written to the Prime Minister to ask what the position is. Are we having an investigation, or are we not? I am waiting for a response from both the Ministry of Defence and the FCO on this matter. There is absolutely no doubt that the evidence suggests that this merits an investigation. I simply do not know what the Government are waiting for to justify that.

10.18 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak on this matter. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing this debate. I will speak, as I always do, on the basis of my beliefs.

The UK has relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The Governments and Oppositions in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia view UK defence sales as a signal of British support for those Governments. When we look at that, we get an idea of where we are. When we read about some of these things that are happening in Saudi Arabia, it is shocking to think that the UK is cosy up to that regime when convenient.

I want to touch on some of those things.

Converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia. Despite that, the number of Christians from Muslim backgrounds is growing. In recent years, we have been outraged by the Saudi authorities for leaving Islam, and some people have been handed over to relatives and vanished, never to be heard of again—leaving Islam is seen as a great source of shame to families and communities in that strongly Islamic nation. Given such serious persecution of Christians in Saudi Arabia, many feel they have no choice but to flee—more Saudi Christians are estimated to be outside the country than in it—but there are still Muslims in Saudi Arabia risking their lives to follow their Lord Jesus. Christians used to make up less than 0.1% of Saudi Arabia’s population, but now 4.4% identify as Christian. We have to look at issues for Christians in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is included on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom list of the nations committing the worst religious freedom violations, comparable with China, Burma, North Korea and Iran. Saudi Arabia is also 14th on the Open Doors list of countries with the worst cases of Christian persecution. Christians are forced to live in secret. For example, at the end of 2014, Islamist police in Saudi Arabia stormed a Christian prayer meeting and arrested the entire congregation, including women and children, and confiscated their Bibles. They disappeared into the system, although I now understand that they have been deported—they were deported for worshipping their Lord Jesus. That is an example of what happens in Saudi Arabia.

As I have said before, Saudi Arabia’s indiscriminate blanket bombing of Yemen, the murder of innocents and the destruction of property rankle with me and many in this Chamber, which is why we are glad to have the debate. The UK alliance with Saudi Arabia in general, and arms sales to the regime in particular, constitute a threat to security, as Saudi Arabia’s aggressive and reckless behaviour in the region contributes to the dynamics of fuelling extremist violence in the middle east and worldwide.

Many have condemned Saudi Arabia, including the UN Secretary-General, Save the Children, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the House of Commons Select Committee on International Development. We are on the wrong side of humanity if we continue to cosy up to the brutal theocracy of Saudi Arabia, and we will be on the wrong side of history with regard to the region. I and many other hon. Members believe that we need to do the right thing and to make it clear to Saudi Arabia that things will have to change if we are to continue doing any business with it at all.

It is sometimes said that politics is about compromise; I think it is much more important to say that politics is about knowing what is a compromise, and what should never be compromised—some things are absolute. It is all very well to talk about complex geopolitical, diplomatic and international reasons—whatever gobbledygook was used—but there are moral absolutes in this world and, if we lose sight of them, we are on a slippery slope from which there is no return.

Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, given the short time he has, and I welcome his philosophical stance. Does he agree that where there is Government, there is responsibility, and where there is responsibility, there can be blame? Where there are non-state actors, there is no such locus of responsibility, so it is easy for this House not to allocate blame. Does he agree that although it is essential that we have complete transparency in, and scrutiny of, how our arms are used, we must guard against falling into the moral luxury of blame, when we should be looking at how to stop the biggest source of human rights abuses, which is generally non-state actors?

Peter Grant: I was not about to allocate blame, because I am not convinced it ever gets us anywhere. However, I question her assertion that where there is Government, there is always responsibility, because I can think of examples much closer to home than Saudi Arabia where Governments do not act with responsibility in every case.

The point that I was making is that there are moral absolutes in this life. If the killing of children is not a breach of an absolute moral requirement, I simply do not know what is. It is all very well to say that bad things are happening in Yemen, but those who listened to the excellent opening contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West will have heard her say time and time again that other people are committing acts of evil in Yemen as well as the Saudis, and they must be held to account as well. We
are asking the Government to ensure that all those who are suspected of war crimes and of crimes against humanity are held to account.

If the killing of children is not an absolutely prohibited act in this world, what is? The Minister claimed last month, as he tried to sweep aside the death of children and other civilians, that bad things happen in war, but the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 93% of the casualties in Yemen are civilians. That is not collateral damage or a few unfortunate missiles that went astray; that is, at its very best, criminally reckless incompetence on the part of those delivering the bombs and, at worst and much more likely, deliberate targeting of civilians, using terrorisation of the population as a means of achieving political ends.

Regardless of the evils being committed by the opponents of the Saudi regime in Yemen—and they have committed evils—the use of child killing to achieve political aims is not something that any of us can ever consider supporting, be it actively or passively, directly or simply standing by on the sidelines condoning things. It is horrifying that the response from the Government time and again is, “We don’t yet have conclusive evidence, so we will carry on selling the weapons anyway”, or, “What evidence there is suggests that it’s not our weapons being used to kill the children; it’s someone else’s weapons.”

If I applied for a shotgun licence and there was credible evidence that I had used a knife to carry out violent attacks on children, I would not get that shotgun licence. Those responsible for issuing the licence would not say to me, “Go and investigate the allegations against yourself. As long as you can persuade us that any crimes committed have not been committed with that shotgun, we’ll allow you to keep the shotgun.” If the situation is as simple and as obvious as that in the case of awarding one licence for one gun, why do we choose to make it more complicated when we are awarding licences to supply weapons capable of annihilating entire streets at the press of a single button? Those arms sales are immoral and indefensible, and they must stop now.

10.26 am

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I will keep my comments very short. I urge the supporters of the motion—which was moved very eloquently—to distinguish between weapons of concern. We must identify where such weapons are coming from, and we must talk about all weapons.

Let me give the House an example. In my constituency, the biggest employer by quite some way is BAE Systems. Over in Hull, it is also a huge employer. It is building the Eurofighter Typhoon for export to the Gulf, as well as the Hawk trainer aircraft. Were I to speak to my local Members in, but I am afraid that time is pressing. I will not give way, because I do not have time.

We have heard from two hon. Members the loose language of, “Let’s ban all arms exports regardless of how they are used”. They should go around and see the economic devastation that that language causes, including how they are used”. They should go around and see the economic devastation that that language causes, including.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): I am going to have to move to the wind-ups, so I apologise to Members who did not get to speak. I have tried hard to get Members in, but I am afraid that time is pressing.

10.30 am

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Gillan. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing it and on her powerful and thought-provoking speech.

Human rights and arms deals may seem like strange bedfellows, but it is quite right that we should view them together. Just yesterday in this Chamber we debated the important work done by UN peacekeepers in seeking to instil peace and protecting human rights in troubled countries. This morning we confront the reality that by continuing to sell arms to Saudi Arabia, a country with a dreadful record on human rights domestically and on links to terrorism and extremism internationally, we are helping to sow the seeds of conflict and undermine human rights.

I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) on reports today of UK police training the Saudi Arabian regime on high-tech
[Kirsten Oswald]
detection that could be used to track down those who dissent from the regime. The Government must clarify their position on that.

Internally, Saudi Arabia imposes a harsh interpretation of sharia law on citizens and visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. While we rightly recoil at the beheadings and barbarity of Daesh, we appear to look the other way as public beheadings continue to take place in Saudi Arabia, with perhaps 100 already in the first five months of this year. By its actions, and given its status as the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia gives comfort to those who would spread such barbarity across the region—indeed, across the globe—in the name of religion, even though in no way do those actions ever represent Islam.

My hon. Friend spoke powerfully about young men languishing in Saudi jails under threat of death. As she explained, and as the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) indicated, we simply do not have the clout either to get full information about those death sentences or to stop them. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) said, such sentences are imposed on grounds that cause us huge concerns about human rights and freedom of speech.

The targeting of anyone who raises civil rights concerns is a real concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke powerfully about a number of cases, including that of Raif Badawi, and the broader impact on families in Saudi Arabia who live in fear or are forced to flee. Like her, I am keen to hear the broader impact on families in Saudi Arabia who live in fear or are forced to flee. Like her, I am keen to hear about the actions of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen.

Kirsten Oswald: Just to be clear, may I ask the hon. Lady what her party’s policy is on trying to restore legitimate Government in Yemen and resisting the violent takeover and displacement of the legitimate Government?

[Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP)] The hon. Lady will know that Ministers have said in the Chamber that the UK’s alliance with Saudi Arabia and arms sales to it are among the things that give the UK influence when it comes to talking about matters such as the death penalty. If it is quite clear that the House of Saud does not take from the Minister how and when concerns from the ground.

Internally, Saudi Arabia imposes a harsh interpretation of sharia law on citizens and visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. While we rightly recoil at the beheadings and barbarity of Daesh, we appear to look the other way as public beheadings continue to take place in Saudi Arabia, with perhaps 100 already in the first five months of this year. By its actions, and given its status as the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia gives comfort to those who would spread such barbarity across the region—indeed, across the globe—in the name of religion, even though in no way do those actions ever represent Islam.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke powerfully about young men languishing in Saudi jails under threat of death. As she explained, and as the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) indicated, we simply do not have the clout either to get full information about those death sentences or to stop them. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) said, such sentences are imposed on grounds that cause us huge concerns about human rights and freedom of speech.

The targeting of anyone who raises civil rights concerns is a real concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke powerfully about a number of cases, including that of Raif Badawi, and the broader impact on families in Saudi Arabia who live in fear or are forced to flee. Like her, I am keen to hear from the Minister how and when concerns from the ground.

Internally, Saudi Arabia imposes a harsh interpretation of sharia law on citizens and visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. While we rightly recoil at the beheadings and barbarity of Daesh, we appear to look the other way as public beheadings continue to take place in Saudi Arabia, with perhaps 100 already in the first five months of this year. By its actions, and given its status as the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia gives comfort to those who would spread such barbarity across the region—indeed, across the globe—in the name of religion, even though in no way do those actions ever represent Islam.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke powerfully about young men languishing in Saudi jails under threat of death. As she explained, and as the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) indicated, we simply do not have the clout either to get full information about those death sentences or to stop them. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) said, such sentences are imposed on grounds that cause us huge concerns about human rights and freedom of speech.

The targeting of anyone who raises civil rights concerns is a real concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke powerfully about a number of cases, including that of Raif Badawi, and the broader impact on families in Saudi Arabia who live in fear or are forced to flee. Like her, I am keen to hear from the Minister how and when concerns from the ground.

As we have heard many times in the House in recent months, there is widespread and legitimate concern about the actions of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West talked about information from Amnesty International that described cluster munition drops late last year and the indirect and direct dangers faced by those on the ground.

Sir Alan Duncan: To just to be clear, may I ask the hon. Lady what her party’s policy is on trying to restore legitimate Government in Yemen and resisting the violent takeover and displacement of the legitimate Government?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his somewhat surprising intervention. I think he fails to grasp the point of the debate. We are delighted to see legitimate Governments in place in countries across the world, but that does not mean that we support the indiscriminate actions of the Saudi Arabian regime. When I last raised Saudi Arabia’s role in Yemen in the Chamber, it was against the backdrop of the UN panel’s report, which revealed widespread air strikes on populated areas and documented more than 100 coalition sorties that could have been in violation of international humanitarian law. Estimates at that time suggested that more than 8,000 people had been killed in Yemen in less than a year, at least 1,500 of them children. A number of hon. Members have mentioned that today. Reflecting on the information presented in that last debate, I was disappointed and a bit perplexed to read that the UN had removed Saudi Arabia from a blacklist of countries guilty of serious abuse of children’s rights, all the while confirming that many of the concerns highlighted in its panel’s report were justifi

Margaret Ferrier: Human Rights Watch accused Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, of giving in to political manipulation by the Saudi authorities. Has the UN lost the plot on this issue?

Kirsten Oswald: I share my hon. Friend’s concerns. I understand that when discussing that the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the UN stated that “the most up-to-date equipment in precision targeting” is used. However, as we have heard so often in the House in recent months, some of the armaments used are almost certainly those sold to Saudi Arabia by the UK. Precision armaments would be far better used to bolster international efforts against Daesh than to destroy the civil infrastructure of Yemen.

Yemen was already a poor country by the standards of the region even before the Saudi-led campaign started. Now, even more of its people are dying from preventable diseases, apparently because high-precision weapons have decimated hospitals, medical supplies and infrastructure. With difficulties in distributing aid, its people face malnutrition, with a massive increase in acute malnutrition among children.

As Saudi Arabia pursues a conflict that appears to owe more to its fear of Iran than any legitimate interests in Yemen, it demonstrates the gap between the sophistication of its arms and the callous disregard it has for the people of Yemen. Children are used as pawns by both sides in the conflict. With millions out of school, another lost generation is more likely to fall prey to the call of the extremist. How can we conclude that Saudi Arabia, the most powerful force in the region even before the Saudi-led campaign started, is almost certainly those sold to Saudi Arabia by the UK. Precision armaments would be far better used to bolster international efforts against Daesh than to destroy the civil infrastructure of Yemen.

As we have heard many times in the House in recent months, there is widespread and legitimate concern about the actions of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West talked about information from Amnesty International that described cluster munition drops late last year and the indirect and direct dangers faced by those on the ground.

Sir Alan Duncan: To just to be clear, may I ask the hon. Lady what her party’s policy is on trying to restore legitimate Government in Yemen and resisting the violent takeover and displacement of the legitimate Government?
In recent months, we have noted the re-emergence of the practice of siege or blockade as a weapon of war. The Saudi-led coalition has been operating a de facto siege of the whole of Yemen, a country that relies almost entirely on imports for its food. More than 14 million Yemenis have been identified as food-insecure, but the aid effort is able to cope with only a fraction of that, leaving many Yemenis unable to tell where their next meal is coming from.

I was pleased to receive confirmation in a recent debate that the UK Government view the imposition of starvation and the deliberate destruction of the means of daily life for civilians as a matter for the International Criminal Court. If that is the case, perhaps the Minister will explain why we are still selling arms in large quantities to a country using that tactic against not a town or city but a whole country. The blockade must be stopped. Instead of selling arms, we should be providing support to ensure that supplies and humanitarian aid can be distributed to the Yemeni population.

Helen Whately: Does the hon. Lady not agree that having a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia gives us an opportunity to ask questions directly and put pressure on the Government to address our concerns? We must do that thoughtfully, recognising the importance of stability over chaos in the region.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, but I wonder how long we will continue to put these points thoughtfully to the Saudi Arabian regime because it clearly has not worked so far. By continuing to arm the Saudi Arabsians, the UK compromises its own standing and the legitimacy of its foreign policy. The Government must use their influence to change the dynamic. They must consider the terrible impact of the bombardment of populated areas with British-made bombs.

Whatever the justification for the Saudi determination to influence the presidency of Yemen, that cannot be at the expense of the lives and livelihoods of the Yemeni people. I say to the Minister there are no bad countries, only bad leaders. The Government have been willing to put the Yemeni people through what they have endured for the last year, but it seems that Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi falls into the category of bad leader. If he is successful in returning to power, it will be a hollow victory, and our Government need to think carefully about their actions in that regard. We need to come clean about the specific involvement of the UK military in arms sales training and logistics in relation to the military operations in Yemen, and we need to answer questions about international and humanitarian law in the case of that conflict.

10.40 am

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mrs Gillan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing today’s debate. This is an important subject and a timely debate. Her opening remarks ranged widely over domestic and international human rights issues.

There is much to be said about Saudi Arabia’s domestic human rights record, but because of time constraints I will, as many other hon. Members have done, concentrate my remarks on Yemen. It is clear that human rights are not being upheld in the conflict there. A leaked report in January found “widespread and systematic” targeting of civilians in the Saudi-led strikes and identified 2,682 civilians killed in violations of international humanitarian law.

I am particularly concerned about the position of children, which was highlighted by the excellent report on Yemen by the Select Committee on International Development, released earlier this year, and by last week’s release of the UN Secretary-General’s 2016 report on children in conflict, which particularly focused on Yemen, and which my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) mentioned in an intervention. The report found that children represent one third of civilian casualties in Yemen. According to UNICEF, child casualty rates have increased sevenfold from 2014. Both the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis are listed for the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals.

There is no doubt that the Houthis have committed egregious breaches of international law, which the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) referred to. I am aware of his background as the envoy to Yemen on behalf of the Government, and he obviously speaks with great knowledge of the area. However, the position of the Saudi-led coalition also poses particular problems for us in Britain. Saudi Arabia is a friend and ally and we should expect higher standards of our friends, particularly when we have sold them £2.8 billion-worth of arms since the start of their action in Yemen.

The groups listed in the report for grave violations against children include the Syrian, Sudanese, South Sudanese and Somali Governments, as well as ISIL/Daesh and Boko Haram. Although the Saudis appear to have got themselves removed from that list, their inclusion on it in the first place should cause the Government to think again. We would never sanction arms sales to any of the other groups or Governments on that list, or to the Houthis. So the question we must ask ourselves is why we are sanctioning arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

Last year, the Justice Secretary took the decision that human rights standards in the Saudi justice system were so low that it could not be considered a proper partner for the British Government, and he withdrew the UK from the Saudi prisons contract. Today, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) has mentioned, the front page of The Times refers to work being done through British police and forensic support. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), the shadow Home Secretary, has called for that contract to be ended, in the light of concerns about human rights abuses that have been raised. There is therefore a similar question for the Foreign Secretary to answer. Is a country that the UN listed, albeit temporarily, alongside Daesh a proper partner for the UK?

That is not just a moral question for the Foreign Office, but a legal one. Arms sales must not be sanctioned when “there is a clear risk that they may be used in violation of International Humanitarian Law.”

It is the view of the Opposition, and has been since last year, that the evidence is sufficient to constitute a serious risk that UK-provided arms may be used in violations of international humanitarian law.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?
Diana Johnson: I am going to carry on, because I want to give the Minister sufficient time to respond to everything that has been raised today.

The Government have steadfastly rejected the view I have set out, and the evidence that supports it. They make two claims in support of Saudi Arabia: first, that the Saudi-led coalition’s actions are not in breach of international law; and secondly, that Saudi Arabia has a proper process in place to investigate alleged breaches. Indeed, the Government rely on the second argument to assert the first. I have consistently challenged the Government to explain why they believe Saudi Arabia is in the best position to conduct an investigation, and I have never had a proper response from any Minister. I challenge the Minister again today to explain why he believes that the best course of action is for Saudi Arabia to conduct the investigation itself, and how that can be seen to be thorough, impartial and transparent.

What assurances have the British Government received that that will be the case? Are the British Government providing any practical support and assistance to the Saudis in their investigation?

I want to challenge the Government on that point: that the evidence against the Saudi-led coalition is insufficient to constitute a risk that British weapons could be involved in breaches of international law. That is the case the Government have been making to the International Development Committee and to the Committees on Arms Export Controls. However, it is not a convincing case, as has been pointed out in an excellent letter from the director of Human Rights Watch UK to the Foreign Secretary. That comprehensively dismantles the Government’s case. I do not want to read out long extracts, but I ask the Minister to look at that letter again.

It is certainly the view of the Opposition that the available evidence meets the test to suspend arms sales until the Committees on Arms Export Controls have completed their hearings. That position has for some time been consistently expressed by me, the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), and the Leader of the Opposition. It is time now, in the light of all of the evidence cited in the debate, for the Government to concede that the evidence simply does not support their position. I call on the Minister to be brave and bold, and show some courage—the same courage that the Justice Secretary showed in standing up to Saudi Arabia over the prisons contract. That would certainly be a case of putting British values into action.

10.47 am

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on securing today’s debate and on the passion with which she put her case. I apologise to her for missing the first few seconds of her remarks. I also want to express the regret of the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), for not being able to speak here today. He is actually travelling on middle east business today.

I will try to focus my remarks on answers to the many points that came up during the debate. I am deeply conscious that in the limited time available I am almost certainly going to give incomplete replies, and that I may be unable to touch on some points at all. I was disappointed when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) questioned the case for Saudi Arabia even to be considered a fit and proper partner for the United Kingdom. That would certainly be a major departure from the position taken by previous Labour Governments, including the one in which she served in the years before 2010. There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is a very different culture, with different political traditions from those of the United Kingdom or other western democracies. However, we need to bear it in mind that it plays an increasingly important part in securing regional stability.

It is important that the big regional players should be at the heart of discussions about finding solutions to regional challenges. The Saudis have been and remain at the forefront of international efforts to defeat Daesh. Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries to participate in air strikes in Syria, and it is fully engaged in the fight to cut off Daesh’s access to finance, through its co-chairmanship of the counter-ISIL finance working group. In relation to Syria, Saudi Arabia has played a leading role in bringing together the Syrian opposition—a key element of finding a solution to the conflict. I want to say a few words about Yemen in due course, but I want to turn to the questions that were raised about some other human rights topics.

The Government remain committed to advancing the global abolition of the death penalty. That means opposing it in every circumstance, in every country. We encourage Saudi Arabia certainly to abolish the death penalty, as we do with every other country that has the death penalty on its statute book. We also encourage Saudi Arabia, so long as it has the death penalty within its law, to uphold minimum international standards, such as ensuring that sentencing is in line with article 6 of the international covenant on civil and political rights. Among other things, that means the death penalty should not be applied to minors and should only be applied to the most serious crimes.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Saudi Arabia last week in the course of a tour of the Gulf region, and he took that opportunity to raise with senior Saudi counterparts our concerns about human rights issues in the generic sense and a number of individual cases that I will come to in a moment. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West asked about a number of cases. On that of Mr Ashrar Fayadh, our understanding is that the Saudi Arabian courts have overturned the death sentence passed upon him, although he remains in detention. We continue to follow that and similar cases closely.

During his visit on 29 May, the Foreign Secretary raised the case of Ali al-Nimr and the two others who were juveniles when they committed the crimes of which they were subsequently convicted. Our expectation is that Ali al-Nimr and the two others will not be executed, but we will of course continue to raise those cases with the Saudi authorities. The hon. Lady asked about Raif Badawi. We remain very concerned about that case. We continue to express that concern at both official and ministerial levels to the Saudis. Our understanding is that the case is still under consideration in the Saudi supreme court, but we do not expect further lashes to be administered.
A number of hon. Members asked questions about the alleged use of cluster munitions by Saudi forces in Yemen. The situation as regards the United Kingdom is this: we have not supplied cluster weapons of any kind to Saudi Arabia since the 1980s. The United Kingdom signed the convention on cluster munitions in 2008 and ratified it in May 2010. Since 2008, we have not supplied, maintained or supported those weapons anywhere in the world.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: No, I am not going to give way.

The Government take the allegations that have been made about Yemen very seriously. We are seeking clarification from the Saudi-led coalition about those allegations, and in line with our obligations under the convention on cluster munitions, we have always made it clear to the Saudis that we cannot support the use of cluster munitions in any circumstances. We continue to encourage Saudi Arabia as a non-party to the convention to accede to it. Accession to the convention will then oblige Saudi Arabia, as it obliged the United Kingdom when we ratified the convention, to take steps to not only identify but dispose safely of any stocks of cluster munitions that it may have, either on its own territory or anywhere else within its jurisdiction.

Much of this debate has focused upon Yemen. I should say, in response to the questions about the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, that we are supporting United Nations Development Programme-led efforts to rebuild the capacity of Yemen’s national de-mining institutions, including YEMAC. That is part of our wider humanitarian help to Yemen. We are contributing just over £1 million to that work in 2016 from the cross-departmental programme expenditure within Whitehall.

On the Yemen situation more broadly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) set out the overall geopolitical position with both succinctness and skill. The fact is that the Saudi-led coalition is present in Yemen at the invitation of the legitimate Government of that country. I do not think we can simply wash our hands and say, “We wish they were not there, but we don’t want to express any view about the Houthis, the fate of Yemen or the wider region.”

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr Lidington: No, I am not giving way. In fairness, the hon. Lady intervened many times during the course of the debate. I have little time available, and I think her hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, wants some time to reply to the debate at the end of our proceedings.

The coalition is there at the invitation of the legitimate Government. Saudi Arabia, whatever criticisms we make of it, is actively helping the United Nations supervision of humanitarian assistance in Yemen, and my understanding is that Saudi Arabia is also the largest single bilateral donor to the humanitarian relief taking place in Yemen. Those things, too, need to be weighed in any overall judgment we make about the activities of the coalition within Yemen.

In respect of the allegations about breaches of international humanitarian law, the Ministry of Defence makes assessments of how the Saudis are acting and whether the coalition is observing international human rights obligations. The MOD assessment is that the Saudi-led coalition is not targeting civilians; that Saudi processes and procedures have been put in place to ensure respect for the principles of international humanitarian law; and that the Saudis both have been and continue to be genuinely committed to compliance with international humanitarian law.

Mark Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP) rose—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. It is quite clear that the Minister is not going to give way.

Mr Lidington: That is the overall frame within which we move on to judge some of the particular and detailed allegations that have been made. I do not want for one moment to dismiss the importance of such allegations. It is important that any allegation is properly and rigorously investigated.

As the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East, said when he gave evidence to the recent investigation of the Committees on Arms Export Controls, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), we press the Saudis to carry out such investigations and to do so with all possible speed. It is the responsibility of any country, where allegations are made against its military, to take action to investigate those allegations. That is what we do and what we did when allegations were made against our forces in Iraq and in Afghanistan. It is what we expected of the United States when comparable allegations were made.

It is important that Saudi Arabia, in the first instance, conducts thorough and conclusive investigations into incidents where it is alleged that international humanitarian law has been breached. Saudi Arabia did conduct such an investigation following the October Médecins sans Frontières incident in Sa’ada, and the results of that investigation led to a number of important steps being taken by the Saudis to avoid any such incident happening again. There were changes to procedures. I do not say we need to be uncritical of Saudi Arabia, but we need to bear it in mind that it showed, in respect of that significant incident, that it was willing to look at where things had gone wrong and to take steps to improve matters for the future.

I will write to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) about the points he made on the Home Office and the story in The Times today. That is clearly a matter the Home Office leads on. The Government’s judgment remains that a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia helps us to keep this country both prosperous and safe. It is in working with Saudi Arabia that we can encourage the changes we would like to see in that country.

10.59 am

Margaret Ferrier: I thank Members of all parties who have taken part in today’s debate, including those who made important interventions—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).
Fire Service: Flooding and Statutory Duties

11 am

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House has considered flooding and statutory duties of the fire service.

It is a pleasure to see you presiding this morning, Mrs Gillan, and I am glad to see the Minister taking his place. It is only appropriate that two former firefighters are contributing to the debate.

Let me start with a couple of points on the general history of the fire and rescue service—[Interjection.]

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. Can I ask Members to have their conversations outside the Chamber and respect the Member who has moved the motion?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mrs Gillan.

As I was saying, I will start with a couple of points on the history of the fire and rescue service. The great fire of London was in 1666, which was the beginning of insurance fire brigades and voluntary pumps being deployed in London. The fire of 1834 destroyed most of the Palace of Westminster and led to the creation of a London county council and of a London fire brigade, which this year is enjoying its 150th anniversary, which I know the Minister is celebrating—happy birthday to the London fire brigade. Statutory duties have evolved over the centuries in which fire brigades themselves have been evolving.

I thank the House of Commons Library and Pat Strickland for briefing paper No. 07605, “Should Fire and Rescue Services have a statutory duty to deal with flooding?” Before I quote from that, I want to make reference not only to the increasing incidents of flooding, but to their severity and regularity. A role that the fire and rescue service used to tackle once in a blue moon is now a core activity for many brigades. A Fire Brigades Union document details the extent of the new demand, stating:

“Firefighters responded magnificently to the winter 2013-14 floods, the largest deployment by the fire and rescue services since Second World War. Across the UK over the entire three months…firefighters responded to nearly seven thousand incidents”, and “effected a large number of rescues…almost two thousand across the UK.”

A briefing note from the Greater Manchester fire and rescue service said that on Boxing day 2015 it deployed two thirds of its available resources on flood response.

I cannot imagine that the Minister will be in denial either that floods are on the rise or that the fire and rescue service is doing more of this type of work than ever before. There is certainly no room for him to deny that we have seen a significant reduction in the numbers of firefighters in the fire and rescue service since 2010.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is not just the fire services that are putting the information out there. The Met Office has said that we are in the middle of one of the most “exceptional periods of winter rainfall in at least 248 years.” Is it not very clear that we need a fully resourced fire service, backed up by a statutory duty?

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which I will reinforce in a moment.

Lancaster University states:

“The London Fire Brigade is only able to respond to less than half of calls within its six minute target following the closure of 10 stations. The closures coupled with the loss of over 552 firefighters and 14 engines in central London were made in 2014 as part of Government cutbacks of £29m.”

Greater Manchester fire and rescue service has seen a 25% cut since 2010. Its briefing says that in 2009-10, it had 1,598 front-line firefighter posts. By 2019-20, it will have 1,026—a loss of 572 firefighter posts, a reduction of 35%.

The Fire Brigades Union’s 2015 floods report outlines the depth of the cuts. It says that 6,740 positions were lost between 2011 and 2015. The same report lists the number of flood incidents and rescues: in December 2015 alone, there were 2,589 incidents and 2,808 rescues. Flooding is on the increase, as my hon. Friend outlined. We only have to look to France and Germany last week, or at London and the flash floods yesterday.

In the general election campaign of 2010, the Prime Minister spoke at Carlisle fire station and promised to protect front-line public services, but between 2011 and 2015, Cumbria lost one in eight firefighters. Five fire stations were earmarked for closure in Cumbria before the flooding in December last year, and in February this year, the local council cited the floods as a key reason to keep the stations operational.

The question is whether a statutory duty is needed. The Commons Library briefing paper and the Fire Brigades Union briefing refer to the existing legislation. On the law in England and Wales, both documents say that part 2 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 sets out the statutory core functions of fire and rescue authorities. Those are statutory duties to provide for fire safety, firefighting, and rescuing people and protecting them from harm in the event of road traffic accidents. The Library briefing paper states:

“Section 9 gives the Secretary of State the power to give FRAs functions relating to other emergencies, including outside the FRAs area. This is an order-making power. Primary legislation would not be necessary.”

The Fire Brigades Union has outlined its position:

“The FBU has serious concerns about the resources available to the fire and rescue service to ensure resilience against flooding…These include the number of firefighters, boats and equipment available…There are issues of staffing, technology and resilience in fire control rooms…The FBU believes a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service in England and Wales, along with investment in the service, provides the best guarantee of resilience to flooding going forward”.

It explained why it has that belief: “A statutory duty would add significantly to fire and rescue service resilience when faced with flooding. Such a duty would…Underscore the need to resource fire and rescue services specifically for flooding…Assist with strategic planning, not only between fire and rescue services and local resilience forums”—it should be “fora”—“but also between different fire and rescue services across England…Ensure firefighters play a full part in the temporary construction of flood defences, as they do in Sweden…Help ensure fire and rescue services have sufficient, professionally trained firefighters available to tackle flood emergencies…Ensure sufficient boats of the right quality are available…Help ensure sufficiently trained and equipped boat teams are available…Ensure sufficient control staff are available to”
handle calls and to make
“resources available to communities during the clear up, ensuring
premises are secure to hazardous substances testing and clear
up”.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The fire service could also have a strategic role in flood prevention and the protection of homes; that was missing in the recent floods. I add that the cuts coming to the fire service will have a serious impact on its ability to respond to floods, as we saw in York in 2015.

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a good point. She saw exactly the nature of flooding in York when it affected her constituency in recent years.

The Minister may very well ask why, when I was Fire Minister in 2006—“Irruption” / He kindly forewarned me that he would remind me that I was the Fire Minister in 2006. It was generous of him, and I think the criticism is absolutely fair, but I will come on to why I think times have changed in just a minute. Department for Communities and Local Government figures underscore the increase in the threat show that in 2007—a year after I was Fire Minister—there were 14,000 flooding calls, in 2011-12 there were 16,000, and in 2013-14 there were 18,000. I believe that demonstrates a pattern.

Even Age Concern—or Age UK, as it is now called—has weighed in. Suzanne Foster wrote to me:
“I wanted to send you a copy of a report published by Age UK on ‘Older people and power loss, floods and storms’,” which she said could be found online and was attached to her email. The first recommendation was:
“Join up essential services better”.

The result of the inquiry into the 2007 floods was clear. On the Pitt review, the Commons Library briefing paper states:
“The issue of a statutory duty was raised in the 2008 report of the Pitt Review into the 2007 floods. The Review took the view that a statutory duty would be beneficial”.
The text of the review states:
“The Review believes that clarifying and communicating the role of each of these bodies would improve the response to flooding. However, we are concerned that the systems, structures and protocols developed to support national coordination of multi-agency flood rescue assets remain ad-hoc. We believe that the Fire and Rescue Service should take on a leading role in this area, based on a fully funded capability. This will be most effective if supported by a statutory duty”.

Following on from that examination and text, it made recommendation 39:
“The Government should urgently put in place a fully funded national capability for flood rescue, with Fire and Rescue Authorities playing a leading role, underpinned as necessary by a statutory duty.”

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): My constituency was affected by the floods on Boxing day, and we asked many questions following the floods about giving the fire service a statutory duty. The Government’s response seemed to be that the fire service has attended, so there is no need for one. Fire brigades were attending fires for centuries, but a statutory duty was felt necessary in that case, although it was in only 1938 that it arrived, under the Fire Brigades Act 1938. That Act required every county borough council to make provision for “the extinction of fires and the protection of life and property in the case of fire.”

Why was a statutory duty needed? Because the situation, service and society were evolving, and something different was needed. There was a recognition that circumstances had changed. The fire service had been providing fire protection for centuries, but a statutory duty was introduced only in 1947. I have also mentioned the Fire Precautions Act 1971, when the Government suddenly realised that they needed a skilled workforce of about 20,000 people to police and enforce the new safety rules. That is what has changed the British fire service in the last 100 years. Ultimately, safer buildings and fewer people smoking have led to there being many fewer fires, deaths and serious injuries. Perversely, that has led to the huge cuts of the past six years.

The fire and rescue service is the victim of its own success in reducing fires, saving lives and preventing injuries, but at the same time it is evolving into new roles—not just flood response, but medical and social care. The Government are transferring the control of fire and rescue service to police and crime commissioners. The Minister knows that I and many colleagues believe that fire and ambulance services are a better fit, and that link is happening almost despite the Government.

Some county brigades in England are reporting that they are attending more medical calls than fire calls.

The London fire brigade and the London ambulance service have just begun a four-borough pilot of first responding and co-responding to specific emergency medical calls to save more lives in London. In the north-west, the fire and rescue service has joint working pilots on social care schemes. The service continues to evolve, as it has over time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) asked about a new statutory duty on flooding, but the Government’s answer has always been that the fire service has attended, so there is no need for one. Fire brigades were attending fires for centuries, but a statutory duty was felt necessary in that case, although it was in only 1938 that it arrived, under the Fire Brigades Act 1938. That Act required every county borough council to make provision for “the extinction of fires and the protection of life and property in the case of fire.”
by Fire Aid, we are deploying that expertise across the world, because we are among the leaders in rescuing victims in road traffic crashes, and we are proud of that.

In contrast, the Library briefing outlines the law in Scotland, stating:

“There is a power in the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 to make orders giving the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service additional functions. A Scottish SI (the Fire (Additional Function) (Scotland) Order 2005/342), creates a duty to make provision for the purpose of… rescuing people trapped, or likely to become trapped, by water…protecting them from serious harm, in the event of serious flooding in its area.

This duty was conferred on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service when this was created in April 2013.”

The briefing then refers to the law in Northern Ireland, stating:

“In Northern Ireland a very similar provision came into force in January 2012.”

The Library is saying that parts of the United Kingdom already have a statutory duty on flooding. Finally, as I have said, section 9 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 gives the Secretary of State power to give the fire and rescue authority functions relating to other emergencies. That is an order-making power, so primary legislation would not be necessary to create a statutory duty to deal with flooding. It works in Scotland; it works in Northern Ireland; so why not in England and Wales? I look forward to the Minister’s response.

11.15 am

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mrs Gillan. I have lots of conversations with the former Fire Minister, the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), because we are good friends and have the same feelings for the fire service, so at the start I should pay tribute to what the fire service did during the flooding over the Christmas and new year period, which was exemplary, I had the privilege of meeting many of the front-line firefighters and other emergency services that took part in that work.

Perhaps I should nudge the former Fire Minister, who does a lot of work with Fire Aid, to declare his interest in it. It does exemplary work and I know he champions it, but he did not mention that during his comments.

May I say at the outset that we are looking for the fire service, working with the other emergency services, to deliver the best possible rescue facilities and prevention work? I do not disagree with many of the points that have been made. I agree that I do not need primary legislation, although some of my civil servants may disagree slightly. I come back to the discussion that took place in 2008, when the Pitt review specifically referred to the role being underpinned “as necessary” by a statutory requirement. That was put before the Government of the day. I rarely do party politics, as most people know, but that was not this Administration or the coalition Administration, but a Labour Administration. Following the Pitt review and following the floods, they did not go ahead with that, but said that the fire service working with the other emergency services could do very well. I think the situation is similar today. The fire service has evolved tremendously.

Jim Fitzpatrick: Will the Minister give way?

Mike Penning: I may give way in a moment. Time will be difficult.

The fire service continues to evolve and not every fire service will come under police and crime commissioners. Around five PCCs are looking into this, but other PCCs and clinical commissioning groups are considering whether the ambulance service could be included. My views on this are pretty well known. I think the blue light emergency services must work much more closely together than now. I am chuffed that in London we have co-responding, but that is just the start. In Hampshire, there are qualified paramedics who are firemen. I apologise to the ladies, I mean firefighters. When I was in the job, there were only firemen.

It is important to see where the job is going. Yes, we are going to more flooding. We have always gone to flooding. I went to flooding and the London fire service went to a flood yesterday. None of the national resilience back-up was used yesterday. I asked the question before coming here today.

I am a former member of the Fire Brigades Union. I met the leadership and it put similar arguments to me. I will keep the matter under review. I will not comment too much on the numbers, not least because in other parts of the country we have seen firefighter numbers drop, but there has been a different way of delivering the service, including retained firefighters. London still has this policy, which I thought was an anomaly when I was in Essex—it will not allow retained firefighters on to its ground even if in their day job they are fully qualified firemen. I have never understood that and it is something that must be addressed as we evolve. I know that the union is trying to protect jobs, but in retrospect it is probably not doing that.

Lancashire has developed a completely different model. The union there wanted to protect jobs and to keep stations open. There was a risk of them closing so it went to the eight-eight day model, so that they were manned during the day with back-up crews during the evening. That is a completely different model. That is why local decision making is vital.

I am not denying that there are fewer firefighters, but there are dramatically fewer turn-outs. Fire prevention work started during our time in the job. I remember vividly arguing that firemen should go into homes to help to install smoke detectors. The situation has dramatically changed but there are still too many deaths and there is a lot more work to do.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): It is often said that there are far fewer fire incidents, but that varies from region to region, as I am sure the Minister is aware. The fact is that there are more and more flooding incidents in this country than ever before. Does that not mean we should be looking at the recommendations of the Pitt review in 2008 and give the fire and rescue service a statutory duty on flood and resilience?

Mike Penning: I will try to make my point a bit stronger. Respectfully, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, and the reason is that I cannot find an instance in which the fire service is not doing what it would do if there were a statutory duty. In fact, I have real concerns that, if we put in statutory powers, fire services would have
kit—and crews—sitting there, at huge expense, and the likelihood of it being used regularly would be completely different from what it would be in Cumbria, York and other parts of the country.

I know that the former Fire Minister understands this: if we say to the fire service, “You have a statutory duty,” it will put the kit in place. In many places, they have that kit. It would really worry me if we had lots of kit sitting around in areas where we know the risk is very minimal. I will keep the situation under review, but I am confident as to where we are. I am meeting in particular the metropolitan chief fire officers later today to discuss the issue, so I am not in any way saying that I will never look at it. I will keep it under review, but at present our position is like that of the Government in 2008. I accept that there are more flooding situations, but in terms of manning levels, we are going out to fewer calls, even though we are doing different sorts of calls. I remember going to flooding incidents quite extensively when I was in the job in the 1980s.

Liz McInnes: The Minister talks as though the flood rescue equipment is in a silo and cannot be used outside the area. In my constituency of Heywood and Middleton, we have a water rescue unit, and it was out in Cumbria during the Cumbrian floods. It does not just sit tight and gather dust.

Mike Penning: No, and that is the point I would make: that is a mutual aid piece of kit that is used, and mutual aid is becoming more and more important. I will come on to national resilience in a second. If we put in a statutory requirement, the neighbouring service, which went and helped brilliantly well, would have to have that there as well. That is what happens in the fire service if we make things statutory. I am confident about where we are, but I will continue to talk to the chiefs.

There are areas where I think we could move. I am thinking of the high-velocity pumps—they were never there when I was in the job, and I pay tribute to the previous Labour Administration who brought in that national asset—and where they sit. For instance, Sussex is about to take one of those pumps as part of its assets, which it will share in a mutual aid situation. I know the fire service listens to everything that the Fire and Police Minister says: I am looking to see whether we can develop that better around the country so that those assets sit where the risks would be, rather than it coming to, perhaps, a Cobra situation and us saying, “We will deploy,” which has a cost implication, or people requesting the deployment. I am talking about improving things in predictability terms. For instance, after we had the deployment. I am talking about improving things in predictability terms. For instance, after we had the Cumbrian floods. It does not just sit tight and gather dust.

Rachael Maskell: It is not just the firefighters who are calling for a statutory duty; it is also the chief officers in flood areas such as North Yorkshire. That is based on evidence as a result of the floods in 2015. They believe that a statutory duty would help them with preventive work as well as, obviously, dealing with flooding situations. They are saying that it is an imperative, so will the Minister listen to those chiefs?

Mike Penning: I do listen to the chiefs. They are firefighters as well, interestingly enough. I am sure that they would like to be classed as firefighters, not separate from firefighters—we may make a few enemies with some chief firefighters, but that is semantics. I do listen to the chiefs, and other chiefs in other parts of the country are not saying the same thing. What we need to do is ensure that we have the assets in the right place. To go back to the point about Lancashire, one of the crews said to me, “We did not have a flotation platform, so we were using salvage sheets and ladders,” which I trained with all those years ago; people would think we had moved on from there. I understand that that service is now looking at deploying that piece of kit. It does not take up a huge amount of space. It uses compressed air.

We have to look very carefully at this matter, and the brigadiers’ report on how the resilience worked during the flooding is crucial as well. We had a situation in which the Army could get in, because it was using what I still call 4-tonne trucks, but when we tried to follow them with fire appliances, many of them broke down and were severely damaged. That had a lot to do with the air intake and with positioning. People would think that in the 21st century we would have learned how to deal with those situations, but actually that is what we were learning. We also know that the cars of crews who came in and parked in one particular fire station were destroyed by flooding. We therefore need to look very carefully at the resilience that is there, and that is one reason why I am looking very carefully at the pumps.

The point I want to make is that we can change the title and say, “You should do this and you should do that,” but we have to ask whether the services are doing that first and whether that is the best utilisation of what we are asking them to do. There are some chiefs who take the view referred to, and the FBU has been running a very long campaign on this matter; it goes way back to when the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse was the Fire Minister. However, I am of the same opinion as the 2008 Minister: if necessary, we could do this, but at present—

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am glad that the Minister has at least said that he will keep the situation under review. The best argument he has is that a statutory duty would force all 40-odd fire and rescue services to buy the equipment when some of them may well not need it—but then a number of us have been advocating fewer fire authorities for a considerable time. It would
Jim Fitzpatrick: be much better to have regional structures and fewer chief fire officers and fewer fire and rescue authorities. That streamlining would be better. The key point here is that whether it is because of climate change or just weather patterns changing, floods are on the up; they are increasing exponentially. We need the equipment and resources to deal with that, and people think that a statutory duty is the only way to get the Government to focus on ensuring that those resources are available.

Mike Penning: I agree that the fire service is top-heavy in administration terms, which is why I am looking at PCCs who want to take over that administration and limit those costs, so that we have more money for the frontline; I am sure that we would all agree with that. Perhaps it is a question for another debate, on the number of fire and rescue services. That is a really emotive subject, because a local community relate, they tell me, to their fire service.

Ian Lavery: I will ask a very simple question and I am sure I will get a very simple answer. If it is right and correct that there is a statutory duty in Scotland and Northern Ireland, what is the difference with the people of England?

Mike Penning: I go back to the decision that was made in 2008. Devolved Assemblies will make their decisions on their priorities in their way. I have no evidence whatever that creating a statutory duty would enable our firefighters to do their job in regard to flood rescue and prevention any differently from how they do it now. However, I have said that I will keep an open mind. It is not a uniform view across the myriad fire and rescue services in this country that this should be statutory. The union has a view, and in most cases I agree with many of the things that the union says. I would do; I was a branch secretary for a short time. But on this issue, I do not agree, and the leadership know that I do not, so it will not come as a big surprise to them. This is really personal to me. I am sure the former Fire Minister will appreciate that if I thought that in any way, shape or form, this would do what it says on the tin, I would do it. I have real misgivings that actually there would be ongoing costs that would be disproportionate to what we were trying to do.

It has been very useful to discuss this issue this morning. I can probably look forward to further debates with the former Fire Minister and I am pleased to be giving him a few seconds now to respond.

11.29 am

Jim Fitzpatrick: Hesitation robbed me of another three seconds, but I am grateful to the Minister for this brief opportunity. I am grateful to my hon. Friends for turning up to support the debate. The Minister knows that there are Government Members who have a similar view. It is reassuring that he is prepared to keep this matter under review. Many of us, right across the country, are very worried about the level of cuts, because obviously if we have cuts and cuts and cuts, we get to a point at which the situation is too dangerous and then the Government start reinvesting. We are drawing attention to the fact that at the moment the cuts are in, if not beyond, that territory, and flooding is one of the additional pressures that the service is having to deal with. Because it is on the increase, we hope that the Minister will look at it seriously and ensure that the brigades affected get the resources that they need.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

[MR DAVID HANSON in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered governance of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I am grateful for the opportunity to open this important debate on the governance of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, a subject that has been the cause of mounting public concern over recent months. It has risen up the agenda as more information has come to light. It is right that we, as Members of Parliament, now have the chance to address it and to air our constituents’ concerns. For some, that is not a concern of just a few months’ standing, but a story that goes back many years.

For a number of patients under the care of Southern Health and, particularly, for the families and friends of those who have sadly died, this has been a long-running and painful saga. We will not resolve it for them today but we can ensure that the issues they care about are properly aired in public and are brought to wider attention.

I pay tribute to those relatives and campaigners, some of whom have come to Westminster today. I was glad to be able to meet with them earlier and to hear from them in person before the debate. I also thank the Minister for sparing the time to join us and to hear their experiences. With the permission of the relatives, I will refer to some of their stories during my remarks and other colleagues may also want to do so, where appropriate.

As well as having a connection to the subject as a constituency MP, I have taken an interest in the wider issues through my role on the all-party parliamentary group on Hampshire and Isle of Wight, on which I lead on health issues. The area covered by Southern Health goes wider than Hampshire, of course, and we have invited colleagues from elsewhere to our meetings when the subject has been under discussion.

Since last autumn, we have had a series of meetings with representatives of Southern Health, most notably with Katrina Percy, its chief executive, and other senior directors. Those meetings have allowed us to put robust questions to them and to hear their side of the story. Although I cannot claim to have been wholly satisfied by the answers we have received, I thank Ms Percy and her team for engaging with us on our concerns. Just yesterday, we had a very useful meeting with the new interim chairman of the trust, Tim Smart, and I extend our thanks to him.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): On behalf of many other MPs from Hampshire, I commend my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on the tenacity with which she has led on the issue on our behalf. She mentioned the appointment of a new chair. Does she feel that, under the new leadership, we will see more assurance from the Care Quality Commission that Southern Health has actually understood what changes are needed for the future? Some CQC reports we have read suggest that the problems that have been raised have not been addressed in a swift manner. Does my hon. Friend share my concern or does she think we will see progress?

Suella Fernandes: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend’s point and I thank her for her work and for standing up for her constituents who have been affected by the issue. We have met with members of the CQC and with NHS Improvement, and we put those points to them directly. I share her concern, particularly on behalf of families and relatives, who would like swifter action in future. However, I am grateful to those organisations for keeping us informed and for taking the time to ensure that MPs are briefed of their actions and plans.

The facts of the issue are well known to many of those here today and to those watching beyond Westminster. However, in opening the debate, it is important for me to recount the broad sequence of events and key facts to help those who may not be familiar with them and because they deserve to be put on the record as the backdrop to the rest of the debate. Let us begin at the beginning.

The tragic starting point of the story was the death of Connor Sparrowhawk. Connor, who had autism, a learning disability and epilepsy, was 18 when he was admitted to Slade House in Oxford in March 2013. The facility was a learning disability short-term assessment and treatment unit run by Southern Health, which had taken it over from the previous provider, Ridgeway, in November the previous year.

On 4 July 2013, Connor was found submerged and unconscious in a bath at the centre. Staff tried to resuscitate him and an ambulance took him to John Radcliffe hospital but, sadly, he died the same day. The initial post-mortem examination concluded that Connor drowned as the result of an epileptic seizure. Southern Health carried out a serious incident requiring investigation report and an initial management assessment, and commissioned an independent consultancy to undertake an internal investigation. That investigation concluded that Connor’s death was preventable and stated:

“The failure of staff at the unit to respond to and appropriately profile and risk assess CS’s epilepsy led to a series of poor decisions around his care…The level of observations in place at Radcliffe hospital but, sadly, he died the same day. The initial post-mortem examination concluded that Connor drowned as the result of an epileptic seizure. Southern Health carried out a serious incident requiring investigation report and an initial management assessment, and commissioned an independent consultancy to undertake an internal investigation. That investigation concluded that Connor’s death was preventable and stated:

Following the publication of that first investigation report in February 2014, Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board and NHS England had ongoing concerns about the quality and safety of learning disability services provided by Southern Health in Oxfordshire, and the improvements that needed to be made. They therefore commissioned a further report in June 2014, which was charged with looking at whether the way in which learning disability services were commissioned or managed contributed to Connor’s preventable death.

The new report was published in October last year and contained a number of criticisms. It stated that there had been warnings about the standard of care in facilities including Slade House, and criticised the management processes following the transfer of services to Southern Health. It found that

“for Southern Health to only rely on its normal reporting mechanisms without addressing the…warning and ensuring that information from local managers was accurate was a serious failure.”

It also found that

“the trust did not evaluate or address the known concerns about the quality of local leadership”,

and that:

“An over reliance on ‘business as usual’ approach to this acquisition was not appropriate.”
The report concluded:

“Southern Health should have ensured that any deterioration in the quality of services could be identified quickly and by processes that Southern Health had confidence in.”

That was the first serious criticism of the overall management of the services.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend described a catalogue of disasters. From the conversations she has had, what confidence does she have that the situation has been put right? I represent an Oxfordshire constituency. Can we have confidence in doing business with Southern Health?

Suella Fernandes: From speaking to families, relatives and patients, it is clear that they are struggling to have confidence in the services provided by Southern Health. The very reason that the debate is happening is so that we can air those concerns and, hopefully, find a pathway to restoring public trust. That is clearly the challenge facing the organisation.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the problems communicated to her by families, which echo and reflect the precise concerns about which the families sitting in the Public Gallery feel strongly. They emphasise that this is not an isolated issue. This is something that we all need to take seriously.

The Mazars report is the next chapter in this story. At the request of Connor’s family, NHS England commissioned an independent report into the deaths of people with learning disabilities or mental health problems while under Southern Health’s care. The report reviewed the deaths of people in receipt of care from mental health and learning disability services in the trust between April 2011 and March 2015. The report sought to establish the extent of unexpected deaths in those services and to identify issues that needed further investigation.

The report was published in December 2015, and its main findings included, first, that many investigations into deaths were of “poor quality” and took too long to complete. Secondly:

“There was a lack of leadership, focus and sufficient time spent in the Trust on carefully reporting and investigating…deaths”.

Thirdly, there was a lack of family involvement in investigations after a death and, fourthly, opportunities for the trust to learn and improve were missed.

Of the 1,454 deaths recorded at the trust during the period under investigation, 722 were categorised by the trust as unexpected. Of those, the review looked at 540 and found that only 272 unexpected deaths received a significant investigation. The report did not specify how many investigations there should have been, but it drew attention to the limited number of deaths that were investigated in different categories. The trust has questioned the use of some of those figures, but the picture painted overall was one of inconsistent standards for investigations, raising the worrying prospect that an unspecified number of deaths may not have been investigated properly. The question of whether there may have been other preventable deaths like that of Connor Sparrowhawk could not be definitively answered, which has led to a great deal of concern among the trust’s patients and something of a breakdown in confidence.

Understandably, people want to know that they or their loved ones will be safe in the care of Southern Health. Those whose relatives have died while under the trust’s care need reassurance that the investigations were properly conducted and that the deaths were not also the result of avoidable errors.

My constituent Richard West is one of those relatives. His son, David, died in 2013, and he has been seeking answers from the trust ever since. At times, the handling of his case has been very poor indeed. Mr West, a former detective and policeman, says that he was ignored and was even told by a representative of the trust that the deaths of patients in its care were “like an airline losing baggage.” I know from speaking to other families that others have experienced similarly insensitive treatment.

The Mazars report contained serious and specific criticisms of the trust and its management. In particular, it levelled criticism at the board itself for the failures. It found that “there has been a lack of leadership, focus and sufficient time spent on reporting and investigating unexpected deaths of Mental Health and Learning Disability service users at all levels of the Trust including at the Trust Board.”

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I applaud the hon. Lady on securing this debate and on her excellent speech. In just about any other organisation, such a searing indictment of the board and, by implication, its executives would have resulted in their resigning. Is she surprised that they did not simply stand down and accept responsibility, as they should have?

Suella Fernandes: There is a lot of pressure from the public, patients and families for people to step down, and the resignation of the chairman of the board is a reflection of the seriousness with which Southern Health takes this issue.

The report continued:

“Due to a lack of strategic focus relating to mortality and to the relatively small numbers of deaths in comparison with total reported safety incidents this has resulted in deaths having little prominence at Board level… There are a number of facets to this poor leadership…: a failure to consistently improve the quality of investigations and of the subsequent reports; a lack of Board challenge to the systems and processes around the investigation of deaths…: a lack of a consistent corporate focus on death reflected in Board reports which are inconsistent over time and which centre only on a small part of the available data; an ad hoc and inadequate approach to involving families and carers in investigations; a lack of focus on deaths amongst the health and social care services caring for people with a Learning Disability; limited information presented at Board and sub-committee level relating to deaths in these groups…; and a lack of attention to key performance indicators… indicating considerable delays in completing…investigations.”
The report also found:

“There was no effective systematic management and oversight in reporting deaths and the investigations that follow... The Trust could not demonstrate a comprehensive, systematic approach to learning from deaths”.

In what I consider one of its most damning findings, the Mazars report also found evidence of repeated warnings being ignored:

“Despite the Board being informed on a number of occasions, including in representation from Coroners, that the quality of the...reporting...and standard of investigation was inadequate no effective action was taken to improve investigations”.

The report also stated:

“Despite the Trust having comprehensive data relating to deaths of its service users it has failed to use it effectively to understand mortality and issues relating to deaths of its Mental Health or Learning Disability service users.”

By any measure, those criticisms were immensely serious and required a robust response.

Following the report’s publication, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health expressed his determination to learn the lessons of the report and set out a number of measures to address the issues raised, including a focused inspection by the Care Quality Commission looking in particular at the trust’s approach to the investigation of deaths. As part of that inspection, the CQC was asked to assess the trust’s progress on implementing the action plan required by NHS Improvement and on making the improvements required by its last inspection, published in February 2015. Separately, the CQC was also asked to undertake a wider review of the investigation of deaths in a sample of all types of NHS trusts in different parts of the country. That is particularly important because we need to know whether the problems and failings at Southern Health are exceptional outliers or whether there is a similar problem in other parts of the country.

The trust accepted the findings of the Mazars report and apologised unreservedly for the failings identified. NHS Improvement set out in January 2016 its plans to provide assistance to the trust to ensure that it delivers on plans to implement the agreed improvements, which include the appointment of a new improvement director and the taking of advice from independent experts. All those measures were agreed by the trust’s management, and in January we had a letter from the chief executive officer setting that out.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. She is outlining that there is an improvement plan, that the board has agreed and that NHS Improvement is helping, but one thing that seems to be frustrating people, particularly in my constituency, is the lack of a hard date on which we can judge that the corner has been turned. Does she agree that it would be sensible for NHS Improvement, or the board itself, to set some kind of deadline by which a judgment can be made? Otherwise, improvement is purely on the never-never and we will never know publicly whether the trust has got to where it needs to be.

Suella Fernandes: My hon. Friend makes a sensible suggestion, which I echo. A deadline with key targets and dates would be hugely valuable, not only in motivating people and focusing minds but in restoring public trust in all the organisations involved.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and on her articulate explanation of the issues involved and the tragedies that have befallen a number of patients.

Clearly there has been a failing of clinical governance in the trust on a massive scale. However, I wonder whether my hon. Friend will reflect on two points. First, it is very difficult to deliver improvements in quality in a resource-poor environment, notwithstanding the clinical governance issues, and we know that child and adolescent mental health services and learning disability services have been chronically underfunded for many years nationally.

Secondly, people with learning disabilities often have complex physical healthcare needs as well as mental healthcare needs, and improved staff training needs to be put in place nationally. That needs to be properly resourced and funded if we are to make a meaningful difference and get things right for people in the future.

Suella Fernandes: I totally agree with my hon. Friend’s observation. There is a challenge here. This is unfamiliar territory for the NHS, and funding will be necessary to support any new attempt to make progress following debates such as this one.

Inspectors from the Care Quality Commission visited Southern Health as part of the planned inspection during January of this year. Following that inspection, the CQC announced on 6 April that it had issued a warning notice to Southern Health, telling the trust that it must make significant improvements to protect patients at risk of harm while in the care of its mental health and learning disability services. The announcement stated that the notice required the trust to improve its governance arrangements to ensure that there was robust investigation and learning from incidents and deaths, to reduce further risks to patients.

The team of inspectors also checked on improvements that had been required in some of the trust’s mental health and learning disability services following previous inspections. They found that the trust had failed to mitigate significant risks posed by some of the physical environments from which it delivered mental health and learning disability services.

On the wider issue of reporting deaths, the inspectors found that the trust did not operate effective governance arrangements to ensure robust investigation of incidents, including deaths; did not adequately ensure that it learned from incidents, so as to reduce future risk to patients; and did not effectively respond to concerns about safety that had been raised by patients, their carers and staff, or to concerns raised by trust staff about their ability to carry out their roles effectively.

All those findings, and the serious step of issuing a warning notice, reinforce the most serious of the Mazars findings. Dr Paul Lelliott, the CQC’s deputy chief inspector of hospitals and lead for mental health, was quoted as saying that the services provided by Southern Health required “significant improvement”. He said:

“We found longstanding risks to patients, arising from the physical environment, that had not been dealt with effectively. The Trust’s internal governance arrangements to learn from serious incidents or investigations were not good enough, meaning that opportunities to minimise further risks to patients were lost.
It is only now, following our latest inspection and in response to the warning notice, that the Trust has taken action and has identified further action that it will take to improve safety at Kingsley ward, Melbury Lodge in Hampshire and Evenlode in Oxfordshire. The Trust must also continue to make improvements to its governance arrangements for reporting, monitoring, investigating and learning from incidents and deaths. CQC will be monitoring this Trust very closely and will return to check on improvements and progress in the near future.

The CQC published the full report of its January 2016 inspection at the end of April 2016. It confirmed the concerns that had been raised in the warning notice and gave further details of specific issues. The chairman of Southern Health's board, Mike Petter, resigned the day before the report was published.

On the same day that the CQC published its warning notice, NHS Improvement issued a statement announcing that it was seeking further powers to intervene in the trust's governance, to ensure that the trust complies with the improvements required of it. NHS Improvement said that it intended to insert an additional condition into the trust's licence to supply NHS services, which would allow NHS Improvement to make management changes at the trust if progress was not made on addressing the concerns that had been raised.

The additional condition was imposed on 14 April, and the statutory notice contained severe criticism of the trust and its leadership. It stated that undertakings that the trust gave in April 2014 that it would comply with enforcement notices relating to breaches of its governance conditions were yet to be delivered in full. It notes that additional undertakings were made by the trust in January 2016 in response to the Mazars report and summarises the CQC's findings from its inspection in January, saying that the warning notice had identified “longstanding risks to patients” that had not been addressed. It then said:

"In the light of these matters, and the other available evidence, Monitor—

that is, NHS Improvement—

"is satisfied that the Board is failing to secure compliance with the Licensee's licence conditions and failing properly to take steps to reduce the risk of non-compliance. In those circumstances, Monitor is satisfied that the governance of the Licensee is such that the Licensee is failing and will fail to comply with the conditions of its licence."

On that basis, NHS Improvement, or Monitor, has imposed a new condition to Southern Health's licence, requiring that it

"has in place sufficient and effective board, management and clinical leadership capacity and capability, as well as appropriate governance systems and processes, to enable it to:

address the failures in governance

"and comply with any enforcement undertakings, or discretionary requirements, imposed by Monitor in relation to these issues."

Kit Malthouse: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me for a second time.

One of the frustrations that I think we have all had throughout this sorry saga has been about the lack of any sense of personal responsibility or line management for particular risks. A thought occurs to me. Can my hon. Friend say who at NHS Improvement will take the decision about whether the trust should be given its licence? I ask that because I have a sense that unless we know who that person is, we will not be able properly to take a view about whether their judgment is right. If the decision disappears into a bureaucratic organisation, it may well never emerge in a timely fashion. Does she have an idea of who is responsible? If she does not, perhaps the Minister could let us know what the processes are regarding the taking of the decision and who finally gets to sign on the dotted line that everything is all right, or not.

Suella Fernandes: I agree that there is a real risk, as my hon. Friend says so eloquently, of this issue falling into a bureaucratic abyss. It is absolutely vital that we have clear processes and that the identities of the responsible people and professionals are clear, so that there is a clear line of accountability for users and indeed for MPs.

Following the resignation of Mike Petter as chairman of Southern Health, NHS Improvement exercised its power to intervene to appoint his replacement, Tim Smart, who is now acting as interim chairman. The notice directing the trust to appoint him stated:

“These matters demonstrate that the Licensee—

that is, Southern Health—

“does not have in place sufficient or effective board management and clinical leadership capacity and capability, as well as appropriate governance systems and processes as required by additional licence conditions. Monitor is therefore satisfied that the Licensee is breaching the additional licence condition.”

Time and again, in report after report, Southern Health has been criticised for its failures of management and leadership, and the effects that those failures have had on the care that it provides. That is why I called for this debate that focuses on the governance of the trust. We all accept that, sadly, tragic failures in care will inevitably occur from time to time, and those at the top of an organisation cannot be held responsible for every incident on the frontline.

Equally, we must pay tribute to the dedicated staff of Southern Health for the excellent care that they give day in, day out for the majority of the time. We cannot and should not tar all of them with the same brush because of the failures of others. However, when clear and systematic problems have been identified, we are entitled to ask that lessons be learned. For me, the most shocking part of the sequence of events that I have just recounted is that right up until this year—indeed, even in the last couple of months—inspectors have stated that necessary changes that have been flagged up as needing action have not been implemented.

When NHS Improvement said in its enforcement notices that the trust was failing in its obligations under its licence and did not have effective border capacity and capability, it used the present tense. That was in April. Since then, Tim Smart has been installed as chairman, and I repeat my thanks to him for meeting my parliamentary colleagues and me yesterday in Westminster. He has been conducting an initial review of governance, and I was pleased to hear that he expects to make some announcements on his findings and proposals within the next month. I am sure I speak for many when I say that we will be looking for some far-reaching changes to recognise the gravity of the situation.

That brings me on to the issue of personnel. I have been asked repeatedly whether I am calling for the resignation of Southern's executives, and in particular...
that of Katrina Percy, the chief executive. I have resisted doing so because, as the Minister has said in the House, politicians and Ministers demanding that heads must roll can often cause more problems than they solve. I repeat my thanks to Ms Percy and her team for coming to meet my colleagues and me on a number of occasions to answer our questions. However, I will now say publicly what I told her at our last meeting: I find it difficult to have confidence that she has properly acknowledged the scale of the problems under her leadership or how difficult it will be for patients and families to have their faith in the organisation restored without a visible sign of a fresh start.

Resignations are a matter for individuals, and Katrina Percy has said that she believes her responsibility is to provide stability by remaining in post. I understand that position, but the sheer weight of criticism of the trust’s leadership over a prolonged period while she has been chief executive would lead many to a different conclusion. The fact that NHS Improvement has now taken the power to direct changes at board level if it considers them necessary sends its own message.

**Mims Davies:** It has been my perception that there has been a sort of bunker mentality. Perhaps people are just burying their heads, going through the process and hoping it will go away. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is perhaps a little sense of that pervading Southern Health from the top?

Suella Fernandes: My hon. Friend is insightful in her observation, although I do not think it takes a genius to point it out. The catalogue of criticisms and failings is not new to anyone. I can understand the frustration and anger of families and patients when they feel that no substantive and material action is being taken.

A mechanism is now in place, and I hope the new chairman and the regulators from NHS Improvement will listen to what I and others say today and consider how they can best act to restore confidence in the trust. I thank my parliamentary colleagues for showing an interest, for speaking up for their constituents and for taking the time to voice their legitimate concerns, both directly to the professionals involved and in this debate.

Before I conclude, I again pay tribute to the families and campaigners who have pursued the issue and shared their experiences with us. In particular, the courage and resilience of Sara Ryan, Connor Sparrowhawk’s mother, has been an inspiration as she has continued to demand answers and ensure that the lessons of her son’s death are learned. Since the issue first began to attract significant coverage, more people have come forward with their own stories and added to the demands for action to be taken. They want to know that their concerns are being heard and that the Government and the NHS are serious about resolving the problems. I have heard them, and so has the Minister. I hope that he will be able to give them some of the reassurance they seek in his reply. I look forward to hearing from colleagues from all parts of the House.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

Mr David Hanson (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith), I should say that four hon. and right hon. Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I intend to call the shadow Minister at 3.35 pm and the Minister at quarter to 4 to give the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) a chance to wind up at the end. On that note, I hope Members will have self-restraint.

3.4 pm

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) on securing this vital debate and on her work with the all-party group on Hampshire and Isle of Wight. Everything that has come out or been dragged out since the tragically avoidable death of Connor Sparrowhawk, “Laughing Boy”, has highlighted the severe failings of Southern Health and the wider questions they raise about the treatment of learning-disabled people in the NHS. The facts that have emerged are awful beyond belief and are a shocking indictment of the leadership of the Southern Health trust and the appalling neglect of the most basic care needs and human rights of learning-disabled people.

As the hon. Lady said, we all owe enormous thanks to the courage and determination of Connor’s mother, Sara Ryan, and her family, as well as the other families of those who have died and suffered. Without them, there was a real risk that the hideous truth of neglect at Southern Health might not have been fully exposed. Connor’s family and other families have been let down so badly and shamefully by Southern Health, which did not share information that the family had a right to. The family were treated as the enemy at Connor’s inquest and did not even receive an apology until Southern Health was directly pressed to give one. Even today, as Sara went for mediation with Southern Health on her human rights case, it had not released background papers, as it was supposed to have done.

The Mazars report happened only because of the determination and persistence of Connor’s family. As we have heard, the failings it exposed were shocking beyond belief and have been confirmed by the CQC reports. It is important to remember some of the hideous statistics that the hon. Lady quoted; we should remember that each one is a human life. Of 10,306 deaths, 722 were categorised as unexpected, of which only 272, or 37%, were investigated as a critical incident. A lower proportion—30%—of deaths in adult mental services were investigated. Appallingly, less than 1% of deaths in learning disability services were investigated. Liaison with families was appalling, with 64% of investigations not involving the family.

I will quote what the My Life, My Choice charity from my constituency said in a letter yesterday to the new chair of Southern Health. It is a charity of learning-disabled people, for learning-disabled people. This is how things look from the perspective of people with learning disabilities. It said:

“You suggested that the Mazars report was not very important, or not true. We think it is a very important report. Our members are very worried about people with learning disabilities dying, and their deaths not being properly looked into. We know from Connor’s case that the truth is not always told, so investigations need to happen. Our members are scared because people with learning disabilities do not get the same standard of healthcare as everybody else. The Mazars report told us that if we die, our deaths will not be taken seriously.”

Someone has to take responsibility for what happened. To the families and to the public, it is unbelievable that the chief executive and medical director of Southern
Health are still in post. We all understand that due process has to be followed, but nearly three years on from Connor’s death, we must ask: how long will it take before those responsible are properly held to account? That is important not just to atone for a wrong; it is crucial because of the signal it sends to others responsible for the care of learning-disabled and other vulnerable patients. It is crucial in re-establishing public confidence that those leading the provision of care are responsible and are held responsible for their actions.

I look forward to the Minister’s response to this debate. With Sara Ryan I met the Secretary of State, and I have talked and corresponded with the Minister. I know that they too are both concerned to see matters put right at the trust, and to apply the lessons more generally in the healthcare system.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. His point that no one, no matter how vulnerable, should feel fear when they go into our health services is something that should give us all pause for thought in this Chamber. But it is not only about accountability in this case; it is also about making sure that those who are watching us as we go through the process know that an independent, verifiable process will be put in place so that nothing like this can ever happen again, not only at Southern Health but throughout our mental health services.

Mr Smith: I very much agree with the hon. Lady, my neighbour and friend, on that important point. I look forward to the Minister’s response as to what the independent oversight will be to ensure security in future.

It will be helpful if the Minister can update us on progress in relation both to the Southern Health trust and to wider concerns in the NHS, and if he can say when he expects the CQC to publish its opinion on the trust’s response to its warning notice, with the possibility of enforcement action being taken. Will he also say when he expects the Government to be in a position to make a definitive statement on the action they will take on the conclusion of the Care Quality Commission’s wider investigation into deaths throughout the NHS? It is an enormously important issue to get right.

We all have to learn from these appalling events. We have to apply the lessons and put in place procedures and the culture so that learning-disabled people and others receive the care, treatment and respect that they deserve, and so that they can be confident that they will get that. An NHS that truly fulfils its duty of care, in which Southern Health so lamentably failed, is the only thing that can come close to a fitting memorial for Connor Sparrowhawk.

Mr David Hanson (in the Chair): We can be more relaxed about the two remaining speakers because a Member who indicated that they wished to speak has now left.

3.12 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) has done the House a service by bringing this debate to the Floor. The measure of cross-party support that she has achieved is evidenced by the powerful speech of the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith).

I hesitated to contribute to this debate because I have not been involved in the cause of the current crisis, which is about the deaths of patients being insufficiently explained. However, I have a history with Southern Health. I explained in the course of an urgent question, which the present Minister responded to on 6 May, that back in 2011 and 2012 my dealings with the trust were, in 19 years in Parliament, the only constituency issue that caused me genuinely to suffer sleepless nights. It was a question not about the way in which people were treated as inpatients in Southern Health establishments, but about a determination by the trust, in concert with a number of other trusts in other parts of the country using similarly questionable techniques, to follow what appeared to be a trend, if not a fashion, to close a significant proportion—35%—of the existing inpatient acute mental health beds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) said in her intervention that she detected something of a “bunker mentality”. She is absolutely right. The mentality that I detected at that time was a culture of stubbornness and denial about whatever it was that Southern Health wanted to do, irrespective of what other people might wish it to do. The issue at the time hinged upon something that ought to have been straightforward: namely, what was the necessary number of acute inpatient beds to retain. I raised that subject in two debates. Although I have not yet had the chance to meet Tim Smart, the new chairman of the trust, of whom I hear good reports, I hope he will take the opportunity to look up the two debates. One was on 10 November 2011 and, most importantly, the second one was on 18 April 2012. I had information from within the trust that the bed occupancy rates were high. In fact, the bed occupancy rates on average were between 91.9% and 96.7% when I was surveying the data. So it made it rather hard to argue that one could safely close two out of the six acute inpatient units, thus reducing the number of available acute inpatient beds from a total of 165 to only 107.

Part of the reason for the reduction was given quite frankly as a cost saving. It was proposed to save £4.4 million; £2.9 million out of that total would be absolute savings and the remaining £1.5 million would be invested in something called “hospital at home”. The group that we set up in the New Forest, which continues to meet regularly—usually three or four times a year—is called Support our Mental Health Services. It has found no evidence whatever that there has been any significant increase in the amount of support or the quality or quantity of support that people get at home.

Given that, at the time, with 165 beds 53% of patients were detained and just under half the total were people who opted to go into an acute bed if they suffered some dreadful breakdown, I predicted that the figure for those detained would rise proportionately to about 82%. When I made these remarks in public, Katrina Percy took objection to them and sent a letter to Ministers, councillors and Hampshire MPs denouncing my comments as “unfounded”, “scaremongering” and with “no place in the 21st century” because I had pointed out that if someone suffered a severe breakdown, perhaps their best chance of getting a bed if they needed one under
the Southern Health regime would be to cause as much mayhem as possible. But it remains a fact that today, as I understand it from sources within the trust, some 80% of the remaining beds are occupied by people who have been sectioned or detained, and that means that the opportunity for getting a bed if you need one, other than if you are sectioned, is correspondingly reduced.

The difficulty that I had at the time in trying to save the beds was that the trust’s clinical director, Dr Lesley Stevens, was determined to go on repeating figures over and over again that there were between 20 and 30 beds vacant at any one time. There were not. Exceptionally, in a short period—if I remember correctly around Christmas time—there was a figure of that sort, but even by the time she was continuing to put that bogus figure forward, that temporary departure from the norm of high bed occupancy had already been left behind and we were back to business as usual with pressure on bed numbers. Eventually, even a proposal that instead of closing both units at once the trust should close just one of the two units scheduled for closure, and see how that panned out, was rejected.

As you can imagine, Mr Hanson, the relationship between me and the trust was pretty much at rock bottom after all the controversy, but both sides decided we had better try to make the best of what was now a fait accompli. Katrina Percy, for her part, promised—and I believe she kept the promise—that no patient whom the trust judged to be really in need of a bed would be denied one, even if one had to be bought in from the private sector. In return I volunteered never to criticise the trust if it bought in such beds; and I never have, because it is most important that it should give beds to those who need them, and that it should not be deterred because of a politician saying “I told you so; look, you are now having to buy in private beds.”

To bring the story up to date, and conclude: there was a double tragedy. The individual tragedy was the death of a young man called James Barton. He was taken on by the trust and became the director of mental health and learning disabilities. That was in about 2014, and in my opinion James was a total breath of fresh air. He reached out to us, and said, “I know we have had all these troubles in the past; I want to build a new relationship”—and he did. In the course of a number of times when James came to liaise with and participate in our group he confided to me that he believed that the beds cutting had gone too far, and he was experimenting with different configurations, in the hope that bringing perhaps about 15 or 18 beds back into the system—approaching approximately half of what had been lost—might get things back into balance. Tragically, in February 2015 James was suddenly found dead at the age of 36, from an unexplained medical condition. That was a huge personal loss to people such as myself, who knew him only slightly. I can only imagine the catastrophic loss it was to his nearest and dearest.

It was also a tragedy from the point of view of people who need acute beds, in my opinion. Although James’s successor, Mark Morgan, has maintained the contact and is a very pleasant person to deal with, the message that I am getting back from Southern Health now is exactly what it was: “Well, we were having to buy in these beds, but we are not having to do it now; and we seem to be back in balance. We don’t need any extra beds.” Incidentally, one of the two units that were closed was at Woodhaven hospital and was only eight years old. I had performed the opening ceremony. The Winsor ward in Woodhaven hospital remains empty to this day.

Mims Davies: I have had families coming to see me—particularly the families of people aged 19 or in their early 20s—for whom beds and in-patient availability are the biggest issue. The treatment at home is working, but they need more sustained treatment, and the closure of bed spaces is having a profound effect on the development of those young people.

Dr Lewis: Furthermore, the beds at Woodhaven were state of the art, with en suite facilities—which is terribly important if someone has to be an in-patient in such circumstances. Many of the remaining beds do not have those facilities. That ward has been standing empty for several years now. I believe a change of culture is needed in the trust. Certainly there is no difference of opinion between us on the point that it is desirable if possible for people to avoid going into a mental health unit as an in-patient. However, to have the confidence to be treated in the community they must know that there will be in-patient beds for the occasions when they need extra support. I hope that that lesson from the past will be borne in mind in future restructuring of the trust. I called the trust’s culture one of stubbornness and denial. That may lie in the minds of individuals, rather than in its structure, but that is a matter for people other than me to decide.

3.24 pm

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) on securing this important debate, and I join her in paying tribute to the families, friends and campaigners who have followed this cause since the very beginning of the tragic chronology that she outlined. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) has just given a very eloquent speech. I propose to take the House through a short episode involving a constituent of mine, David Hinks.

However, I should start by noting that the issue is of cross-party interest—the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) is here—and that it crosses the geographic boundaries of Hampshire and Oxfordshire, and other areas covered by Southern Health’s geographic remit. I pay tribute to the Minister for taking the issue so seriously and look forward to welcoming him to Havant tomorrow to talk about mental health issues. I know that he takes the issue seriously, and I look forward to his response.

David Hinks was 30 years old, and he lived in Bedhampton in Havant. He worked as a ticket inspector for South West Trains, and he had a history of mental illness, which included no fewer than five suicide attempts. However, despite that mental health history, he was never admitted to a psychiatric ward. He was offered only antidepressants and group therapy sessions, which fell well short of the treatment and support that he needed. In 2015, he was arrested by the police on suspicion of assaulting his wife. However, despite that quite drastic step, Southern Health again took no immediate
action, and sent someone round to his house to check on him in December 2015 a few days after he had committed suicide.

That is just one of the many tragic cases presided over by Southern Health in recent years. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham has recounted many others. There has been great public interest in the issue in the Havant constituency, particularly around the time of the Mazars report and the recommendations for action by the CQC. I call on the Minister to do all he can to ask NHS Improvement to recommend improvements in the procedures of Southern Health—particularly in relation to risk reporting procedures, staff training and safeguarding procedures. All MPs have among their constituents some of the most vulnerable members of society, and we rely on institutions such as Southern Health to take good care of them in their time of need. I hope that David Hinks’s death will not have been in vain. Improvements must come and lessons must be learned. I know that the Minister will take Mr Hinks’s case as seriously as the others that he has heard about.

I join others in welcoming Tim Smart as the new interim chair of Southern Health, and I thank him for his engagement, as I do Katrina Percy, who is based in my constituency. The issue is one of substantial public concern throughout the area covered by Southern Health. I hope that the debate will be a catalyst for those who are working hard to change the culture and improve the service, and I look forward to further reports to the House.

3.28 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Hanson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) on securing this important debate, and on her heartfelt contribution. She made some excellent points, which I am sure the Minister will take good care of them in their time of need. I hope that David Hinks’s death will not have been in vain. Improvements must come and lessons must be learned. I know that the Minister will take Mr Hinks’s case as seriously as the others that he has heard about.

I join others in welcoming Tim Smart as the new interim chair of Southern Health, and I thank him for his engagement, as I do Katrina Percy, who is based in my constituency. The issue is one of substantial public concern throughout the area covered by Southern Health. I hope that the debate will be a catalyst for those who are working hard to change the culture and improve the service, and I look forward to further reports to the House.

We have heard about the reports on Southern Health that have demanded changes and improvements to patient safety—improvements and changes that, by and large, the trust has failed to implement over far too many years. I believe it is a story of chronic management failure. Most astonishingly of all, it is a story of a chief executive who remains in post despite this litany of failures on her watch over a number of years. I believe it is a story of chronic management failure. Most astonishingly of all, it is a story of a chief executive who remains in post despite this litany of failures on her watch over a number of years. I believe it is a story of chronic management failure. Most astonishingly of all, it is a story of a chief executive who remains in post despite this litany of failures on her watch over a number of years. I believe it is a story of chronic management failure.

We have also heard about the reports on Southern Health that have demanded changes and improvements to patient safety—improvements and changes that, by and large, the trust has failed to implement over far too many years. I believe it is a story of chronic management failure. Most astonishingly of all, it is a story of a chief executive who remains in post despite this litany of failures on her watch over a number of years. I cannot imagine a chief executive in any comparable organisation who would still be in post with such a record. I take a different view from the hon. Member for Fareham and the Minister: I do not say this lightly, but I do not believe that Katrina Percy should still be in post. Does the Minister have confidence in the chief executive of Southern Health foundation trust?

Like other Members, I welcome the appointment of Mr Tim Smart as the new chair of the trust, following the previous chair’s resignation. We know that he has recently launched a new appraisal of the capabilities of those involved in the governance of Southern Health, and that is not before time. I understand that he has met some of the victims’ families, and I hope that marks the start of an ongoing and meaningful dialogue, not a one-off encounter. Mr Smart has an incredibly difficult job to do to rebuild faith in the trust and to ensure that governance arrangements are robust and sustainable. Most importantly, he must move swiftly, after months
of sclerosis, to ensure that patients are not at risk and that no more preventable deaths can ever be allowed to occur.

When the Secretary of State responded to the urgent question on Southern Health from the Labour shadow Secretary of State last December, he rightly said that, more than anything, people want to know that the NHS learns from such tragedies. But the most recent CQC report shows that Southern Health has not learned from these tragedies. The Secretary of State also said:

“Nor should we pretend that this is a result of the wrong culture at just one NHS trust. There is an urgent need to improve the investigation of, and learning from, the estimated 200 avoidable deaths we have every week across the system.” —[Official Report, 10 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 1141.]

We know that the case of Southern Health is not unique. In my role as shadow Cabinet Minister for mental health, I receive many pieces of correspondence from people right across the country. I was contacted only recently by Richard Evans, father of Hannah, who took her own life while in the care of the NHS.

Hannah had a very long-standing history of complex mental illness. The conclusion of the inquest was that Hannah had died by hanging. The jury’s narrative verdict listed nine serious failings that contributed to her death, describing her treatment as “limited... inadequate...and insufficient.” The coroner further submitted a regulation 28 report in which he included the full jury narrative, stating that it “revealed a serious breakdown of care in relation to Hannah”, an individual with “exceptionally complex needs who represented a very high risk of suicide.”

One of the most serious failings was that Hannah was able to get hold of an electrical cable, which she later used to take her own life.

Hannah’s tragic case shows that failures of care are not the preserve only of Southern Health; they take place in other parts of the NHS and in other parts of the country. We have also heard of at least three deaths this year of young people in the care of Priory Group hospitals. I am in regular communication with Inquest, a charity that works with those bereaved by a death in custody or detention, which sends me details of case after tragic case from across the country.

The Minister must address these questions in his response. I asked him this in an urgent question last month, and I ask again: does he have full confidence in the governance arrangements at Southern Health? If so, what evidence does he have to support his view? If not, what is he going to do to change, reinforce and strengthen governance arrangements at Southern Health? Is he content with the pace of change at the trust and the degree to which the trust’s board has implemented the recommendations made to it over recent months? What steps has he taken to ensure that similar situations cannot arise in other NHS trusts? What steps will he take to ensure that when a family loses a loved one, they are not left to fight and pay for justice on their own?

On that last point, I hope the Minister can go into some detail, because if any good can come from this sorry and tragic tale, it is that new systems are put in place to ensure that no other families are put through the sorrow and grief that the families of the victims of Southern Health have been put through, and that when deaths occur, they receive full independent investigations. Appallingly, such investigations have happened only on a few occasions.

We all understand that the NHS is a vast, complex institution. It deals with 1 million patients every 36 hours and employs more than 1 million people. Of course human error and tragic mistakes cannot always be prevented, but the lesson of Southern Health is that sometimes things go beyond human error. They can escalate to catastrophic levels of systemic failure, preventable deaths and cover-ups; they can descend into a culture of denial and secrecy; and they can end up at the opposite end of the spectrum of decency and compassion that characterises so much of our national health service and the caring professionals who work for it. That is why we call for a full public inquiry into preventable deaths in the NHS, so that light can be shone, families can grieve, and justice can be done. The victims and their families deserve nothing less.

It should not be left to individual families to have to fight and fund their own efforts to achieve justice. The British public, as the owners and funders of our national health service, need to be reassured that every part of it is working to its highest standards, with the best quality of care, particularly for some of the most vulnerable people in our country.

3.38 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) for securing this important debate on the governance of the Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust. I also thank all Members who have spoken, by way of either significant speeches or interventions. The number of colleagues from the area who are involved—from across the House—gives an indication of how seriously we all take this issue. I urge the trust’s representatives to read the report of this debate extremely carefully, so that they absorb everything said by my hon. Friend and all those who have spoken in support.

May I begin by once again apologising to all the patients and families who have been affected by the failure of the trust to provide safe care for its patients? I met Sara Ryan yesterday when I visited the National Forum of People with Learning Disabilities. I had an opportunity to have a conversation with her, and I met more parents and families today before the start of this sitting. Nothing that an official can write on a piece of paper can adequately describe what it is like to meet and talk to families who have been involved in the sort of things that we are talking about here. This is not the first time I have had such meetings: I have had them since coming into post a year ago. It is impossible to convey simply and straightforwardly all that people feel.

What worries me most—I have said this to families in private and I say it again here—is that I hear the same things again and again. I hear about the frustration and concern about the time taken to get anything done when it has been agreed that something should be done, about the time taken to get any answers about what might be done in the first place, and about the defensiveness in the attitude of the institution being dealt with—my
hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) described it as a bunker mentality, I do not know whether it is a reflection of a professional attitude—because clinicians and others see things every day—but it is genuinely upsetting to hear people who have lost their loved ones talk about the lack of simple sympathy from those who deal with them. I have heard from enough people in enough different parts of the country to know that what I am hearing is not a one-off. I also get distressed when I hear through the system that people can be difficult. People have every reason to be difficult, but that is not an acceptable way of describing people who are concerned and upset.

Because this point is made in place after place, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and others. know well, by many different types of people, I am not sure that the system’s response deals adequately with some of the individual issues that have arisen over the past year—I will come to that later. I say to the parents and families involved that their individual contact, when they get the opportunity, with Members of Parliament and Ministers is not time wasted. It is easy to say that people will feel that only when they see something done, but the contact has a profound impact on officials and Ministers alike.

The first duty of any care provider is to keep its patients safe. The reports of inaction, bordering on complacency, set out in the recent Care Quality Commission report were truly shocking. I responded to an urgent question on the safety of care and services at the trust on 3 May, and I welcome the opportunity provided by today’s debate to update the House on the actions taken in response, several of which pick up on issues raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and others.

As hon. Members are aware, NHS England commissioned a review by Mazars in November 2014 of deaths of people with a learning disability or mental health problem in contact with the trust between April 2011 and March 2015, in response to serious concerns surrounding the avoidable death of Connor Sparrowhawk. On publication of the report in December 2015, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health asked the Care Quality Commission to carry out a focused inspection of the trust to review its governance arrangements and its approach to investigating and learning from incidents, as well as its progress in responding to Monitor’s action plan.

On 12 January, Monitor announced further regulatory action in response to the Mazars report, including the appointment of an improvement director for the trust. The CQC inspection took place in January 2016 and led to a warning notice and an announcement of further regulatory action by NHS Improvement, which were both published on 6 April 2016. On 5 May, following the resignation of the trust’s chair, Mike Petter, NHS Improvement required the trust to appoint Tim Smart as the new interim chair. Those actions were in response to the persistent failure of the trust’s senior management to address the environmental and governance risks identified by CQC as far back as October 2014.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and others asked about what has been happening. The issue is split into looking at what has happened and—to use that terribly clichéd phrase—what lessons can be learned, and what is happening now and what confidence people can have in the future. That is vitally important. I have sought assurances from NHS Improvement and CQC that the regulators are now able to oversee a rapid programme of remedial action by the trust, and I understand that the following measures are now in place. First, at monthly progress review meetings, NHS Improvement challenges the trust’s death and incident reporting action plan and its progress. Secondly, at the request of NHS Improvement, the death and incident reporting action plan is currently subject to external scrutiny. Thirdly, Alan Yates, the improvement director, is acting as a direct link from the trust to NHS Improvement, providing support and constructive challenge to the trust’s board in its oversight of the implementation of the action plan and providing assurance to NHS Improvement and other stakeholders about the trust’s approach.

On the work being done to bring the governance question to a swift conclusion, and in answer to the hon. Lady’s question about pace, the interim chair has already overseen improvements to clinical governance and the trust’s response to the CQC warning notice and NHSI licensing conditions. In parallel, he has commissioned an external review of the capability of the board, which extends to executive and non-executive directors, that will inform a decision on leadership by 6 July. That will give the chair, whom I met a couple of days ago, the opportunity to review current capabilities with a view to the future. It is important that he has done that.

Tim Smart has also been in discussion with clinical commissioning groups and other trusts across the local health economy about the provision of services in accordance with the NHS five year forward view, and what that might mean for Southern Health. The transfer of the learning disability service in Oxford to Oxford Health will have been completed by the middle of October.

I spoke to Tim yesterday, and I am absolutely clear that he is right to insist on the highest standards of governance, with leadership concentrating on the real business of the trust—patients and their care. We have an imminent deadline, processes are in place and I am confident that a better Southern Health will emerge, but my confidence counts for very little. It is important that I am able to say that to colleagues with confidence, but the real confidence Southern Health has to regain is that of its patients and families and those who are involved. Having met some of them today, I know that that is a difficult hurdle to overcome, but it is the most important one. A description of processes and what people such as me are doing is not sufficient.

It is necessary that I have said what I have said to colleagues, and that I put on the record that I am confident that NHS Improvement’s review process and its ability to make management and executive changes—which will be carried out by Tim Smart, a newly appointed, experienced chair—is a good response to what has happened. The right person is in place with the power and ability to make the necessary decisions, but any confidence in them will come from the quality of the actions taken as a consequence of the powers invested in the chair and NHS Improvement. Unless actions that have the confidence of people are seen to be taken, something will be lacking. It is important that the chair’s judgment is relied on at this stage, and that I am able to reassure colleagues that the way in which NHS Improvement is working with the chair, and the powers...
that it and CQC have, are appropriate at the present time, but we must see what happens next.

Nicola Blackwood: The Minister opened by expressing his frustration that, since taking his post, he has been hearing about similar failings again and again. Of course, it is not just us in this place who hear about those failings, but the public and patients too. Every time they do, they lose confidence in the ability of the health service and the Government to address those failings. What in the steps that the Minister and Southern Health are proposing will break that mould? What will be different about the response this time? How will our response to this crisis restore the confidence of our most vulnerable constituents?

Alistair Burt: I will address that a little later, if I may, but I will come to it.

I should also answer the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) on the chain of accountability for NHS Improvement, and on who makes the decisions there. The decisions are made by Jim Mackey, who leads NHS Improvement. He is a direct appointment of the Secretary of State, so the Secretary of State invests his confidence in Mr Mackey, who makes the decisions on the work of NHS Improvement.

I will now turn to some of the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham and others. First, on the position of Katrina Percy, I need to be clear: Ministers have no authority to intervene in such matters, and nor would it be right for them to do so. I have been assured by Jim Mackey, the chief executive of NHS Improvement, that agreed processes are in place to review the performance of the senior leadership team and to make any changes that are in the best interests of patients. A Minister has to leave that there, and is not able to express any further view. That there is confidence in decisions taken is clearly of huge importance to Members in the Chamber, as they have expressed, and to others. A process is in place to decide that, and it will be decided by the chair.

I share my hon. Friend’s concern that inspectors have pointed to repeated failure by the trust to close out necessary improvement actions until the beginning of the year. NHS Improvement has asked the improvement director to ensure that the trust does not treat actions as complete until sufficient robust evidence supports that claim. The repeated failure to complete actions is one of the things that I will come on to in answer to my hon. Friend’s questions. When people are told what to do by a serious regulator, why do they not just do it? Why do they not do it in Southern Health, but do it in other places? What is the point of accountability and what is the process whereby in other parts of public service something is demanded by a regulator—say, in the acute part of the NHS—and something therefore happens, but something does not happen if dealing with those with mental health or learning disability issues?

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend makes her own point about a conversation I was not part of. I am sure people will read what she has to say.

As I have already set out, a clear and robust process is being taken forward by the interim chair to review the capability of the board and to take any necessary action. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham has called for far-reaching changes. I ask that we await the conclusions of the review and look for the right balance to be struck between continuity and stability to ensure that the trust is able to deliver what it has promised. Wholesale change could introduce further delays to making progress on such work.

Recent media reports have suggested that the trust might be split up. I repeat that the priority now is to ensure safe and effective care in the present and in the future for the population served by Southern Health. NHS Improvement is working with the trust to explore all available options.

Members have also asked why the trust has not been prosecuted for historic safety breaches. I am aware of the allegations of historic health and safety breaches made by a former health and safety advisor to the trust, who has also briefed CQC about such concerns. I share the concerns of all those who are asking why it has taken so long to get a grip on the issues. CQC did indeed identify safety concerns back in October 2014 and has provided an assessment of safety in its most recent report. However, it is unforgivable that patients have continued to be exposed to unnecessary risk while the trust has dragged its feet in resolving the problems.

I understand that CQC has now reviewed evidence gathered during the most recent inspections and additional information obtained from the trust and other public bodies, including the Health and Safety Executive. CQC’s review has identified further lines of inquiry, which it plans to complete as quickly as possible in order to inform a decision on prosecution one way or the other.

Mr Andrew Smith: Is it not the case that following the gathering of that further evidence and, indeed, of other leaked reports of what Southern Health knew at an earlier stage, which had not previously been apparent, the police are now reviewing the case for prosecution?

Alistair Burt: Genuinely, I am unaware of that. The police may review evidence at any time. If CQC has certain evidence that it wishes to take to the police for prosecution, that is a matter for it. I understand the processes that people would want to go through. It is important for me to offer reassurance that those processes are in place, and that things that for too long have been swept under the carpet are open for examination, which I understand to be the case.

Let me deal with the question of a public inquiry. Ministers face many calls for inquiries, and it is important for public inquiries to be considered only where other available investigatory mechanisms would not be sufficient. Public inquiries are rare events. I argue that the processes now being followed by NHS Improvement and CQC are the best way to put right the safety and governance issues at Southern Health. That does not rule out the dissemination of wider learning from this case through NHS Improvement or, where appropriate, the holding to account of individuals via professional regulation or normal performance management routes.
It is right and proper that we should ask such questions. We can perhaps examine whether the system would have responded in the same way had the trust been an acute trust, as I mentioned earlier. I am passionate about improving the care and outcomes for people with mental illness or learning disabilities by ensuring that all aspects of healthcare for people, whatever the issue that has brought them into the care of the NHS and others, are given equal priority with physical health. That must include regulation.

Let me now deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood). As I have indicated, what I have observed over the past year has worried me. That is to say, there seems to be greater tolerance of when things go wrong in mental health than in acute services. We need to ask ourselves why it has taken so long to resolve those difficulties and to reach the regulatory decisions that are now starting to take effect.

I will therefore be looking at the matter with NHS Improvement, to consider both the effectiveness and the timeliness of regulatory interventions in mental health and learning disability services. I am keen to bring independent leadership into that work, alongside NHS Improvement. A task-and-report group will do a piece of work specifically on that.

Let me name the other places that have upset me during the course of the year. In Hull, there has been a problem with in-patient beds and an inability on the part of the NHS to make decisions about it for more than three years. There was the case of Matthew Garnett, the young man with autism in the wrong place; I could not get information on him for weeks, because of the failure of the NHS to provide what I needed. There are the problems in Tottenham with new mental health facilities, similar to what happened in York, at Bootham Park—how that was closed, and the inability of people to handle it correctly. That is a whole series of cases in which I think things could have been done better. The response has not been good enough. An inquiry into one thing is not sufficient, and the processes are in place to deal with that. Looking at the whole range of why such things happen is really important, and that work is now underway.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** Will the Minister give way?

**Alistair Burt:** No, I cannot, because my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham has to have her two minutes.

A further review of the investigation of deaths is being done. It was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, but it will not be completed until the end of the year, when the Department will give its response. This has been a hugely important debate, but it is not the end of the matter. It is a staging post, and people will be able to see things following it. I commend my hon. Friend for raising it.

3.58 pm

**Suella Fernandes:** Thank you for your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Hanson. I am also grateful to the Minister for the time he spent meeting families and relatives today. I am confident that he understands the gravity of the problem, and that is reflected in his time, dedication and personal commitment to improving mental health throughout the country. I also acknowledge his apology, which will not change anything, but—I hope—might provide some solace.

The debate is for those we have lost, those let down by the professionals, those for whom help came too late and was too little, families and relatives: more widely, it is for all those with mental illness and learning disabilities. A nation is only as humane as its treatment of its most vulnerable. We here in the Chamber have a special duty to those who depend on healthcare and support. I hope that the debate marks the beginning of a journey towards more justice and compassion.

I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for their contribution to the issue and to the debate this afternoon.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Resolved.**

That this House has considered governance of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust.
Visitor Visas: Sub-Saharan Africa

[GERAINT DAVIES in the Chair]

4 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered visas for visitors from sub-Saharan Africa.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. The word “visa” for a document that permits a visitor entry to or exit from a foreign country is believed to be derived from the Latin “charta visa”, meaning a verified paper or a paper that has been seen. Sadly, for too many people from sub-Saharan Africa, UK visitor visas are documents that are not seen, because of the massive logistical barriers that stand in the way of applying for them and the opaque and often apparently arbitrary decision-making process for their granting.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise those concerns directly with the Minister, and I am grateful to him for making time to meet me and a representative from the Scotland Malawi Partnership yesterday to discuss some of them in advance. The issues will not be new to him or his Department, because they have been raised repeatedly in recent years both by MPs and in the House of Lords through questions and debates and through the channels of the all-party parliamentary group on Africa, of which I am secretary. However, I believe that this is the first occasion since the 2015 election on which time has been made available for a debate on the issue. The timing is opportune, because despite parliamentarians’ best efforts in recent years, it seems that little has been done to resolve the many challenges facing visa applicants in sub-Saharan Africa, and reports of major frustrations and disappointments with the system appear to be on the increase.

The debate is about visas for visitors from sub-Saharan Africa, but I want to look particularly at experiences in Malawi, as that is the country with which I have the most familiarity. The Scotland Malawi Partnership has helpfully provided a detailed briefing. I declare something of an interest: until the election, I worked for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which is a member of the Scotland Malawi Partnership, and was also a member of the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which is to provide funds for medical students at the Kilimanjaro Christian medical centre. Two medical students from Tanzania were invited on our behalf some time ago, but they are not able to come, precisely because of the bureaucratic hurdles. All that they wanted to do was attend, visit, give their stories and go back.

Patrick Grady: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his long-standing work on international development. I suspect that many local charities that want to bring visitors over encounter exactly those hurdles.

Before coming back to the challenges of the process and the concerns about it, I want to deal briefly with why it is important that people from countries such as Malawi should be allowed to visit the UK. I stress that the debate is about visitor visas. The debate on immigration, asylum and settlement is aired often enough in this Chamber and elsewhere. However, the issues are perhaps connected, because there is a strong sense among those who go through the visa application process that the system is based above all on a concern that people who arrive on a visitor visa may abscond or refuse to return to their country of origin.

I plan to table written questions after the debate to establish what figures the Government hold on the rate of absconding or non-returning, especially among holders of short-term sponsored visitor visas, to see whether that concern is real or imagined. There will undoubtedly be individual chancers who make it to the UK on visitor visas and never quite make it home, although frankly, in my time in Malawi I met plenty of UK and European travellers who ended up on the beach at Lake Malawi and never quite made it home, because they were quite
happy to spend their days in the travel lodges or set up their own. There is reciprocity there, but on the whole, people who come here for a short time—especially those who are sponsored or invited by charities and community organisations—come for a specific purpose and are supported and accompanied throughout their visit, often from the moment they arrive at the airport to the moment they are dropped off there at the end.

Visits for school or cultural exchanges, or for speaking or campaigning tours, are designed to have a lasting impact beyond the visitor’s short presence. A school exchange might promote better global citizenship among young people or provide an invaluable training opportunity for teachers from both countries. Visiting artists or musicians might help to inspire new kinds of creativity and collaboration or provide some social focus for the legitimately established diaspora community here in the UK.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. I would simply like to put it on record, as a member of the International Development Committee, that it has been invaluable to be able to hear what witnesses have to say, see them, look into their eyes and ask questions prior to making important recommendations and decisions that may affect many people. Although immigration control is important, we have to apply care and common sense in such situations.

Patrick Grady: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady, and I was going to make exactly that point. A speaking tour that gives witness to the impacts of poverty or the success of projects that help to overcome poverty may help to change Government policy and improve the lives of even more people. Ironically, speakers on such a tour might find themselves running up against the Government’s anti-advocacy clause, but that is perhaps a debate for another day. It is not just ironic but a key concern of mine that visas are denied to, or barriers are put in the way of, visitors who could help to transform our understanding of poverty in global campaigns against injustice. Last year my former organisation, SCIAF, wanted to bring visitors over from Malawi to help to promote its Lent fundraising and awareness campaign—a campaign supported by the Department for International Development’s UK Aid Match scheme—but the first visa application was denied.

One of the first events that I helped to facilitate in Parliament after the election was a major seminar organised by ActionAid to launch its “Fearless” campaign against violence against women. The UK Government have repeatedly and rightly spoken out against all forms of violence against women. The UK Government have repeatedly and rightly spoken out against all forms of violence against women, yet a visa application was denied—not once but twice—to Tiwonge Gondwe, a women’s rights campaigner from Rumphi district in Malawi. In response, she said:

“Women in Malawi face violence every day. I experienced violence but now I work as a volunteer to campaign for women and to help realise my children’s rights. I wanted to come to the UK to build international support for women’s rights, but because I’m a volunteer I was told I did not earn enough money. That does not make sense.”

In such situations, disappointment and frustration is felt by not just the individuals but the sponsoring organisations. Long-established, credible organisations, often with worldwide presence and public support, can feel that judgment is being passed on their bona fides when visa applications that they support are rejected. I ask the Minister to consider as a result of the debate what further or different consideration can be given to visa applications that are supported or sponsored by established, credible and suitably registered UK charities, businesses or other institutions.

Visa barriers or refusals not only damage the relationship between the individual and the sponsoring organisation but send a signal about the kind of welcome this country and the Government want to offer. That signal often contradicts the message that the UK is open for business, and that we welcome tourists and visitors who can contribute to our economy, culture and society. They can also send a message that one arm of Government does not know what the other arm is doing, and they undermine the civil society links that the UN has identified as crucial to the achievement of the sustainable development goals. Indeed, I understand from the Scotland Malawi Partnership that there have recently been instances when even applications sponsored by the British Council have run into difficulties.

I will come back to some of the practical difficulties. The Minister yesterday received a copy of the Scotland Malawi Partnership briefing on the issue, which outlines 10 areas of concern about the visa application process. I will not go through all of them, but I will highlight a couple of key themes. A major one is the lack of clarity about how to apply and what to include, with the online application system being a particular barrier. I understand that when SMP representatives visited the visa application centre in Lilongwe earlier this year, they were told that the centre was not allowed to give information or advice about what to include in an application, but only to encourage applicants to look online.

Margaret Ferrier: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Patrick Grady: I am a wee bit short of time, I am afraid, and I have a funny feeling there is a Division in the House.

4.11 pm
Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.22 pm
On resuming—

Patrick Grady: I wanted to come on to the practical difficulties that are being faced by people applying for visas from sub-Saharan African countries. The first, as I said, is the lack of clarity about how to apply and what to include, and the particular barriers faced by people trying to apply online. The advice to the Scotland Malawi Partnership was to look online to see the guidance for filling in an application. When its representatives asked whether they could have a look online, the staff at the visa application centre said, “Well, we’re sorry, but you can’t, because our internet connection has gone down.” If the visa application centre cannot get a reliable internet connection, how is an applicant who might live many hundreds of miles away in a rural area supposed to get online?
The Government regularly report approval rates of between 80% and 85% for visa applications. As I touched on earlier, I doubt that takes into account applications that never complete due to the challenges and complexity of the system, but I suspect that it does include applications that are granted very close to, or on, the day of planned travel. Those visas are then impossible to use or can be used only after the costly rearrangement of plans.

The Government might respond by saying that people should not book travel until a visa is granted, but first, that stands in contrast to the Government’s claim that there is a smooth, reliable turnaround system. Secondly, the effect of that would be either very costly last-minute purchases of flights or incredibly long lead-in times for what are often voluntary or fast-moving organisations trying to arrange a visitor’s programme here in the UK. We heard an example of charities’ efforts from the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) earlier.

Perhaps the biggest concern expressed by stakeholders, which has also been reflected in the work of the Africa all-party group, is the outsourcing of the visa processing function to private companies. With many of the Government’s procurement contracts, it appears that they go to the lowest bidder rather than to who can offer the best service. The hub-and-spoke model of local application centres and regional decision making hubs exacerbates that concern. Indeed, in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the visa application process for a prospective visitor who lives in, say, Pretoria—in the same city as the visa processing centre and in a country much higher up the UN development index—is undoubtedly vastly different from that of someone such as Tiwonge Gondwe in Malawi, who lives 500 miles from her capital city and the visa application centre.

Of course, the process is happening in countries where the UK has a well established network of embassies, consulates and high commissions. It is unclear why having an additional network of visa applications centres represents best value for money. I hear reports that when visas are delayed or refused, appeals to the high commission can have little or no impact. Will the Minister confirm whether staff at the high commission, or the high commissioner, have the authority to issue or authorise visas in urgent or emergency cases?

It may be increasingly difficult for visitors from sub-Saharan Africa to obtain visas for the UK, but I was pleased to hear recently that a licence had been granted for the import of one of Malawi’s other famous products: Malawi gin. I hope that when it comes to organising formal launch events for the product in the UK, it will be possible for not only the product, but the people who make it, to arrive here safely. I will endeavour to secure a sample for the Minister; perhaps while he is enjoying an MGT—a Malawi gin and tonic—as many of us who have been expats in Malawi have, he can reflect on some of the points I have raised.

For clarity, what steps is the Minister taking to keep the efficiency and effectiveness of the visa application process under review? Is he prepared to receive evidence and case studies from the Scotland Malawi Partnership and others demonstrating their concerns and the patterns of failure in the system, and is he prepared to act on them? What reassurance can he give us about the consideration that he can give to visa applications that are sponsored and funded by credible UK-based organisations, such as charities, schools, churches, universities and businesses? What discussion is he prepared to have with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the role that high commissions, embassies and consulates can play in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the process?

I am grateful to the Minister for his willingness to engage on this issue. He has answered questions in the House, he has attended meetings with the all-party group, he gave up time to meet me yesterday and he is responding to the debate today. I hope that we can continue the dialogue and see some resolutions to the concerns. I hope that he will take my comments in the constructive spirit in which they are intended, and that through such dialogue and partnership we can continue to strengthen the links between Scotland, the UK, Malawi and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Zikomo kwambiri.

4.26 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) on securing this debate, and I certainly underline to him a commitment to continue to engage. The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would be prepared to consider further representations on individual parables, or examples from the discussions that he and I have had with representatives of the Scotland Malawi Partnership. I will certainly reflect on those. It may be appropriate for me to write to him on the representations that he has made to me separately, on further consideration of some of the facts that have been asserted and some of the experiences that have been described. I certainly give him that clear commitment at the outset.

I recognise that the UK is a major donor to Africa. Scotland obviously has very strong ties to Africa and to Malawi in particular through the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which has been rightly referenced during this debate. That is something to celebrate and I recognise the continued focus to which the hon. Gentleman and other Members will wish to draw attention.

I underline that the UK is welcoming record numbers of visitors. In the year to June 2015, 9 million non-European economic area visitors came to the UK—an increase of 0.5 million when compared with the previous year. We also issued 1.9 million visit visas in the year to March 2016—an increase of 2% when compared with the previous year.

Let me respond to some of the themes that the hon. Gentleman highlighted. Visas are an effective tool for the UK in helping to reduce illegal migration, tackling organised crime and protecting national security. They are an important part of the UK’s immigration system, which is fair to legitimate migrants and tough on those who flout the rules. However, I know that, for some, obtaining a visit visa for the UK can seem to be an inconvenience or to put up hurdles or obstacles. That is why the UK has invested heavily to ensure that applying for a UK visa is as straightforward as we can make it.

We have upgraded our entire network of visa application centres to increase capacity. We have made our processes less bureaucratic, we ensure fast turnaround times and we offer appointments out of working hours. We have extended our five to seven-day priority service, which is
now in nearly 200 countries, including 23 locations in Africa. We have also taken steps such as introducing a passport pass-back service in some locations so that customers can retain their passport while their UK visa application is being processed.

Our super-priority 24-hour visa service is building on the popularity of the five to seven-day service. It has been introduced in Pretoria and Johannesburg in South Africa and we are rolling it out to Nigeria. We judge that all those changes are working to provide greater flexibility and choice. We know that they have been welcomed by many travellers and tour operators. Ninety-nine per cent. of all visit visas are processed globally within the customer service standard of 15 days, with 85% of people who applied for a visa in the year to March 2016 being successful.

Visas, of course, play an important part in facilitating travel to the UK to maintain connections between Africa and the UK, for all the reasons highlighted by the hon. Gentleman, including debate and exchange. They underpin so many of the factors to which he drew attention. In Africa, most decisions are made significantly faster than the 15-day standard; for example, the average is 5.1 days in South Africa, 8.1 days in Cameroon and 7.9 days in Malawi.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman is concerned that visas for some anti-poverty campaigners to come to the UK to speak of their experiences, including from sub-Saharan Africa, have been refused. I cannot comment on individual cases, but visitors must satisfy Home Office rules and requirements. I will dwell on this a little because I appreciate that that was one of the central points of his contribution. Some people have suggested that individuals with modest economic circumstances are precluded from being granted a visa, even if a genuine sponsor in the UK is meeting the cost of the visit. I will say in straightforward terms that all visa applications from anywhere in the world are considered on their individual merits against the immigration rules. Applicants should provide evidence to show that they meet those requirements. Visitors to the UK must show that they can be adequately accommodated and supported during their stay and can meet the cost of their onward journey. That is important to ensure that only genuine visitors come to our country and to protect our system.

There is flexibility within the rules for visitors to be maintained and accommodated by friends or relatives and also now for a professional organisation to do so. Entry clearance officers will take into account all information provided by applicants and their sponsors when making decisions on visa applications. They can make inquiries directly with sponsors where necessary. I will dwell on this a little because I appreciate that that was one of the central points of his contribution. Some people have suggested that individuals with modest economic circumstances are precluded from being granted a visa, even if a genuine sponsor in the UK is meeting the cost of the visit. I will say in straightforward terms that all visa applications from anywhere in the world are considered on their individual merits against the immigration rules. Applicants should provide evidence to show that they meet those requirements. Visitors to the UK must show that they can be adequately accommodated and supported during their stay and can meet the cost of their onward journey. That is important to ensure that only genuine visitors come to our country and to protect our system.

I understand the difficulties for applicants in countries without application points and we do our best to mitigate disruption, including through an on-demand mobile application service. We have user pay visa application centres in nine countries in Africa where there are low volumes of applications. We seek to strike a balance in having a network of visa application centres that make things more accessible, particularly when low volumes might not support a full visa service. I know that, for example, the number of visas issued in Malawi was around 1,600 last year and remained fairly stable between 2015 and quarter one of 2016. It is about how to have a sustainable network that is able to meet the needs and provide some accessibility in that way.

Patrick Grady: I am grateful for the Minister’s constructive tone, but 1,600 applications in Malawi is two or three a day, so why not provide an in-house service within the consular system? Given that the system is remote and online, is there any scope for sponsoring organisations to help with applications remotely from the UK, where we have better internet connections?

James Brokenshire: On the relationship between UK Visas and Immigration and high commissioners, only decision makers who are entry clearance staff can issue visas. However, we have established arrangements for handling urgent compassionate cases when there are logistical barriers to issuing a visa in time for travel. UKVI works closely with colleagues from other Departments to ensure that our visa service in a given country is appropriate to the local situation and that UK interests in a particular country are given appropriate weight. We obviously have an ongoing dialogue with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the visa service.

How payment is made was a factor that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) highlighted. When
Age Discrimination: National Living Wage

4.41 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered age discrimination and the national living wage.

May I say how delighted I am that you are chairing this debate, Mr Davies?

One of the biggest challenges facing this Government has been the persistence of low-paid work, and I welcome any and all measures to address that, including the national living wage. However, young workers under the age of 25 rightly feel a sense of injustice at having been left out of the pay rise. As of last month, many workers under 25 will have discovered that their pay package is substantially less than that of their older colleagues. About 6 million young people aged 18 to 24 in the UK could be affected. I sought this debate to provide an opportunity to examine the inequality underpinning that decision and to ask the Government to plan for an extension of the national living wage to under-25s.

As it stands, those between the ages of 21 and 24 are currently paid 50p less than the living wage per hour. That is predicted to rise to a difference of £1.21 per hour by October 2020. The margin is greater again for those between 18 and 21, who are paid £1.90 less an hour. It has been estimated that under-25s on the minimum wage will earn just over £11,000 less than an older colleague over the next five years.

We all welcome the recent rise in youth employment. It is up by 94,000 as stated by a Treasury Minister in the main Chamber yesterday. However, this debate is about the value of work. The Resolution Foundation suggests that wages have fallen significantly for young people in recent years, with incomes for 22 to 29-year-olds falling by 12.5% between 2009 and 2014, so I am asking the Government to use the living wage as a means to put that right.

I am sure that the Minister will accept that comments made by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General have rubbed salt in the wounds of young workers, who were already demoralised at being left behind in relation to the living wage. When he outlined the Conservative party conference the Government’s rationale for taking the decision, he said:

“Anybody who has employed people knows that younger people, especially in their first jobs, are not as productive, on average.”

He continued:

“Anybody who has employed people knows that younger people, especially in their first jobs, are not as productive, on average.”

What a kick in the teeth for the next generation. We know that young people are often the ones asked to work the longer shifts, lift the heavier packages and work the antisocial hours. I know that from personal experience. When I graduated from university, I started working for a business in my home town dealing with sales both overseas and across the UK. My boss was a good man, but as one of the few employees who at the time was young, unmarried and without children, I was regularly asked to travel at short notice and work out of hours, at evenings and weekends.

Young people are regularly asked to work harder and longer hours because of their youth and are often keen to oblige through a desire to prove themselves and to
move up the ladder, but sometimes they feel that they have little choice. Sometimes their circumstances mean that it is easier for their employers to ask them to work the more antisocial shifts rather than older members of staff, who might have commitments at home, so when the Government say that young people are not as productive, how are the Government measuring productivity? What does an underproductive young employee look like? Shockingly, when I asked the Government in a written question for their figures to back up their claims that young workers are unproductive, I was told that they have absolutely no evidence to prove that. In his answer, the Minister told me that “there are no official statistics estimating the productivity of workers by their age.” So we know that the Government cannot provide evidence for that claim.

I accept that those embarking on a new role often require training and support from their employers and perhaps represent initially a reduced return on the investment for an employer. However, that could be said of any employee, of any age, taking on a new role or returning to the workplace. I ask the Government to avoid making generalisations that single out the under-25s, and I will give an example of how unjust that could be in practice.

Let us imagine a young person who takes their A-levels at 18 and goes either into training in the workplace or directly into employment. They could potentially be in a job for six years before being entitled to the living wage, but a new employee could start in the same role, sit at the next desk and be paid the living wage, at 50p more an hour, with six years’ less experience, simply because they are over 25.

Alternatively, a young person might study hard at school and decide to pursue an academic route, going to university. Research undertaken by Which? indicates that a typical student on a three-year course outside London might expect to graduate with about £35,000 to £40,000 of student loan debt. Most students on a three-year course graduate at the age of 21. The Office for National Statistics has identified that about 47% of graduates are employed in non-graduate roles, a trend that has steadily increased since the 2009 recession. So a young graduate, who has done all the right things by working hard and getting a degree, is saddled with up to £40,000 of debt as a result, has only a 53% chance of working hard and getting a degree, is saddled with up to £40,000 of debt as a result, has only a 53% chance of

Tackling youth unemployment is a goal that I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the House support, but organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses have pointed out that the Government’s approach could see employers wandering into legally precarious territory. Any employer that actively seeks to recruit under-25s to cut wage costs will almost certainly fall foul of age discrimination legislation. The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, referred to as protected characteristics, with section 5 of the Act recognising that age is one of those characteristics. It is direct discrimination if, because of a protected characteristic, one person is treated less favourably than another. The House of Commons Library has confirmed that to recruit workers on the basis of their age would constitute direct age discrimination.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): As someone who is under 25, I can say that everybody who is elected in this room is paid on the same basis. Therefore, I find it completely unjustifiable that the same principle does not apply to the outside world. Does the hon. Lady agree that this is yet another example of the Conservative Government’s attitude that there should be one rule for us and another for people outside this Parliament?

Holly Lynch: Hon. Members might remember that in the living wage implementation debates, I highlighted that, at times, William Pitt the Younger makes us all feel like underachievers, as he was Prime Minister at such a young age. There are great examples of young people doing well in this place, as well as out in the real world.

Firms interviewing for a role are legally required to choose the best candidate for a position, regardless of age. The employer is forbidden from acting on the financial incentive to hire the younger applicant so how, exactly, do the Government anticipate the incentive will work in practice? In its evidence to the Low Pay Commission, the Federation of Small Businesses said “our survey data suggests that some businesses may focus their recruitment on the under 25s. However by doing this they run the risk of potentially breaching age discrimination legislation, which should lead many employers to re-evaluate this stance.”

It can only be described as shambolic when the FSB feels compelled to advise its members to avoid acting on those very incentives.

I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify the Government’s intention around the 25-year-olds threshold as a financial incentive and if he could respond to the advice of the FSB. If, as a result of the Equality Act 2010, the under-25s threshold is not permitted to serve any purpose in boosting youth employment rates, why have a lower rate at all?

Thankfully, many companies recognise the contributions made by under-25s and are opting to pay them more than the minimum wage. Nestlé employs up to 1,000 people in my constituency and was accredited by the Living Wage Foundation in June 2014 as the first mainstream manufacturer in the UK to become a living wage employer, paying at least £8.25 an hour from the age of 18.

Nestlé’s senior public affairs manager told me that, as part of its European youth employment initiative, Nestlé decided to go above and beyond the basic requirements...
of becoming an accredited employer, extending its living wage commitment to apply to graduates, interns and those on its fast-start school leaver programme. It said:

“As a major employer in Halifax and across the UK, we know this is the right thing to do. Not only does it benefit our people but also the communities they live and work in.”

Nestlé has joined 2,575 living wage employers up and down the country to recognise that, regardless of age, young people are hard workers. The company knows that if it is important to maintain morale in the workforce, and that young workers deserve respect. The Living Wage Foundation is explicit in outlining that the living wage should apply to everyone over the age of 18.

I anticipate that the Minister will most likely point out the difference between the Living Wage Foundation’s living wage, adopted by Nestlé, and the Government’s living wage, and he would be absolutely right. However, the Government did not decide to call their increase in the minimum wage a living wage by accident. Therefore, I am asking the Government to consider adopting the Living Wage Foundation’s principle that fair pay for fair work starts at 18, in the same way that it has adopted its name.

Given that there are several examples of best practice, such as Nestlé, which has independently recognised the benefits of an equitable pay scheme, why have the Government taken the decision to set the bar lower than the standard that many of our more responsible employers are already attaining? In his 2015 Budget, the Chancellor announced that, with the living wage, he wanted to move towards a higher wage and lower welfare country. However, although the living wage has delivered a benefit to thousands, under-25s are the exception. With this Government benchmark, we risk undermining the good work of trailblazers who are going above and beyond in the market place, with the potential to suppress wages for the under-25s.

In April, when the living wage was introduced, The Guardian ran a story about Anthony, who is 23 and works in a London warehouse. He was quoted as saying:

“I was already getting £7.20 an hour … I’m now on £6.70. It’s been cut just because I’m 23 and not 25…I’m getting less for doing the same job…I feel so worthless.”

I think we can all agree that that is shocking and I do not believe that the Government intended for wages to be cut in any way, but that is not to deny that that is the very real danger in sending out the message that it is okay to pay young workers less for no reason other than their age.

I am, of course, willing to accept that minimum wage rates must be set at a rate that firms are able to support, but previous rises in minimum wage rates for young people have not had an adverse effect on employment. Indeed, that was the case when 21-year-olds covered by the youth development rate were moved on to the adult minimum wage in 2010. That is the perfect case study for measuring the effects of a large increase in wages of a certain age group; in that case, it was a rise of 22.8%.

The Low Pay Commission has reviewed that case, saying:

“We strongly oppose a separate rate for 21-24 year olds. The key point here is that while it is true they have higher unemployment and lower pay, their rate of improvement in employment is impressive and faster than for 25-29 year olds. Their rate of labour market improvement shows they can bear increases in line with the National Living wage.”

The TUC was keen to point out that, by setting the threshold at 25, the Government had adopted the highest threshold for being paid the standard adult rate in the developed world, matched only by Greece. Hon. Members might be interested to hear that Japan, Canada, Turkey and Spain start the adult rate at 16, while France, Ireland, Germany and New Zealand pay the full adult rate from 18. Even in America, there is no age threshold apart from the option to pay workers under the age of 20 a lower rate for their first few months of employment. Only the UK and Greece have set the threshold at 25. If the policy worked, surely we would see it reflected across the developed world, but that is not the case.

Looking back to the introduction of the national minimum wage, John Major told his party in 1996 that the minimum wage should be opposed as it would “price job-seekers out of the market” and was a policy to “destroy jobs”. I urge the Government to avoid making the same arguments in the current debate because, just three years after Major gave that speech, the Conservatives embraced the minimum wage after it had so clearly boosted wages without harming employment.

There is support for extending the living wage. In a recent poll by Survation, 66% of voters stated that they believe the new higher rate should also be given to workers under 25. There was support from across the political spectrum, with 55% of Tories and 74% of Labour supporters in favour. Even 69% of UK Independence party voters supported extending the living wage.

In conclusion, nearly 6 million young people could be affected by the lower wage rates and it is an absolute outrage that they have been told they are not worth £7.20 an hour, with unverified claims about poor productivity combined with arguments about low pay incentives that could see employers who act on them being open to legal challenge.

We would all like to see youth unemployment improve, but debt and low wages are not a sustainable solution. The Government’s adoption of a higher minimum wage is welcome but, unless under-25s are included, that flagship policy will have a great unfairness at its heart. Once again, the Government are on the wrong side of the equal pay for equal work debate. That has to change and I will work with young people and colleagues from across the country to ask the Government to rethink their unjust and unworkable decision, and extend the living wage to under-25s.
been so much progress, particularly for women, but there remains a persistent issue of inequality, endorsed by the state, when it comes to age. The differing rates of the minimum wage reflect a situation whereby young people are actively discriminated against because of their age.

In the Scottish National party, the equalisation of the minimum wage has been our policy for many years. While I was convener of the SNP's youth wing, Young Scots for Independence, a resolution was moved at the SNP conference in 2006. It stated:

"Conference notes that the minimum wage is pegged at different levels dependent on age. Conference believes the current system to be grossly unfair and discriminatory and resolves, in an independent Scotland, to equalise the minimum wage levels."

Much to my regret, we have not managed to achieve that independent Scotland yet. Nor have we achieved devolution of employment law so that the Scottish Parliament might make that change for itself. I still believe, though, that there is no justification for this grossly unfair and discriminatory practice. YSI renewed the fight on that issue at conference in 2013, giving the SNP's backing to the Scottish Youth Parliament's excellent "One Fair Wage" campaign.

I wish to dispel a few myths on the reasons behind the staggering of the minimum wage rate. The Low Pay Commission said in its 2013 report that "we do not want the level of the minimum wage to jeopardise their"—

young people's—

"employment or training opportunities."

I just do not buy that. Young people have a range of options in front of them: work, study, apprenticeships. All that the staggering of the minimum wage ensures is that, whichever choice young people take up, whether it is employment on its own or in support of their studies, they are not legally entitled to the same wage as an older colleague in the same job. That is patently unfair.

Apprentices are faced with a rate of only £3.30 an hour. In many places that would not even cover their bus fare to get to the job, which is an absolute scandal. Do the Government believe that apprentices do not need to eat and do not have bills to pay? That rate compounds existing disparities. Analysis in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills research paper on the evaluation of apprenticeships shows that apprentices are far more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background. If the Government actually believe that work and training are means of getting out of poverty, apprentices should be much better supported than the current national minimum wage rates suggest. Decent employers offer comparable rates to their apprentices, but they are not legally obliged to do so.

Going further, under-25s have no discount on their bills, on their purchases in shops or on their rent. There must be recognition that an equal day's work deserves an equal day's pay. Those in the 16 to 17-year-old bracket at £3.87 an hour may well do the same work as someone in the 18 to 20 bracket at £5.30 an hour or someone aged 21 to 24 earning £6.70 an hour. None of them is entitled to the holy grail of the pretend living wage at £7.20 an hour, and of course none of them is a true living wage, as determined by the Living Wage Foundation, of £8.25 an hour. Research by the Scottish Parliament's information centre shows that workers under the age of 18 will earn roughly £6,500 a year less than someone over 25. It further highlights that 18 to 20-year-olds will find themselves £3,705 worse off and apprentices will be £7,605 worse off than workers aged 25 or over.

The Government hide behind the myth that the staggering of the minimum wage reflects young people's lack of experience. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made that assertion again yesterday:

"For younger workers, the priority is to secure work and gain experience."—[Official Report, 7 June 2016: Vol. 611, c. 1016]

Again, that does not stack up. How can it possibly be fair that, by the letter of the law, a young person could start a job at 16 and work there for eight full years to gain the entitlement that a 25-year-old would have walking in on their first day? It is not about experience at all; it is about age discrimination sanctioned by the state.

I mentioned in a previous debate on the living wage on 18 April that I have a constituent who feels that she was dismissed due to being an older worker in a bar. She was on a zero-hours contract and was phoned on the day of her shift to be told that her services were no longer required. That coincided with the introduction of the new higher rate of the minimum wage. My constituent cannot prove it, but it smells very fishy. The response I received yesterday from the Minister for Skills was absolutely woeful. There is no action, and no changes are being made.

As the hon. Member for Halifax said, the staggering of the minimum wage rate gives unscrupulous employers perverse incentives to choose to hire younger workers, perhaps in industries such as catering, cleaning and retail that have a relatively high turnover of staff. Those workers are being exploited, too. Employers can dodge their obligations and try to manipulate the system to save cash, as younger, less experienced workers are less likely to bring a case successfully to an employment tribunal, even if they can pay the fees in the first place. Such employers are likely to get away with it.

The SNP is calling on the UK Government to raise the minimum wage for young people and apprentices or, if they will not do so, to give that power to the Scottish Government to do it for themselves. As part of the SNP's commitment to fair work, we passionately believe that the living wage should be paid as widely as possible, including to apprentices and young workers. The Scottish Government have done a huge amount of work to persuade businesses in Scotland to take it up. We now have a very high success rate of employers paying the living wage to their employees. We fully support the living wage campaign, and we recognise that the living wage can make a real difference to the people of Scotland. Our Government are a fully accredited living wage employer, which sends out a hugely important signal that the UK Government should also take up.

If we had control over employment law in Scotland, I am certain that we would improve the pay of people in our nation, including those who happen to be under 25. My gran waited a long time to see discrimination broken down; I hope my daughter does not have to wait very long.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I call Jim Shannon to share his thoughts.
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have plenty of thoughts, and I am glad to share them. It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. I enjoyed the setting of the scene by the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), whom I congratulate on securing the debate. It is also a pleasure to be one of two males who will contribute.

It is hard to argue with the principle, ideal and intent of the national living wage. We want everyone in our country to have a life free from poverty and a job that compensates them properly for their labour, which is the purpose of the national minimum wage. In Northern Ireland we have some of the highest levels of poverty in the whole United Kingdom, so the minimum wage is an important issue for us.

We are a nation of shopkeepers, and I am descended from a family of shopkeepers. Margaret Thatcher said that we were a nation of shopkeepers—I am not sure whether we are as much as we used to be, but we still have a lot of shopkeepers. As the hon. Lady said, we are debating the principle of rewarding those who put in the graft by getting up to go to work and work hard for their family, but we would not be having this debate if there were not outstanding issues with the minimum wage changes.

We have all heard that small businesses across the country are worried that they will have to pick up costs that they cannot afford and, as a result, may have to lay off workers, who are not just employees but friends and family. That is an important issue. While seeking to improve the wages of people in the 18 to 25 bracket, we have to ensure that the businesses that employ them are able to pay those wages—it is important that we achieve that.

My constituency office—other Members will say the same—has been visited by many 18-year-olds who are setting up home together. That is good, and we want to encourage them, so we help them as best we can with housing. We hope that their wages will be enough for rent, food, heat and enjoying some time together as a young couple starting off. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) said that an 18-year-old could be doing the same job as a 25-year-old to the same level of expertise and ability but receive a lesser wage, which is grossly unfair.

Evidence from the Association of Convenience Stores shows that it is extremely concerned about the prospect of the national living wage reaching 60% of median earnings, which is currently projected to be £9 an hour. Retailers report that that is likely to change their staffing structures and affect store profitability. Some 25% of shop owners work more than 70 hours a week, and 20% do not take any annual leave. The May 2013 “voice of local shops” survey indicated that a majority of independent retailers, some 55%, believe that they earn less than the national minimum wage when taking into account the hours they work. Shop owners might not be earning the wage they need, but they do it because they have done it all their life and they want to create some employment for those around them. There are other reasons for doing it as well.

The Chancellor has taken that into account and has offset various business costs such as corporation tax and national insurance. The Government are cutting the burden of business rates by some £6.7 billion over the next five years. Provided that that does not affect tax receipts, it is a most welcome move that will help business owners across the country by freeing them of some of the shackles and obstacles that ambitious and striving small and medium-sized enterprises face in their quest to succeed and expand. The national living wage will hopefully not have the impact that SMEs once feared, but only time will tell. We will see how that works.

It is easy to jump to the assumption that there may be a form of discrimination, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central said. Many of us feel that there might be discrimination, and in some cases there may well be blatant discrimination. It is about getting fairness so that people get a wage that reflects their labour and the sweat on their brow. That is what I am keen to see. There are mortgages or rent to pay, as well as childcare costs, family expenses and possibly pension savings, because now when people get a job they are often entered into a pension scheme almost straight away; indeed, people are encouraged to join pension schemes, by the Government among others. It is also important to have a pound or two set back for a rainy day. The hon. Lady referred to her grandmother. My grandmother and my mother are the same in this regard; they always had a pound or two set back for a rainy day, or the “what if?” category. When something goes wrong, it is good to be prepared for it.

Those are just a few of the costs that people have to factor in after being paid as they get older. Before the national living wage, people on the old-style minimum wage also factored those things in. It is true that there are some 21 to 24-year-olds who have all those expenses and more, which why it is important and welcome that the Low Pay Commission will continue to monitor, evaluate and review pay conditions for younger workers when it makes recommendations for future changes to the national living wage. I am keen to hear the Minister’s response to the debate, particularly on how he sees the Government monitoring, evaluating and reviewing those conditions. If those conditions are not right, what will happen?

The fact that changes to the national living wage are possible shows that there is room for movement. I believe that the Government have created some flexibility for the changing, adaptation and correction of the national living wage; the Minister will confirm whether that is the case or not. I hope that what is on the table now will not be, by any means, the end goal. There will be some possibilities for movement, to secure better conditions for those on the minimum wage.

It is important that we do not disadvantage anyone financially in all of this activity, but at the same time we cannot disadvantage those who need the wage increase the most and those who are trying to get on in their life. Let us encourage our young people. That is why we are here; that is why we are MPs. We want to encourage our constituents, and our young people in particular. There needs to be careful monitoring of how the national living wage plays out in reality for those in the lower pay brackets, to ensure that no one is being disadvantaged by the structures.

I conclude by saying that close monitoring of the situation should allow for appropriate adjustments to be made. It is imperative that it continues in the future and that all essential amendments are made in a timely
fashion, to ensure that the national living wage is the success that the Government, the hon. Member for Halifax and the rest of us here today want it to be.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I want to begin calling the Front-Bench spokespersons at 5.20 pm, so I invite Liz McInnes to speak for eight minutes or so.

5.12 pm
Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I have only prepared a short speech, so I might give the Front-Bench spokespersons a bit longer to speak. However, I am sure that we are all eager to hear what the Minister has to say.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing this important debate. It is about a subject that I know she has done a lot of work on, and I commend her for that. This is a really important issue and I agree with her that fair pay for fair work should start at the age of 18. The arbitrary cut-off point of 25 makes no sense; 25 is not the age of consent. There is no reason why this Government should have picked on people under 25. Not for the first time, I find myself standing up in this place and asking, “What have this Government got against young people?”

This Government seem to be intent on attacking young people across the country by putting barriers in their way. They come in the form of educational barriers—the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance—the depletion of local youth services, the increase in tuition fees, the transformation of maintenance grants for students into maintenance loans, which puts those students into more debt, the refusal to address zero-hours contracts and the failure on housing, with the lowest house building figure since the 1920s. In all these ways, this Government discriminate against younger people and now they seem to be using pay in the workforce as another way of undermining our young people.

We welcome the Government’s national living wage, although I prefer to refer to it as the new national minimum wage. The real national living wage would be considerably higher and set independently by the University of Loughborough, which is something we should all be moving towards—a rate of pay that people can actually afford to live on and that is independently assessed. I welcome the pay rise, but I am profoundly concerned that the Government are undervaluing the skills and talents of people under 25, leaving many young people across the country in a perilous position by excluding them from the full living wage.

The legislation fails to address the finding of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in 2015 that younger people face the “worst economic prospects for generations”.

The commission stated:

“Younger people suffered the greatest drop in income and employment compared to older age groups and now face greater barriers to achieving economic independence and success”

than they did five years ago. The same report indicated that there was a decline in both earnings and full-time employment among younger workers, despite their being more likely to be better qualified than previous generations. We must harness and encourage the talent of young people, not discourage it.

One of the Government’s flagship polices to drive young talent was to deliver 200,000 new apprenticeships and to introduce an apprenticeships levy. However, the CBI has questioned the implementation of that policy, asking “for more clarity” and arguing that apprenticeships will only “help a small minority” of businesses. Also, apprenticeships need to be extended from traditional industrial sectors to meet the growing demands in social care, the tourism and leisure industry, and the digital and creative sectors.

Those 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in full-time education are at greater risk of being in poverty than any other category of people who are eligible to work. Even when 16 to 19-year-olds are in full employment, the cuts in benefits and the rise in zero-hours contracts have meant they face a daily struggle, making it increasingly difficult for them to get on and make a start in life by, for example, getting on to the housing ladder.

Home ownership among young people is below 50% and figures from the Office for National Statistics show that more young people aged between 20 and 34 are now living with their parents than was the case 20 years ago. The prevalence of zero-hours contracts is higher among young people than among other age groups, with 37% of those employed on zero-hours contracts aged between 16 and 24.

Austerity is a political choice and people under 25 should not pay such an unfair price—in the form of low wages and poverty—because of the policies of this Conservative Government. It is scandalous that the Government feel that they can discriminate against under-25s. Age discrimination is illegal under the Equality Act 2010 unless “objective justification” can be demonstrated, and saying that lack of experience justifies this age discrimination is not satisfactory.

In 2013, the Prime Minister proclaimed that young people have “low aspirations” and that his Government would “get them to think that they can get all the way to the top.” The Chancellor has claimed that the Government put “the next generation first”. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor speak great words, but they are really empty words that ring hollow, to my ears and to those of young people in this country, whose lives we are discussing today.

This Government have put young people last: last in opportunity; last in funding; last in jobs; and last in pay. We must not condemn younger people to become a lost generation and we must bring the national living wage age-exclusion to an end.

5.18 pm
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): As always, Mr Davies, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I thank the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who truly has been a champion on this issue, and there is no doubt that we share the same interest in addressing it. I have made this point before, but I will make it again to echo the sentiments expressed by the hon. Lady. She said that this is not a national living wage and, in fact, the Government are showing audacity in using the words “living wage”, because it is not. The accredited Living Wage Foundation has already made that clear—it
is a national minimum wage. There has been a welcome increase, but it is simply not good enough that there is discrimination against an entire generation of young people.

I will speak from my own experience. I stayed on at school when I was 16, but I had to get a part-time job because I was from a single-parent family and the only way that I could continue my studies was to work part-time. I worked twice as hard, for twice as long, for the same amount of money as some of my colleagues, and that is the exact same position that many young people are faced with 13 years on. That is absolutely ludicrous and I honestly do not know how the Government can defend that policy at all.

I will take this opportunity to highlight some of the comments made by my hon. Friends and by other hon. Members today. The hon. Member for Halifax said that there is absolutely no proof that young people are not as productive as older people and I am pleased to hear that the Government have no statistics to that effect, because I am absolutely certain that it is not the case. I hope that the Minister, when he gets to his feet, will confirm that the idea that young people are not as productive is a complete falsehood.

The Government do not want to be on the wrong side of equal pay for equal work, so it is about time they got on the right side of history. To cover the points made incredibly well by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss)—I have also held that same convenorship role in the SNP youth wing, for my sins—it is essential that we dispel some of the myths around young people taking more time to train and it being harder to get them up to speed with their colleagues. There are some incredibly hard-working young people across the country, and this Government fail to recognise that through their policies. When will they reconsider this policy? Age discrimination sanctioned by the state should never be legitimised.

I asked some of my constituents how they felt about things. Being under 25, were they excited by the new national minimum wage? Were they excited to be discriminated upon by their own Government? While Hailey is not under 25, she said that they were discussing it in college, and she was shocked to hear that a girl in her class, who was under 18 but over 16, was getting less than £5 an hour for the same job on the same hours. In fact, Hailey said, the girl was working more hours to get the same money. Will the Minister respond to Hailey? Ali said that it is despicable that companies—and, I would add, the Government—would allow people to get away with paying someone less because of their age. She said:

“That’s age discrimination. I thought that was illegal—it’s certainly immoral.”

I hope the Minister will respond to those points, which were made so well by Hailey and Ali.

The figure of £7.20 an hour, which the Government have set as their new minimum wage—if people wish to call it a living wage, carry on, but it is not—does not reflect the fact that the Living Wage Foundation has stated that £8.25 an hour for those living outside London would be more reflective of a real living wage. For those living within London, the real living wage would look more like £9.40, which is a far cry from £7.20. Forgive me if I am being presumptuous, but the Minister has perhaps been away from the labour market for some time, so he has not been subject to a minimum wage. I am not necessarily so far away from the labour market. I do not remember receiving a minimum wage, and £7.20 is a far cry from any sort of living wage. It fails to take account of the fact that many people under 25 have families, children and homes to provide for. All it assumes is that every young person has the luxury of deep-lined pockets and a family on whom they can rely. I do not think that is the case, and I am pretty sure that many young people, who are absolutely crucial and are working every hour God sends to make money, would not be happy to hear that the Government genuinely think their labour is worth less than some of their colleagues. I look forward to the Minister responding to each of those points.

We should consider the further aspects of age discrimination, which could take the shape of younger workers being employed in preference to their older counterparts—I am sure that the Government do not want to encourage that—as a cost migration strategy. I respect the comments made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). Many employers will have difficulty balancing the books due to the new minimum wage, but the reality is that the pressures on small and medium-sized businesses will continue. I am sure that the Government, because they take business so seriously, will do all they can to support small and medium-sized enterprises to deliver a real living wage, instead of creating a further disparity between young people and their voters, who they perhaps prefer.

The ultimate question is this: when will the Government put young people first, instead of simply prioritising businesses, their own agendas, bankers or whatever else they seem to think is their priority? Young people are our future. They are our labour force and our economy—when will the Government start looking out for them?

5.24 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing this important debate. She absolutely hit the nail on the head when she said this policy is a kick in the teeth for young people. That comment was certainly well received by the Chair.

The Government are sending a worrying message about the generations by pitching them against each other. They are leaving an open goal. They are saying to young workers, “You are not as valuable as older workers.” During the debate we have heard some worrying examples of employers trying to circumvent the fundamental purpose of the increase in the minimum wage by deliberately hiring under-25s. What we have not heard, and I hope the Minister will rectify this, is an indication of a clear strategy from his Government as to how they will ensure that the so-called national living wage is not used by a small number of unscrupulous employers to manage out staff aged 25 or over or to change terms and conditions in a way that would fly in the face of provisions enshrined under the Equality Act.

As part of the shadow Equalities team, I must say that it does not come as a huge surprise that the Government have once again failed to consider equality. We have a Prime Minister who has referred to equality impact assessments as “pointless reports” and “bureaucratic
nonsense” and who refuses to conduct a cumulative impact assessment of Government policies on women since 2010. In lieu of that, the Labour Equalities team commissioned research from the House of Commons Library that showed that, as of the Chancellor’s last Budget, 86% of the net savings to the Treasury through tax and benefit changes since 2010 have come out of the pockets of women. The Government appear to talk the talk on equality, but they fail to put in place the fundamental work to ensure that, advertently or otherwise, certain groups in our society do not end up the losers as a result of Government policy.

The Government could have worked in collaboration with key partners such as the Living Wage Foundation or the University of Loughborough to help to pilot the higher rate minimum wage before it went live, but instead it was rushed through so that the Chancellor could score a political hit at the Budget with a shiny new policy. The Government have self-appropriated the term “living wage” to mean their age-restricted minimum wage. That is what it really is, as it is based on median earnings, while the Living Wage Foundation rate is calculated according to the cost of living. That cost of living is the same for young workers as it is for older workers. I have never met a landlord who is willing to rent out a property for less money to someone who is under 25, or a baker who is willing to sell a loaf of bread for less because the person wanting to eat it is under 25. It costs us all the same to live.

We have seen the Government pinch and misappropriate a term to describe a policy pushed through without any proper equality safeguards. Some of the key questions posed during the debate must be answered. What safeguards are in place to ensure that employers cannot manipulate the terms and conditions of their staff to make them worse off as a result of the new higher national minimum wage? What strategy is in place to ensure that workers under 25 are not exploited and that the provisions of the Equality Act are not breached? Will companies be named and shamed? Will there be financial penalties?

The Government must put their declarations of being a party of equality into action and demonstrate they are serious about that by answering those basic questions and ensuring that safeguards are in place for young people and all employees in the workplace. Of course, all that could have been thought through much earlier, had the policy not been rushed in the first place.

Young people deserve a better deal than the one they are getting from this Government. What message are the Government sending to young people with wages low, maintenance grants for the poorest students cut and voter registration rules cynically changed to lock young people out of democracy? The number of young people owning their own home is at its lowest level since records began. University tuition fees have trebled. It seems very much that the Government are not on the side of young people, and I fear that the consequences will be severe.

Even the former Tory MP David Willets, who now heads the independent Resolution Foundation, has said that the Government are creating a “country for older generations”, in which pensioners benefit from constantly rising incomes while the young, their families and children—under-25s can have a family and children—are battling constantly rising prices and falling incomes. He said:

“The social contract is a contract between the generations and in Britain it is being broken.”

The Government must not leave the next generation out in the cold and take them for granted. It seems that the policy of a minimum wage only properly kicking in at 25 has been dreamt up with an idea of young people who perhaps go through higher education and do some internships while living at home with their parents. The reality for many young people is that they are an adult at 18, leaving home and standing on their own two feet. I call on the Government to integrate equality into their thinking right across their policy, so that all groups in society are treated equally.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I make it clear that my somewhat ambiguous utterance in response to one of the comments made by the mover of the motion should not be interpreted as an affirmation? I am completely impartial in my job. Over to the Minister.

5.30 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): Mr Davies, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Whatever utterances you choose to make, I will still enjoy serving under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing the debate and for setting out her argument as clearly as she did. Hers was one of the more reasonable and well-founded arguments made, but listening even to her speech one would have thought it was not the Labour Government who introduced the idea of age-related minimum wages. Because you are, Mr Davies, like me, of a somewhat older generation than some of the contributors to the debate, you will remember that age-related rates were an integral part of the original National Minimum Wage Act 1998—Labour are right to be proud of that achievement. It was integral that the design should allow rates to vary up to the age of 26. That was done by the Labour Government explicitly to protect young workers in the labour market.

In advancing the argument that the national living wage is somehow an egregious act of discrimination, the Labour party and the hon. Member for Halifax have to accept that they are advancing the argument that the last Labour Government to win an election were a discriminatory Government. Although I am sure that the hon. Members from the Scottish National party would be only too happy to endorse that suggestion, I suspect that the hon. Member for Halifax and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), would not want to go quite that far.

Let me turn to the impact on employment opportunities. Hon. Members seem to forget that there is a real reason why raising legal minimum wages for younger workers too quickly is a risk. When the last Labour Government—the same Labour Government who brought in the minimum wage with age-related bands—finally limped out of office in 2010, unemployment was high in general, but it was particularly high for young people. In the first quarter of 2010, more than 930,000 young people...
throughout the United Kingdom aged between 16 and 24 were unemployed. The unemployment rate was much higher as a percentage than the rate for people over 24.

I am glad to say that under the coalition Government and the current Government, we have managed to bring unemployment down not only for people over 24, but particularly for people under 24. Now, 307,000 fewer people between the ages of 16 and 24 are unemployed than when the last Labour Government completed their term in office. The risk of unemployment for young people is a sensitive issue because we all know that a protracted period of unemployment can have long-term negative effects on people’s chances as they go through life.

**Cat Smith:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nick Boles:** No. I heard a lot from the hon. Lady.

It is especially important that young people are given early opportunities, which explains the original construction of the national minimum wage. Opposition Members surely recognise that the Low Pay Commission is an independent body charged with advising the Government on what is a responsible increase for the national minimum wage. The commission is charged with looking in particular at what is called—forgive me for the rather unpleasant jargon—the varying bites of minimum wage rises. That refers to the percentage of the median wage for someone of that age that the national minimum wage would represent at that particular level. I am sure everybody can understand, because it is a matter of common sense, that the closer the national minimum wage rate for somebody of that age gets to the median wage, the greater the risk that raising the national minimum wage rate will reduce employment opportunities.

**Mhairi Black:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nick Boles:** I am not going to give way. I listened to the hon. Lady intently and I am trying to cover all the points raised in a longish debate.

It is critical to understand that although the national minimum wage bite—the percentage of the median wage—for 25 to 30-year-olds in 2015, before the national living wage came in, was only 59%, the bite for 21 to 24-year-olds was 78.7%. That is nearly 80% of the median wage, and that is before the substantial increase in the national minimum wage that was recently introduced for people under 25. There was a significant risk that, had the Government introduced the national living wage for everyone, including those under 25, that would have had a substantial and negative effect on those under-25s’ employment opportunities.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) referred to the apprentice minimum wage. It is important to note that in 2015 the apprentice minimum wage was, but this Government and the current Government, we have managed to bring unemployment down not only for people over 24, but particularly for people under 24, now, 307,000 fewer people between the ages of 16 and 24 are unemployed than when the last Labour Government completed their term in office. The risk of unemployment for young people is a sensitive issue because we all know that a protracted period of unemployment can have long-term negative effects on people’s chances as they go through life.

On one of the few occasions when any Government of either, or any, stripe have rejected a recommendation of the Low Pay Commission, we rejected its recommendation for a small increase in the current apprentice minimum wage, and we instead increased it in one year by 21%, the equivalent of a £1,185 pay rise for a full-time apprentice working 40 hours a week. So we acted on the apprentice minimum wage.

We have taken the advice of the Low Pay Commission and also acted on the national minimum wage rates that apply to people under the age of 25. This year, we accepted all of the Low Pay Commission’s recommendations for national minimum wage rates to come into force from this October. The main national minimum wage rate for 21 to 24-year-olds will increase by 25p, or 3.7%—substantially more than inflation or, indeed, average wage growth—to £6.95 per hour. That is the largest single increase in the main rate of the national minimum wage since 2008, in cash terms, with the expectation of the highest level ever in real terms.

Finally, hon. Members from the various Opposition parties may debate how discriminatory legislation brought in by the Labour Government was, but this Government will continue to invest in apprenticeships; to create millions of jobs, in particular for young people; and to increase wages of all working people, under and over the age of 25, through the national minimum wage and the new national living wage.

5.38 pm

**Holly Lynch:** I thank hon. Members for their valued contributions.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) talked about how age discrimination not only affects under-25s, but leaves older employees particularly vulnerable in the workplace, which was a good point. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said that we were a nation of shopkeepers, but also that young people in the workplace sweat just as much as older people. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) identified policies across the board that have been unfriendly to younger people. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) identified the disconnect in how we recognise the contributions of younger MPs in this place, but not the contributions of younger workers out in the real world.

I also thank the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who talked about her experiences of working at 16. I started my first job at 14 and, by the time I was doing my A-levels at 18, I had three jobs: babysitting for a number of families, and working behind a bar and at weekends in a chemist’s shop. To be told that I was unproductive, holding down three jobs while doing my A-levels, is why the issue is particularly close to my heart.

I thank the official Opposition’s Front-Bench spokesperson—my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) and I try to avoid being in the same place at the same time, as most Members struggle to tell us apart. Perhaps that says something about the demographics of Westminster, that younger, female politicians all look the same to their older, male colleagues—present company excepted, of course.

I am disappointed with the Minister’s response. I understand that there are other opinions historically, but I make the point that when some of the decisions
were being taken, I was holding down three jobs while at school. However, I believe that he has failed to address any of the issues that I raised—the injustice of people being told that they are underproductive, and the reason given by the Minister. Also, clarity is desperately needed in industry, for employers, as highlighted by the Federation of Small Businesses. Do young people have an incentive to get into the workplace? If employers act on that, will they end up in the courts?

I would like to take the issue further. If the Minister can provide any more information in writing, I would be grateful to receive it. I hope that other hon. Members will join me in continuing to keep this campaign going.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,
That this House has considered age discrimination and the national living wage.

5.41 pm
Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Thursday 9 June 2016

[SIR DAVID AMESS in the Chair]

Stillbirth

1.30 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered stillbirth.

I am grateful that I was able to secure this debate today. I know that I am not alone in this place in having direct or indirect experience of the very important issue of stillbirth. I will not attempt to put into words what going through this experience does to those who are left to pick up the pieces. There are no words to describe the pain and, normally, I am a pretty private person. However, I realised that, if I am going to campaign to help to improve this situation, I must speak out and use my experience to make things better, if I can.

Too many people suffer horrendously through stillbirth, but they suffer in silence. I am an MP and I believe that I have a duty to speak up for all those people who feel that they have no voice and that no one cares or understands. I want to work with others to make things better.

Stillbirth is not inevitable; it is not something that just happens. In my case, after five years of IVF treatment and one miscarriage, I experienced what all the medical professionals with whom I came into contact called a “textbook pregnancy”. I was glowing, in rude health and despite my small frame I was carrying a huge baby by the time my pregnancy came to an end. However, what I did not know, and what the medical professionals failed to pick up, was that I was suffering from HELLP syndrome, a form of pre-eclampsia. Apparently, it had been showing up in my blood tests for some time but that was repeatedly missed.

I was returned home, after I arrived at hospital on my due date, as previously arranged, with my hospital bag and ready to be admitted. The great discomfort that I felt—pronounced pain through my whole body—was dismissed as the usual discomfort that comes with late pregnancy. Having returned home, almost immediately, I had to go back to the hospital, where I was kept waiting for over an hour and a half and told that I was being a nuisance. Again, I was told to return home, but my husband refused to allow that to happen. It transpired that, if I had indeed returned home, I would most certainly have died.

As it was, I was sent to a bed with extremely bad grace and administered with high doses of morphine. My baby died overnight. No blood was checked, no monitoring took place and no doctor examined me. The next morning, after my baby was found to have died, doctors wondered why my body would not co-operate as they tried to induce labour. While they waited 48 hours to discuss this, my liver ruptured and I started having fits. My husband was told that I was unlikely to survive.

The reason I tell this story is that the failings in my care are far more common than they should be. Unfortunately, my case is very far from unique, particularly in one significant way. Work undertaken by Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, showed the importance of listening to mothers’ concerns about their babies. Forty-five per cent. of parents who experienced a stillbirth felt that something was wrong before the medical problem was diagnosed. Too many women are told that their concerns are unfounded and sent home, only for their baby to die soon afterwards. One simple change is for antenatal care to become more collaborative. Listen to mothers’ concerns; women know their own bodies.

To this day, Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board has not admitted that anything went wrong with my care. There has been no apology; apparently, it just happened. When I was discharged from hospital, it was agreed that an investigation into my care would take place and that any lessons that could be learned would be learned. At that point, I—like so many others before me—naively thought that that would happen. How else could the system improve?

Eighteen months later, after repeated phone calls, I received a one-page summary telling me, in language so vague and non-committal that I barely understood it, that the case had been looked at and lessons had been learned. At that point, and with extreme reluctance, I sought medical advice.

From that moment, Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board fought like a caged lion to cover its back to abdicate responsibility, which I realised it had, in fact, been doing all along. However, unlike so many other women, I was in a position to commission two independent reports from experts: Dr Shaxted, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist; and Dr Benjamin Stenson, a consultant neonatologist from Edinburgh. Quite frankly, they were astonished at the extraordinary, repeated and glaring errors in the care I received.

Many people would have walked away, and I know many people indeed have walked away, crushed by a system that compounds the huge loss suffered by refusing to accept when mistakes have been made, much less learn from them. I fought on because it was the only way I had of showing that my little boy mattered. I could not allow the loss of my son to be swept aside, ignored and dismissed, as though it were an incident of no importance.

People come to their MPs when they feel powerless, when their own efforts to solve a difficult situation in which they find themselves have failed. People often come to their MP when they cannot make themselves heard when dealing with an institution or organisation that refuses to listen to them, and crushes them beneath its weight. I know how that feels. That is why today I feel privileged to be in a position to offer help to some of my constituents when they feel that sense of powerlessness.

After I was elected as an MP, it seemed to me that the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board became more interested in settling this case, which had dragged on for more than six years and with no apparent end in sight. I was offered a nominal sum, which I instinctively wanted to refuse. What I wanted was what I had wanted on the day I walked out of the hospital. I wanted an apology and I wanted to see some kind of evidence that work had been done to help to ensure that such mistakes would be much less likely to reoccur.
However, my choice was to take the sum offered, or face the real possibility of a judge awarding me the same amount or less, which in practice would have meant that I would be liable for all costs incurred by both parties. Bankruptcy beckoned, and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board was allowed to sweep the entire matter under the carpet, at a time of its choosing and without a backward glance after dragging out the entire process for more than six years. No liability was admitted, and as far as the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board is concerned there is no case to answer. How is that justice? How can others who have suffered similarly have confidence in a system such as this, and confidence that similar mistakes will not be repeated? Since I have spoken out, many people have contacted me to tell me their own shockingly similar stories.

We know that many stillbirths are avoidable, although it is also true that in some cases we do not even know why such a death has occurred, and I applaud Sands for the work it does to raise funds for research in this area. Governments across the UK must commit the necessary funding to help us to understand more about unexplained stillbirths.

It is thought that around 50% of stillbirths cannot be explained by medical professionals. However, let us be clear—not knowing why around 50% of stillbirths occur does not mean that they are inevitable. The fact is that the majority of unexplained stillbirths occur in low-risk pregnancies. That suggests that routine antenatal monitoring is failing to identify babies at risk, even though such monitoring could save their lives. Around 50% of stillbirths can be explained and much can be done to raise awareness and increase monitoring to help to mitigate risk factors.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on the courageous way that she has raised this important issue? [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Does my hon. Friend agree that sometimes there is a case for a coroner’s inquiry into babies who are said to be stillborn? My sister lost her son, Hamish Kinghorn, and because he was said to be stillborn there could not be a coroner’s inquiry, despite the fact that there were NHS failings during the labour process. It is a difficult job, but that could be one way that can bring succour to the mother, in this case, my sister. This is obviously one of many cases that my hon. Friend is hearing about.

Patricia Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I will talk about the intervention of coroners in a little more detail but, in principle, I agree: there must be a role for coroners in the process.

With greater awareness, parents will be able to make more informed choices about their health and pregnancy care. As with most health issues, social inequalities are a factor. The truth is we are failing to properly identify many babies who are at risk. We lack knowledge, data and research into why babies die.

To put the figures into context, every year around 6,500 babies die before or shortly after birth. That is one baby every hour and a half—the equivalent of 16 jumbo jets crashing every year. Some 4,000 are stillborn and another 2,500 die within a month of birth. Although some work has been done, it is not unfair to say that there has been no significant reduction in the death rates in the past 10 years. There is still a taboo around stillbirth. Folk don’t like to mention it. They don’t know how. It creates discomfort and awkwardness. It is not like other deaths, is it? You cannot talk about shared memories of the lost baby. That leads to those suffering the loss feeling abandoned and isolated. Life must continue behind what is very often a fragile mask of normality.

Thinking of our own lives, almost all of us will know someone who has had a stillbirth or whose baby has died shortly after birth. However, the tragedies are too often hidden. Road traffic accidents kill around 3,000 people each year. Twice as many babies as that die, and still it barely appears on the agenda. Sands research showed that 75% of the public were very surprised by the numbers of stillbirths. There was more concern about cot death and Down’s syndrome, yet stillbirth is much more common. I think that it is not a political priority because it is considered unfashionable. It is not talked about generally and it is even more difficult for people to talk about when they have experienced it.

Will the Minister give assurances that the practice of trusts investigating themselves when things go wrong will be reconsidered? I have formally written to the Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Health, Shona Robison MSP, to ask for similar consideration to be given to that issue in terms of health boards in Scotland. Ideally, an independent body should complete investigations into alleged failings in care within a specified timeframe. That would prevent long-drawn-out investigations or, worse still, legal processes. In my case, those lasted more than six years.

Experts in the field are unequivocal when they tell us with one voice that for otherwise healthy babies to die undelivered near term is an easily avoidable event. In answer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), I find myself persuaded by the case put forward by the Campaign for Safer Births that coroners should have the power to hold an inquest for babies who die during labour or are stillborn at full term, which is from 37 weeks on. Coroners currently have no jurisdiction to hold inquests into such deaths.

In my case, Dr Stenson noted “with disappointment” that there was a record in my notes that I did not want a post-mortem performed on my son. He went on to point out that there was no record to indicate who performed the post-mortem on my son. He went on to say that there has been no significant reduction in the death rates in the past 10 years. There is still a taboo around stillbirth. Folk don’t like to mention it. They don’t know how. It creates discomfort and awkwardness. It is not like other deaths, is it? You cannot talk about shared memories of the lost baby. That leads to those suffering the loss feeling abandoned and isolated. Life must continue behind what is very often a fragile mask of normality.

Will the Minister give assurances that the practice of trusts investigating themselves when things go wrong will be reconsidered? I have formally written to the Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Health, Shona Robison MSP, to ask for similar consideration to be given to that issue in terms of health boards in Scotland. Ideally, an independent body should complete investigations into alleged failings in care within a specified timeframe. That would prevent long-drawn-out investigations or, worse still, legal processes. In my case, those lasted more than six years.

Experts in the field are unequivocal when they tell us with one voice that for otherwise healthy babies to die undelivered near term is an easily avoidable event. In answer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), I find myself persuaded by the case put forward by the Campaign for Safer Births that coroners should have the power to hold an inquest for babies who die during labour or are stillborn at full term, which is from 37 weeks on. Coroners currently have no jurisdiction to hold inquests into such deaths.

In my case, Dr Stenson noted “with disappointment” that there was a record in my notes that I did not want a post-mortem performed on my son. He went on to point out that there was no record to indicate who spoke to me or what information I was given. I may or may not have had such a conversation. Quite frankly, I cannot remember, as much of my time in hospital was spent under extremely heavy sedation in a critical care unit and then a high dependency unit. Why was the conversation not had with me when I was more alert? Why was it not properly recorded? I cannot say what my response would have been, but I had no opportunity to make a measured assessment of the relative merits or otherwise of such an important decision. Is that not odd? Is it likely to be unusual? I doubt it very much.

That is what has helped persuade me that coroners should be involved in such decisions. It would mean that particular trends could be noted, informing training needs and highlighting serious failings. It would ultimately help the NHS to deliver what we all want: higher-quality
maternity care. Coroners would be in a position to issue a prevention of future deaths report that hospitals must follow to prevent similar mistakes occurring.

In Scotland, 34% of all stillbirths occur at 37 weeks and beyond. The figure for England and Wales stands at 33%. Those figures are truly dreadful and are a national disgrace. The North Ayrshire and Arran health board has a higher rate of stillbirth than the UK average. It comes second in a list of 21 health boards across the UK given red light warnings for high stillbirth and newborn death rates. That causes me alarm, as I know it does for my constituents. Scotland ranks 31st out of 33 high-income countries in the world on this issue. Although international comparisons are difficult—definitions of stillbirth can vary—it is still an appalling statistic.

It is too late to save my little boy. There will be other little boys and girls as eagerly awaited as my baby who are yet to be born. We can do much more in Scotland and across the UK to take action to ensure they have the safest possible care. I urge the Minister to reflect seriously on the suggestions I have put forward. I will also be urging Scotland’s own Cabinet Secretary for Health to continue to work to improve maternity care. We cannot go on allowing 100 babies to die each and every week. It is time that the issue was put firmly on the political agenda. Tears and hand-wringing will not save our babies. Action and political will can. I urge the Minister to take action.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): I have been advised that there are five colleagues who wish to speak. The concluding speeches will start at 2.30 pm. Perhaps the other colleagues who have taken the time to be here may be minded to make interventions.

1.46 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing the debate. She has spoken with great passion from a personal perspective. We have all been moved by what she has said. It was very powerful.

I want to make a short contribution on behalf of a constituent and a member of my family. My constituent wrote to me to tell me about how she lost her first child to stillbirth:

“This life altering event has led to us being placed into a world we never knew existed. Sadly, the baby loss taboo leaves many unsupported and prevention affected.”

She has been trying to get information from her clinical commissioning group on what is happening to ensure that such things do not happen again and that more women can be protected. What she has got back from the CCG so far has been a general statement of Government policy, which includes the four principal activities that CCGs are asked to concentrate on: reducing smoking in pregnancy; monitoring foetal growth; raising awareness of foetal movements; and improving foetal monitoring.

That is all very well—I put great emphasis on the improvement of foetal monitoring, so that the information is provided and is fed back to the individual concerned—but my constituent also wants detailed information about what the CCG is doing to ensure that the issue is addressed. The CCG operates across two obstetric units and four midwife-led units and has a small number of babies delivered at home each year. She has not been able to get detail about what that CCG will do to address the situation for the future. I hope we can send a strong message to CCGs around the country that concentrating merely on the Government’s four key objectives is not good enough. What we need is the detailed information on how they are going to go about dealing with this issue through their sustainability and transformation plans to provide reassurance for women who are in this situation.

I appreciate the effect that stillbirth has on women, but it is not exclusively a woman’s problem. The fact that stillbirth occurs is a problem that affects the whole family, and it affects men as well. I know that, to my own cost, through a family incident. It is essential to bear in mind the impact on the mental health of men who are involved in cases of stillbirth and simply do not know where to turn in what is a completely traumatic experience. I urge the Minister to concentrate on providing information about what the Government are doing for the whole family and for the wider community.

My next point is that essentially we are talking about an artificial distinction here. We are talking about the distinction between miscarriage and stillbirth and about a particular period, which comes at around 24 weeks. That is totally unfair. Before the 24 weeks, parents are given no chance to grieve for the baby who has been lost, or to go through the process of putting their lives back together again. We ought to look at that to see whether that distinction is still relevant.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that counselling should be available for the whole family on request? We should be seeking to take that forward across the whole UK.

John Howell: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Counselling needs to be provided for the whole family unit to see them through a very traumatic experience.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for introducing the debate and to the hon. Gentleman for his point about the effect that stillbirth has on the family. To add to that—I know I am not alone; there are women with whom I am sitting here who have suffered miscarriages, too—after you have suffered a miscarriage or a stillbirth, it is extremely difficult to enjoy any subsequent pregnancy. Every minute of every day is spent wondering whether you are going to lose the next child too. It is worth while bringing that point to bear in this debate to ensure that support is available for women after their loss.

John Howell: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. It is not just about the individual stillbirth, traumatic though that is; it is about the future and ensuring that individuals can go through another pregnancy in the full knowledge that they are more likely to be safe than not. Anything that we can do to help that, we should. We should take any opportunity to take things forward. That is all I wanted to contribute to the debate, and I am grateful to have had the chance to speak.
1.53 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir David. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for securing this debate and for her heartfelt, considered and important contribution. It will have made a difference to many families, and I believe it will truly help to drive improvements.

We have heard about Sands. Sands awareness month should be a matter of concern to every Member of this House. Stillbirth can affect any family, and it is vital that we give it proper consideration and have ample time to discuss the varied and complex issues that surround it. I understand that stillbirth is a topic that is so hard to think of, let alone to debate here, but if we do not, we miss the opportunity to confront issues facing children and families who have been affected throughout Scotland and the UK. They deserve our attention and consideration.

I know that many people have their own personal experiences to draw on; I am very fortunate that this is not an experience I have had directly. I cannot say how thankful I am for that, and for the excellent care that I was fortunate to receive during my two pregnancies. But, like many here today, I know that not everyone has had experiences like mine. Far too many people watching today will have experienced the heartbreak of stillbirth. I will never forget a little girl who would have been the same age as my eldest son, but who was stillborn. That is one of the memories that will stay with me forever. It is important that we remember all these children and acknowledge them.

We are fortunate to have access to excellent House of Commons Library briefings for debates. I was struck by the introduction to a briefing relating to this debate, which said:

“When a baby dies the impact on a family can be profound, with many parents reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression for years after their baby has died.”

I appreciate that that statement was included in that briefing because, although it seems obvious to all of us here today, it needed to be written down and put in black in white to be absolutely clear. There can be few things that anyone will ever have to deal with that are more difficult than the loss of their baby. It will have a terrible impact on family members, and for a long time. It is not something parents or families will ever forget about.

It is also vital that we continue to take steps to look at why stillbirth happens and what we can do to minimise the instances and increase awareness among medical professionals and parents of anything that might cause concern and be worth looking at.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on her very moving speech.

Some Members may be aware that before I came to the House I specialised in medical negligence law, mainly acting for pursuers, or plaintiffs as they are known south of the border. Drawing on what our hon. Friend said, a desire is not enough: real action is needed. Maureen Watt, the then Scottish Public Health Minister, noted that “The Scottish Government responded to a parliamentary petition in 2010...by forming a stillbirth working group and setting an aim in 2012 to reduce stillbirths by 15 per cent by 2015”.

She also noted a subsequent reduction of 18% in stillbirth rates, which shows that a combination of approaches can make an impact. Importantly, she stated that “ministers were determined to reduce rates further.”

As my hon. Friend said at the beginning of her speech, this is not an issue of party politics, as I am confident that everyone present agrees; it is about finding ways to improve prospects for babies and preventing heartbreak and loss for families. We can all agree that this issue should have our support.

I am pleased that Scotland has made progress on reducing the stillbirth rate in recent years and similarly that the UK has made progress, but there is much work to be done and we must commit to focusing on that. It is also important that mothers who go through this traumatic and heartbreaking experience are offered the appropriate support and care, and have access, as my hon. Friends have said, to a complaints process that is open and transparent and offers opportunity for redress.

The comments made about the importance of investigation and the role of coroners are worth considering. It was interesting to see the Royal College of Midwives in The Lancet stating:

“Attention to preventing stillbirths in approach to term and 36 weeks plus must be improved”, and that more must be done, just as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran. We need to focus our minds on the stark statistics that she has told us about. One third of stillbirths happen at term—37 weeks’ gestation or beyond—and in the vast majority of all stillbirths we never know what has befallen the baby. These areas need to be addressed with as much energy and urgency as we address important messages regarding maternal health and wellbeing.

Researchers for the Campaign for Safer Births have estimated that approximately 500 babies die every year because of avoidable factors during birth. Many are left permanently brain-damaged or disabled. They believe that all these tragic deaths and injuries could be avoided with better care. They aim to raise awareness of the issue, which my hon. Friend has surely helped to do by securing this debate today. They want
to see safety improvements in maternity units and the provision of information to those who have experienced poor care or negligence.

I believe that a combination of approaches, such as those adopted by the Scottish Government, can make a material difference, but it is clear that we must be committed to driving change if we want to continue to reduce stillbirth rates. That will not happen without continued targeted action. The stillbirth group established by the Scottish Government has provided evidence that the stillbirth rate has fallen in Scotland since it commenced its work. There are 15 maternity units in Scotland taking part in a UK-wide study looking at foetal movements, which we have heard are a vital indicator, and, in particular, at how units respond to women who report decreased foetal movement. I am hopeful that there will be further progress in Scotland and the UK in this very important area.

In March 2015, the Scottish Government appointed Catherine Calderwood, an obstetrician and gynaecologist who was the national clinical director for maternity and women’s health for NHS England, as chief medical officer. That is important. Her work on reducing stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Scotland and avoidable harm in maternity services will be influential as we continue to push for vital further reductions in the number of stillborn babies. Those stillborn children are our children— they are our families’, our friends’ and our neighbours’ children—and we can best respect that by supporting continuing research, encouraging open conversations about stillbirth and helping to break down the taboos that are still all too prevalent. As politicians, we must push for new research and new ways of working, and encourage real dialogue among medical professionals about stillbirth, particularly where things have gone wrong with the care provided.

I express again my admiration for my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran for securing this most important debate, and to the other speakers who have contributed.

2.1 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I echo the comments about the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and congratulate her on securing this very important debate. She is incredibly brave to talk about her experience—I know that from my personal experience of doing the same thing. I also pay tribute to her colleagues who have come to support her, because that is hugely comforting. What she has done is incredibly brave, and I thank her very much for that.

The hon. Lady spoke about the importance of talking about stillbirth and neonatal death. She hit the nail on the head: we do not like talking about death in this country—even more, we do not like talking about the death of children and, in particular, babies—but it is only by talking about not just stillbirth but neonatal death and the death of babies that we can understand the scale of the issue. As she rightly said, a lot of people in this country do not understand how poor we are at tackling this issue. We are somewhere in the region of 23rd in the western world. Given that we have one of the best health services in the world, that is totally unacceptable.

I do not particularly like talking about statistics when it comes to babies. The hon. Lady rightly said that somewhere in the region of 3,500 babies a year are stillborn. If half of those deaths are avoidable, that is approximately 1,500 to 2,000 babies and 2,000 to 4,000 parents who would not have had to go through this experience. It is not just the parents who feel the effects of stillbirth and neonatal death, but the grandparents, the friends and the wider family.

I will talk about my own experience very briefly. I have three beautiful children, but only two of them are currently with us. We lost our son. He was diagnosed at 22 weeks with a very rare chromosomal disorder called Edwards syndrome, which meant that there was a relatively high likelihood that he would not make it. As was said earlier, it meant living every day with the prospect of a stillbirth—it was too late for a miscarriage at that stage. He went full term—he was a fighter—so we went through the experience of stillbirth at full term. I have said in the Chamber previously that there is no word to describe the experience other than numbness—in fact, I will not describe it because it is going to make me upset. The point I want to make is that every single stillbirth is an absolute personal tragedy. We as a Government and as politicians have a duty to do all we can to ensure that as few people as possible go through that personal experience.

That happened in 2014. On entering this place, I was committed to doing something about this issue. I teamed up with a number of other MPs and we set up an all-party parliamentary group on baby loss, which the hon. Lady kindly joined, to do something about this on a cross-party basis. The Government have the responsibility and the power to do a lot of the work, but the all-party group can act as a conduit between the fantastic charities that work in the sector and the Government, who I know are committed to tackling the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) made an important point about mums and dads. We thought it very important that I co-chair the APPG; it is intentional that we have a man and a woman co-chairing the group. It is important that we address the issue from both sides, because it affects men as much as it affects women.

As the hon. Lady said, Baby Loss Awareness Week is coming up in October. In Parliament, we will be marking that occasion for the very first time. Mr Speaker has kindly allowed us the use of his state rooms for a function. We will be sending around ribbons and encouraging as many right hon. and hon. Members as possible to wear them proudly, and to talk about and raise the issue as much as possible in that week and also throughout the year.

I spoke earlier about the amazing work of charities in this sector. I will name just two—Sands and Bliss—but there are so many more that do incredible work, from charities carrying out research to very small organisations that knit hats, mittens, scarves and all sorts of other things, which can be hugely comforting to parents who have gone through this experience.

The Government have a very important role to play in tackling this issue. As the hon. Lady said, research is a huge part of that, whether it is on social inequality—which, as she rightly said, is a known factor in stillbirth, maternal age or ethnicity. We still do not really understand why ethnicity is so important. There is another awkward subject that we do not like to talk about in this country:
we do not encourage parents who have gone through this terrible experience to have post-mortems. Often, medical professionals do not want to ask the question, but if they phrase it correctly and say, “By offering your baby for a post-mortem, it would help us immensely in understanding, in research terms, why this happens,” it will help to prevent more in the future. We have to do far more to encourage post-mortems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley talked about education for parents-to-be, whether about drugs, smoking, diet or obesity—the two are somewhat different. There is a huge amount of work to do in that area.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right to suggest that this is not a party political issue—it crosses the divide—but I am hugely proud that the Government recognise that it is serious and have taken steps to address it. They are not just talking but putting money in, and they have set a target. Targets are thrown around all the time, but they are meaningless unless the money and resources are behind them, so I am proud that the Government have done that.

There are some important elements to the Government’s new care bundle. I fully agree with my hon. Friend. Friend that it is important that we ensure that clinical commissioning groups and hospital trusts are doing what the Government are mandating them to do. The smoking cessation work is really important. Still now, more than one in 10 mums smoke during pregnancy. We know that that is such a high-risk factor when it comes to stillbirth. On foetal growth monitoring, we are one of the few countries that do not scan in the late stages of pregnancy. We scan at about 20 weeks and then do not do anything until the mother goes into hospital, but lots of other countries scan at 36 weeks. We are also looking at foetal growth, which is really important. The bump is measured from naval to the pelvic bone, and if there are any issues with its size, the mother is sent to hospital for a scan with a consultant. That is very important. We need to do far more foetal growth scanning in the later stages of pregnancy.

The hon. Lady also made a hugely important point about the awareness of foetal movement and the importance of foetal monitoring. We absolutely have to empower more women when they get that feeling. In so many cases of stillbirth, the mums say with hindsight, “I knew there was something wrong, but I didn’t want to bother health professionals,” or, “I phoned my doctor or the NHS helpline, and they said don’t worry.” The reality is that, if there is an issue, mums often know. It is important to empower women, so that if they feel something is not right, they go and get it checked out. We would much rather they got a diagnosis to say, “There’s nothing wrong. You’re okay. Go home”, than they ignored it, but worried about it, only for horrendous consequences to ensue.

The new Government care bundle is important and good, with £4 million being put in. In my local hospital, Colchester general hospital, we have already seen the start of that money trickling down. New monitors have been installed, and they are going in all across the country, which will help with the monitoring element in the later stages of pregnancy. Another hugely important bit is the training of midwives and nurses, and more than £1 million has been put into that. Finally, a £500,000 investment has been made in the review process, to ensure that we document and learn from every single stillbirth, while treating each as a personal tragedy. Those records should be kept and shared, so that we can look at best practice across hospitals. Some of our hospitals in the United Kingdom are fantastic and world-class, but, sadly, some are not. We need to bring all hospitals and maternity units in the country up to the very best standard.

I am pushing the time limit, but I will touch briefly on two more points. Sadly, even if we meet the Government’s target on stillbirth, which is to reduce it by 15% by 2020 and half by 2030—an incredible aim, and I would love it if we got to that position—1,500 to 2,000 babies would be stillborn every single year, so it is still important to deal with some of the bereavement issues in hospitals across our country.

The first priority should be bereavement suites; it is imperative to get one attached to every maternity unit in the country, because it is totally unacceptable that any mum or dad, having gone through the experience of a stillbirth, should have to go on to a general maternity ward, surrounded by happy families with balloons and teddies and the sound of crying babies. That is not acceptable. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), has absolutely recognised the issue, and is working hard on it; he is doing a study of exactly what provision we have in our hospitals. I would love it if, by the end of this Parliament, we could have a bereavement suite attached to every maternity unit in the country.

Finally, although the bereavement suite is one part of that jigsaw, the second part is having enough bereavement-trained midwives and gynaecological counsellors in those units who are able to give the support to parents, not only at the time, but afterwards and—as the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said—with future pregnancies.

In conclusion, the hon. Lady is hugely brave. She raises a hugely important issue, and one that I know the Government recognise and are taking action to address. We, as cross-party politicians, can keep pressure on the Government to ensure that they meet that target of a 15% reduction by the end of the Parliament and—what an aim!—to halve stillbirth by 2030.

2.13 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Thank you, Sir David, for the opportunity to speak in this debate, the subject of which is of such huge importance. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for bringing this issue, and her own tragic experience, to the attention of the House, an act of true bravery. I cannot imagine how hugely difficult it is for her and others who have contributed to the debate to speak so openly about losing their children. Equally, I cannot imagine how difficult it is for any parent or family to lose a child, but today is about raising awareness of stillbirth, and I will highlight to the House the case of dear friends of mine who had twin girls last year, but, tragically, lost one of them, Sophia Faith Fraser, who was born sleeping as a result of a little-known complication called twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome.

My friends were delighted and instantly felt hugely privileged and special to discover that they were to have twins. However, at their 20-week scan they were referred
to the foetal medicine unit at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow, as their identical twin girls looked to be suffering from severe complications. The doctor confirmed their fears: their girls were suffering from stage 2 twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome. TTTS is a rare disorder, which can happen in identical-twin pregnancies and, simply put, is an unequal flow of blood between the twins across the shared placenta. One baby donates blood across the placenta to their twin, becoming dangerously anaemic, and the recipient twin becomes so overloaded with blood that they are at risk of heart failure. It is a critical condition, which can be fatal to both babies.

My friends’ doctor explained that laser surgery would be the best option, to try and correct the blood flow by closing some of the vessels the girls were sharing, but the procedure carries major risks, and the parents were advised that they could lose one or both of their girls. If left untreated, however, there was only a 10% chance that both girls would survive, and they would be very likely to suffer brain damage. As we can imagine, the parents wanted to help their girls in any way they could, so they decided to go ahead with the laser surgery.

The case carried a high risk of complications so, two days later, Sophia’s mum was taken to Birmingham, where their doctor could perform the surgery with the support of a specialist team. The laser surgery went well, closing some of the shared vessels through a small incision in Sophia’s mum’s abdomen. Two litres of fluid were drained from her womb, a dangerous side effect of the TTTS, and her parents were told that a scan would be performed an hour later, to tell if there were still two heartbeats. That was the longest hour of their lives, but they were overjoyed when the scan showed that both girls had survived the procedure, and had already begun to make improvements. However, the parents were warned that the next few days were critical and, a week later, during a check-up, it became apparent that although the laser surgery had corrected some of the flow, it had not solved the problem completely.

Sophia, the donor twin, was in grave danger and required a blood transfusion, which was given directly into her stomach through her mother’s stomach with a fine needle. That procedure carried great risk not only for Sophia but for her sister, Eloise. Without it, however, Sophia could not survive, and the parents wanted to do everything possible. Their aim was for the girls to make it to 28 weeks’ gestation, when they could be delivered and given a higher chance of survival. The blood transfusion brought some success, and the procedure was repeated to try and build up Sophia’s blood supply. However, heartbreaking, when her mother was 25 weeks pregnant, Sophia passed away. The parents were devastated; she had fought so hard and for so long. They felt they were living in a nightmare, and—as they described it to me—one they could still not wake up from.

My friends were grieving for Sophia while fighting hard for Eloise, who was still in danger and had to be scanned every two to three days. Sophia and Eloise’s mum bravely carried both girls until she was 34 weeks pregnant when, after a check-up, she was given an emergency caesarean section due to a bleed in her womb. Eloise Hope Fraser was born at 6.46 pm, weighing 4 lbs 7.5 oz, and her little sister, Sophia Faith Fraser, was born sleeping shortly afterwards.

Both girls had been very poorly during the pregnancy, with the uneven blood flow endangering their lives and putting them at risk of severe long-term health problems or brain damage. The girls’ parents believe that Sophia knew how ill she was and let go, giving her big sister a special gift, the gift of life. For that, they think she is a brave and amazing little girl, who will always be an important part of their family. I know they could not put into words how much they love her and her sister, Eloise. Eloise is now thriving, and making her little sister proud every day.

My friends’ case is rare, but not unique. They have often said to me that the care they received during their pregnancy from the foetal medicine unit was absolutely outstanding. They described Dr Janice Gibson as the most dedicated and skilled medical professional they had ever met. She held their hands and cried with them, and she gave them hope and sound advice. They can never repay her for what she did for their family. Dr Gibson is the only person in Scotland trained to carry out the laser procedure, and funding is needed to support ongoing training and families going through similar experiences. The couple now hope to raise money for this important cause, which they have been doing through the Sophia Fraser Foundation. The money they raise will support foetal medicine through the Yorkhill Children’s Charity.

I tell Sophia’s story today, with her parents’ permission, to highlight some of the unknown complications and rare disorders that can occur during childbirth, such as the twin transfusion syndrome. Aftercare and bereavement support for parents, as has been said, is so important, and I pay tribute to Sands, which does work in my West Lothian constituency and across our countries to support families who have lost children to stillbirth or neonatal complications. We have come a long way in medical developments, and although Sophia’s mum had the best care she felt she could have had, we must continue to raise awareness and work to improve services and care so that lives can be saved, and so that parents do not have to go through what Patricia or Sophia’s parents have gone through.

2.19 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is very hard to sum up this debate. We have heard some extraordinary contributions from my very brave colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), and from the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Colchester (Will Quince) and my hon. Friends the Members for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and for Livingston (Hannah Bardell). While listening to all those wonderful contributions, I reflected on my own story, which is not of a stillbirth but of a bad miscarriage, which I have never mentioned to my children who are alive now. This debate is so important, because it puts into the public domain the pain, grief and horror of stillbirth. As parliamentarians, we must make this a subject that we are able to discuss so that we can improve the life chances of children yet to be born.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran asked the Minister to take steps to improve the statistics. The hon. Member for Colchester said that we do not want to talk about statistics; we are talking about babies. We want to improve the life chances of
babies yet to be born. This is a time that I feel proud to be a Member of Parliament, because we can do that. The Sands month for remembering and mentioning stillbirths is important, as is the work of the other charities that have been mentioned. One charity that has not yet been mentioned is Kicks Count, whose work leads directly to women listening to their bodies and ensures that if there is not foetal movement, they can report that. I hope that as a result of this debate, women will be listened to. I know, since I have been there, that women know their bodies. They know when something is not right. If only we could get health professionals to take on board what women are telling them, that could make a huge difference.

Other changes could be made. As my hon. Friend said, health trusts—CCGs in England—should not be investigating themselves. There should be independent investigations into deaths, and those investigations should be time-limited and not allowed to drag on. That is important. Coroners should be able to hold inquests and post-mortems should be carried out to help our understanding of why babies die just before, during and just after birth. It is important that we take that work forward. I understand that men are also affected by stillbirth. We sometimes concentrate on mothers, but we must recognise that it is families who suffer.

As has already been said, there is nothing but consensus among the parties in this debate, both north and south of the border, and that is very important. We all want the best for babies. We all want them to be born. We all want to improve our standing in global statistics. Actually, we all just want more babies to be born safely, and when they cannot be, for their deaths to be investigated so that the fight to help this really difficult situation moves forward. I understand that men are also affected by stillbirth. We sometimes concentrate on mothers, but we must recognise that it is families who suffer.

As has already been said, there is nothing but consensus among the parties in this debate, both north and south of the border, and that is very important. We all want the best for babies. We all want them to be born. We all want to improve our standing in global statistics. Actually, we all just want more babies to be born safely, and when they cannot be, for their deaths to be investigated so that the fight to help this really difficult situation moves forward.

2.23 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this extremely important debate and the compelling way that she introduced it. She is right that she is not alone in having gone through such a terrible experience, and she is certainly not alone in wanting to move this issue up the political agenda. I pay tribute to her for the courage that she has shown in retelling her experience. I do not think that any Member could fail to have been moved by her speech, and I am sure that many of those watching her contribution will, sadly, have recognised the personal tragedy, which was made more difficult by the defensive attitude of the health service. Many people have had such experiences—not just in this area but through many other failings in care in the health service. She made a compelling case for the extension of coroners’ powers to holding inquests on stillbirths. As we know from recent high-profile inquests, there is a need for a comprehensive review of that whole system.

Hon. Members from both sides have made excellent and sometimes very moving contributions. I draw particular attention to the contribution of the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who rightly raised the impact on parents’ mental health of such experiences and the loss that the whole family feels. Not only the mother and father, but little brothers or sisters and the wider family are impacted by such tragic events.

The hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) was right to highlight the need for prevention and how many parents experience a stillbirth and never get an adequate explanation of how that happened. I agree that only through continued targeted action will we drive the necessary progress. The hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) summed up the challenge very well when he said that we do not like talking about death in this country. I pay tribute to him for the great strength that he showed in talking about his experience. I am sure that he will be able to get many more Members to talk about this subject through his work on the APPG. The hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) spoke with great sincerity about her constituents’ experience and the twin to twin transfusion syndrome process, and conveyed the incredible range of emotions that parents must go through in such situations, which are rare but none the less extremely difficult for those involved.

I welcome the debate, which, as we have heard, coincides with Sands awareness month. I add my voice to those of others who have already paid tribute to the enormously important work that that charity does. Sands awareness month gives us the opportunity to increase awareness of stillbirth and neonatal death and the devastating impact experienced when a baby dies before, during or after birth, which hon. Members have conveyed with great sincerity and courage.

In November, I was privileged to have the opportunity to respond for the Opposition in a debate marking World Prematurity Day. That debate was also difficult, and what we heard then from Members about stillbirths and neonatal deaths was equally compelling and challenging. We still face those challenges, and this is an opportunity to explore in further detail some of the issues that were raised in November and have been raised today and to scrutinise the progress that the Government have made in the six months since that debate.

As has been said already, although there has been enormous progress in the past century in tackling stillbirth and infant mortality rates, progress has more or less stalled in the past two decades, and the UK continues to perform significantly worse than many comparable nations on infant mortality rates and remains one of the poorest performing countries in the developed world for stillbirths. That is a clear sign that we are not doing well enough in providing neonatal care or tackling the underlying public health issues that contribute to prematurity births and stillbirth.

Research into babies stillborn from 28 weeks indicates that the UK has a stillbirth rate of 2.9 per 1,000 births—higher than Germany at 2.4; Poland at 2.3; the Netherlands at 1.8; and Denmark at 1.7. Members have said that this issue is not just about statistics, and it is about far more than that, but those statistics need to be laid out, because it is clear that we are not doing as well as we should be and progress is not as swift as in some other places in Europe. I think that all Members want to see that situation addressed. We welcome the Secretary of State’s ambition to reduce stillbirths and neonatal deaths by 50% by 2030, but 14 years is a long way off, so will the Minister give us some indication of what progress he expects to be made before that date? Will he also set
out where he expects us to be by around 2020, by which time the Secretary of State has indicated that he expects there to have been a measurable reduction?

We welcome the announcement from 13 November of a £4 million investment in equipment and training and the establishment of a new system enabling staff to review and learn from every stillbirth and neonatal death. The Government have signalled their intention to review every one of those tragedies, and I would appreciate it if the Minister could update us on how close we are to reaching that target, and when he expects it to be met.

One of the key themes that has emerged today and in the debate we had last year is that we have some of the finest neonatal care in the world in this country, but that there is simply far too much variability between hospitals and regions. In my role as an Opposition spokesperson I have had the pleasure of visiting some excellent facilities, most recently those at Barnsley general hospital, where the commitment and attention to detail of the staff, based on listening to and valuing patients’ views, was particularly impressive. At this point, I think it is worth paying tribute to NHS staff who are tasked with helping families at their most difficult time for the sensitivity, understanding and professionalism that they show.

The hon. Member for Colchester raised the issue of bereavement suitases being available in every maternity unit in this country. If we had the same quality of care that I saw in Barnsley throughout the country, that would be a real achievement. We need to see those units that currently offer the very best care spreading their expertise across the country, so that everyone can have the very best throughout their pregnancy. Attempts to achieve that have begun. In March, NHS England published new guidance, building on existing clinical guidance and best practice. It identified four key interventions, with the aim of meeting the Secretary of State’s ambition to halve the rate of stillbirths by 2020. Those key interventions are reducing smoking in pregnancy, enhancing detection of foetal growth restriction, improving awareness of foetal movement and improving foetal monitoring during labour.

It has been estimated that if no women smoked during pregnancy, 7.1% of stillbirths could be avoided, which would equate to around 230 additional babies surviving each year. Smoking and passive smoking increase the risk of infant mortality by an estimated 40%. However, despite those startling statistics, we have seen a significant cut in public health funding, leading to around 40% of local authorities cutting budgets for smoking cessation services. Only last week I saw two pregnant women smoking on the same day. While I appreciate that that is anecdotal, it nevertheless brought home to me that we are certainly not making the inroads that we should be into cutting smoking during pregnancy. As the hon. Member for Colchester said, one in 10 women still smoke during pregnancy, which is startling, given the huge amount of evidence about the risks of doing so. We clearly need to do more to get that message across. If the key interventions are to be effective, cuts to public health budgets will not help in achieving that aim.

I have no doubt that the other suggested interventions will also help us to drive down rates of infant mortality. However, as the Royal College of Nursing has pointed out, England remains 2,600 full-time midwives short of the number it needs. We simply must have the correct level of staffing if we are to successfully implement that guidance. There are also serious issues in the levels of other clinical staff in neonatal units. The report published last year by Bliss, “Hanging in the balance”, argues that neonatal services are “stretched to breaking point”. It also states that two thirds of neonatal intensive care units do not have enough doctors and nurses, with around 2,000 more nurses needed to fill that gap. A report by the Royal College of Midwives also stated that more than 40% of wards became so busy last year that they were forced to close their doors. The average unit closed its doors on five occasions, with some closing more than 20 times.

Worrying reports this week also suggest that staff shortages and increasing demands are impacting on the ability of midwives and maternity staff to provide care. A survey by the Royal College of Midwives found that 62% of midwives and maternity support workers felt dehydrated at work because they did not have time to have a drink; 79% did not take the breaks to which they were entitled; and 52% had witnessed an error, near miss or other incident in the past month. Given the impact of current staff shortages, I question the proposal to replace bursaries for nurses and midwives with student loans, as I believe that is a risk we cannot afford to take at this stage.

The Universities Minister has confirmed that, since the tripling of tuition fees in 2012, the number of student nurses over the age of 25 has plummeted. Given that the average age of nurses and midwives in training is over 25, I have serious concerns that, for all the good intentions we have at the moment, we will not have the resources and staff to deliver the improved outcomes we all want to see. Areas such as neonatal care, which are already stretched, need more support, and I therefore invite the Minister to reconsider the current policy.

I conclude by focusing on the families who experience bereavement when their baby dies during or after birth. It is difficult to contemplate what they go through when what should be a time of joy and celebration becomes a period of tragedy beyond measure. Again, I pay tribute to the compelling way hon. Members have expressed their experiences. They have certainly given us all an awful lot to consider. What has made many people’s experiences even more difficult is that speaking about the loss of a baby has, as many Members have said, traditionally been considered taboo. Families have often felt they have nowhere to turn for help, or even to talk about it. The fact that Members have had the courage to talk about it today will help us challenge that taboo, and along with Sands awareness month, we will be able to make progress in making sure that we can talk about these issues openly and give a voice to those who have experienced the personal tragedy of the death of a baby.

I hope the great sincerity and passion with which Members have spoken will lead to a redoubling of efforts, not only in terms of neonatal care and tackling public health issues but in ensuring that we listen to the experiences of people who have gone through this, so that families get the support they need at the point of such a personal tragedy. They deserve the best possible bereavement support from highly trained professionals, and we should do everything in our power to ensure they are offered nothing less than the very best.
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this debate and on sharing her experiences so personally and powerfully with the House. I thank colleagues from all sides of the House for doing likewise. Sometimes this House, when it speaks with a personal voice on non-partisan issues, can strike a blow for democracy. I think anyone listening today will have seen their representatives doing their jobs and sharing here in Parliament that which is so often not well expressed in the land.

It is a great pleasure for me to stand in for the Minister for Care Quality, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer). He is unable to be here today, ironically because his wife, who is pregnant, is having a check-up. I hope it will not be anything serious, and I am sure we all wish him well. I know how much he wanted to be here today, and a number of Members on all sides have paid tribute to his leadership and commitment to this issue, which is very personal. I know he would like to be nowhere more than here, other than beside his wife.

Being here is a particular pleasure for me, partly because I am the Minister responsible for research in the NHS, genetics and unleashing the power of our health system to use its daily footprint of treatment and diagnoses to help to prevent suffering for future generations. This is an area in which, as hon. Members have touched on, good research and intelligent use of data from our health system can help to support future care and improve standards of care and prevention.

On a personal note, I was a child of parents who lost a child. I was due to have a baby sister. She was stillborn very late, and it was a tragedy for the whole family, as hon. Members have talked about, and devastating for my mother. It created huge pressure on my mother and her then husband’s marriage, which did not survive, and led to a complex raft of mental health and domestic family issues, which, as a number of colleagues have said, is all too common. People suffer in silence, and I think all of us talking about this today will in itself help to give people courage to recognise that this is an important issue that people should feel free and able to talk about.

Before I address the specific points made by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran and other colleagues, I want to set the scene on the Government’s approach to stillbirths in England. I and the Minister for Care Quality, and the Department of Health and its officials, very much welcome the hon. Lady raising this issue today and her support for Sands awareness month, which is this month.

As a number of colleagues have mentioned, stillbirth is often a taboo subject that many people find difficult to talk about and, because of that, many people do not know the statistics. Stillbirth is a personal tragedy, but the statistics matter. Around 15 babies every day are stillborn or die in the first weeks after birth. Today, perhaps 15 families who are expecting a joyous life event instead experience one of the biggest tragedies of their lives, with another 15 tomorrow and another 15 the day after, and so on. If there were 15 fatal car crashes every day, I dare say the country would be in uproar, but stillbirths remain an uncomfortable subject for people to discuss. It is important that here in Parliament we raise the issue and raise awareness of it.

I want to commend the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss, which is co-chaired by my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Colchester (Will Quince). The APPG was established following one of the most moving Adjournment debates held in Parliament, last November, on bereavement support for families who have experienced the loss of a baby. Reducing the number of stillbirths is an absolute priority for the Department of Health, and we will continue to work closely with Sands and the health system to raise awareness of the risk factors and the clinical practices that can improve outcomes for families.

In fact, England is a very safe country in which to have a baby and it is encouraging that the stillbirth rate in England has fallen from 5.2 deaths per 1,000 births in 2011, to 4.7 in 2013; but we all know that there is much more work to be done. Compared with other similar countries, our stillbirth rates are frankly unacceptable. The Lancet stillbirth series was published in January and showed that the UK was ranked 24th out of 49 high-income countries. The same publication showed that the UK’s rate of progress in reducing stillbirths has been slower than that of most other high-income countries. The annual rate of stillbirth reduction in the UK was 1.4%, compared with 6.8% in the Netherlands. To be frank, that places us in the bottom third of the table—in 114th place out of 164 countries around the world—for progress on stillbirths.

We are aware, however, of the impressive work being done through the Scottish Maternity and Children Quality Improvement Collaborative that has resulted in a 15% decrease in the stillbirth rate in Scotland in just three years. That is another area where the devolution of responsibility allows healthy competition between the devolved Administrations and the best can inspire the rest. We want NHS maternity services to be an exemplar of the results that we can achieve when we focus on improving safety and the patient experience. We believe that, with a concerted effort, we can make England one of the safest places in the world to have a baby.

The Government are wholeheartedly committed to improving outcomes for mothers and babies. In November last year, the Secretary of State launched the national ambition to reduce the rate of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, maternal deaths and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth by 50% by 2030, with the short-term aim of achieving a 20% reduction during this Parliament by 2020. We were delighted that the royal colleges and maternity and neonatal professionals, as well as key third sector organisations, including Sands, have come together in this area and have welcomed that important yet stretching ambition; we know that to achieve it the health system, the Government, charities and the public all have to take action and work collaboratively.

We know from experience in some maternity services in England that making safety a priority can have an impact very quickly. Strong leadership in the service, good communication, implementation of evidence-based practices, learning from other services about what works and what does not, multidisciplinary team working and training can all have a real impact quickly.
To support the NHS in achieving that stretching ambition, the Government have also announced additional investment: £2.24 million to support trusts in buying monitoring and training equipment to improve safety. That fund was run at the beginning of this year and has now been completed. Over 90 trusts have been successful and received a share of funding, allowing them to buy the latest equipment. We are also putting £1 million into rolling out training programmes to ensure that staff have the skills and confidence they need to deliver world-leading standards of care.

We have also committed to fund the development of a new system—the standardised perinatal mortality review tool. Once that is complete it will be used consistently across the NHS to enable staff to review and learn from every stillbirth and neonatal death. We are developing the tool as many national reports have referenced—as colleagues have here this afternoon—the fact that the same mistakes are being made repeatedly, which is unacceptable. What is missing in these cases is a systematic approach to improving services. We must view individual failings as important and recognise the need for accountability, while balancing that with the need to establish standard processes that will prevent mistakes and avoidable incidents from reoccurring.

In November we also committed to work with Sign up to Safety—the national patient safety campaign launched by the Government in 2014—to support all organisations and to ensure that they can contribute to the national ambition and share best practice. In March we launched the Sign up to Safety sub-brand, “Spotlight on Maternity”. The new guidance asked all organisations with maternity services to commit publicly to placing a spotlight on maternity, to contribute towards achieving the Government’s national ambition and to improve maternity outcomes. It set out five high-level themes for services to focus on that are known to make care safer: building stronger leadership; building capacity and skills for all staff; sharing progress and lessons learned across the system; crucially, improving data capture and knowledge; and focusing on perinatal mental illness.

I want to deal, in particular, with a number of points that have been raised, starting with the investigation of stillbirths and neonatal deaths. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran raised two points about the investigation of stillbirths. The first was the suggestion that coroners’ powers should be looked at and could be expanded, so that they have jurisdiction to investigate the death of a child who is stillborn after 37 weeks’ gestation to try to understand why the death occurred and to inform best practice. The second point was about independent investigations about clinical care when concerns are raised about a stillbirth or neonatal death.

By law, coroners can only investigate the death of a child when the child has lived independently of their mother, and there are no current plans for the Ministry of Justice to change that. The points about the importance of parents being able to volunteer to have a coroner look at such cases have been well made this afternoon, and I am sure that Ministers at the Ministry of Justice will be watching this debate. If there is doubt as to whether a death was a stillbirth, it should be reported to the coroner to consider whether an investigation should be carried out. Expanding the remit of coroners would require a change in the law and would be an issue for the Ministry of Justice—I will make sure that this debate is brought to its attention.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists’ guidelines on late intrauterine foetal death and stillbirth state that the right approach is for stillbirths to be reviewed in a multi-professional meeting, using a standardised approach to analysis for substandard care and future prevention. We believe that we should be pursuing that focus, led by clinicians. We are looking at all options to improve reviews into stillbirths and neonatal deaths, including investing half a million pounds to create a system to look at them more consistently across the country, so that staff can understand and learn from each incident.

In April we established a new independent healthcare safety investigation branch—HSIB—to carry out investigations and share its findings. It will operate independently of Government and the healthcare system, be transparent and support continuous improvement by using the very best investigative techniques from around the world, as well as fostering learning from staff, patients and stakeholders. We want that branch to act—in the same way as in the airline industry—as an exemplar to the system as a whole, so that investigations improve and clinicians are increasingly confident that when they speak up after a mistake the result will be learning and not blame.

I want to tackle the point the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran made about collaborative care between clinicians—midwives and doctors—and mothers. She called for maternity care that is more collaborative and responsive to women. She is right. She mentioned the statistic from Sands that 45% of women who raised a concern with a health professional during pregnancy were not listened to and then went on to have a stillbirth. That is completely unacceptable. All women should receive safe, personalised maternity care that is responsive to their individual needs and choices. That is why the Minister for Care Quality has taken such a strong lead on this issue.

In February the report of the independent National Maternity Review chaired by Baroness Cumberlege, “Better Births”, was published. It set out the vision for maternity services across England to become safer, more personalised, kinder, professional and more family-friendly. As we work towards achieving the national ambition, the Department will continue to work closely with NHS England to ensure that this work is embedded in the maternity transformation programme that is delivering the “Better Births” programme.

Women and their partners and families also have a role to play. Evidence shows that this stretching ambition cannot be achieved just through improvements to NHS maternity services. The public health contribution will be crucial. In fact, The Lancet stillbirth series concluded that 90% of stillbirths in high-income countries occur antenatally and not during labour.

When starting pregnancy, not all women will have the same risk of something going wrong and women’s health before and during pregnancy is one of the factors that most influence rates of stillbirth, neonatal death and maternal death. We know that a body mass index of over 40 doubles the risk of stillbirth. A quarter of stillbirths are associated with smoking, and alcohol consumption is associated with an estimated 40%.
In addition, the report, “Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries in the UK” published in June 2015 showed that the risk for women living in poverty is 57% higher, for babies from black and minority ethnic groups it is 50% higher and for teenage mothers and mothers over 40 it is 39% higher. Those striking statistics show why the Department of Health will continue to work closely with Public Health England and voluntary sector organisations to help women to have a healthy pregnancy and families to have the best start in life wherever they are and whoever they are.

As part of the national ambition, the Department is already developing a public-facing communications campaign with Sands and Best Beginnings to highlight the avoidable risk factors. It is vital that women and their families understand these risks and the impact they can have on outcomes for them and their babies, and the lifestyle changes they can make to increase their likelihood of a positive outcome. This campaign will be launched imminently and I encourage all hon. Members to support it during the launch period.

I want to touch on research as the Minister for research in the Department. Some hon. Members have asked that we support research into the causes of stillbirth and neonatal death so we can better understand how to identify babies at risk. Unless we invest in research, we simply cannot understand how to improve services. I welcome the fact that just this week Sands announced the launch of its 2016 research fund. In recent years, the Government have invested significant sums in support of research into important questions regarding stillbirths and neonatal deaths.

The National Institute for Health Research, for which I am responsible and on which we spend over £1 billion a year as the NHS research laboratory around the country, supports biomedical research centres at Cambridge and Imperial College, where it has invested over £6 million in research on women’s health, including research to increase understanding of stillbirths and neonatal deaths. Other NIHR funding pots are available for bids from researchers and charities. It is vital that we continue to encourage bids for studies on the causes of stillbirth and neonatal deaths and the identification of babies at risk, so we can learn how to improve services.

I want to touch on the importance of bereavement care, which has been raised. The death of a baby, whether during pregnancy or following birth, is a trauma and a tragedy for those involved. I can only begin to appreciate just how devastating it must be for the parents who experience that loss. It is important that we provide them with appropriate care and support at that time. It is our duty to them. The recent MBRRACE report stated that 60% of parents currently receive a high standard of bereavement care, but that means that 40% do not.

Since 2010, we have already invested £35 million in the NHS to improve birthing environments, including better bereavement rooms and quiet area spaces at nearly 40 hospitals. We have also conducted a survey to map the bereavement provision in England, which will allow us to build up a picture of current provision and identify where the gaps are. The qualitative data we have collected is also crucial in both highlighting areas of good practice and understanding the challenges that services face. My officials are considering all that information and working on setting out the next steps imminently.

In the time available, I want to try to deal with the other points that have been raised, including third trimester scans. The UK National Screening Committee is currently carrying out a call for new screening proposals. I can send hon. Members details of how to submit a proposal to that funding pot.

On routine antenatal care, the “Better Births” report by the National Maternity Review calls for safer care based on a relationship of mutual trust and respect in line with the woman’s decisions. The vision is for women from the antenatal period to receive care from a small team of midwives who work closely with an identified obstetrician. The relationship developed between the woman and the clinicians needs to ensure that the woman receives personalised and safe care that is responsive to their individual needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) asked about ensuring that clinical commissioning groups are properly aware of their obligations. The “Saving Babies’ Lives” care bundle published in late March by NHS England brings together elements of maternity care that are recognised as evidence-based and/or essential for best practice. It is designed to tackle stillbirth and early neonatal death, and focuses on those four key areas. I am happy to take this opportunity to highlight the fact that CCGs should be aware of it and to make sure that NHS England ensures that CCGs are aware of their responsibilities and what is expected of them.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) asked about our commitment to report on the progress of our ambition of a 20% reduction by 2020. I am delighted to confirm that the standardised perinatal mortality review tool will be available to all trusts by 2017 and we will provide annual progress reports following the launch of the strategy. The annual progress report will include expert advice from all the royal colleges and we plan to publish the first this autumn.

Some hon. Members asked about counselling for families. We are committed and believe that good bereavement care should consider the needs of the whole family: mother, father and children. The Government are absolutely committed to improving bereavement care. We are working actively on setting out the next steps in due course.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire andArran for securing the debate and hon. Members from all sides for sharing often personal and traumatic stories. It has allowed us to highlight some very difficult issues and to acknowledge the silent suffering of so many of our constituents—this condition does not respect party or geographical boundaries—and to stress the importance of tangible progress from all the agencies involved. I hope that I have reassured hon. Members that the Government are taking the matter seriously. We are putting in both investment and, importantly, leadership, which I think all hon. Members agree the Minister for Care Quality is showing. I look forward to seeing the progress of all this work and reporting on it later this year.
2.57 pm

Patricia Gibson: I reiterate my gratitude to the House for allowing me to have this debate. I want to make a brief point to the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), which other hon. Members have made: of course this is an issue not just for women; it is an issue for mums, dads, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, sisters and brothers. It affects entire families and we must recognise the impact of that.

I thank all those who turned up today to participate in the debate or simply to observe it. Their presence helps to reinforce the importance of the issue. I thank the Minister for responding to the debate. I was hopeful when he mentioned that the Ministry of Justice might be interested in extending coroners’ powers. I will watch that carefully. I am heartened to see that there may be some movement towards independent reviews of care and deaths. I am also heartened to hear about the commitment to fund research to better understand the issue. I am very pleased to hear the Minister's emphasis on and understanding of the need for more collaborative care that is more responsive to women, as well as his commitment to and faith in the “Better Births” programme. I thank him for that and I thank everyone who attended.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered stillbirth.

2.58 pm

Sitting suspended.

226WH

Refugee Family Reunion Rules

[MR PETER BONE in the Chair]

3 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered refugee family reunion rules.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, for what I think is the first time. I am delighted to have secured this debate on what to my mind is one of the most important issues facing this country today.

I am going to break one of my own golden rules, Mr Bone. I know that from time to time you speak about Mrs Bone in the Chamber, and those little family insights are no doubt treasured by us all. I rarely speak about my family, and probably most right hon. and hon. Members will understand why. Today, however, I will depart from that rule for a minute or two because—this goes to the heart of things—we have to stop thinking about the family reunion rules as an abstract or theoretical issue. We need to stop thinking in terms of targets, quotas and rules and instead start thinking of individuals and families. We need to introduce some humanity into the system.

Last weekend, I was myself part of a family reunion. The whole Carmichael family—three generations of us—gathered on Islay to celebrate my parents' diamond wedding anniversary. As some hon. Members may know, Islay is a small island, but it is home to no fewer than eight distilleries. It is fair to say that we learned some years ago how to have a good party, and last weekend was no exception. I mention this because I think it would help us all, as we approach this subject, to ask ourselves how we feel about our own family. What would we do to keep them together; what would it mean to be separated from them; and how would we feel if that separation was the result of some arbitrary set of rules?

My wife and I have two sons. We have a 15-year-old in secondary school and a 19-year-old in his first year of university study. If I were in this country as a refugee, the 15-year-old would be entitled to join me, but the 19-year-old would not. That reminds me of the Old Testament story of Isaac having to choose between Jacob and Esau. Forcing that sort of choice on people belongs in the Old Testament, not in a 21st-century, modern democracy. My 19-year-old son did not suddenly become a different person when he turned 18. The feelings I have for my 19-year-old son did not change when he became 18, and if I were separated from him, I would feel that separation every bit as keenly as I would if I were separated from my 15-year-old.

I contrast my family's happy weekend with the stories of so many who come here seeking refuge and our help. I am sure that we could stand here all day exchanging anecdotes and personal stories, so I will offer only one example. Muhammed came from Syria. He arrived in the United Kingdom in March 2014. He was granted refugee status in December 2014 and immediately began the process of applying for family reunion. The restrictive family reunion rules mean that the former lawyer—I am a former lawyer myself—his wife and their younger
children are separated from the two older children because they are over 18. His oldest daughter, Athar, is currently in Turkey, while his oldest son, Kusai, 19, is in a refugee camp in northern France. The rigidity of the rules means that essentially we are forcing young people to make dangerous journeys to reach their families and safety.

I am grateful to the several campaign groups and agencies that supplied briefing material ahead of today’s debate. To pick just one, I am supporting the British Red Cross’s Torn Apart campaign. This is my first ask of the Minister today. Will he meet the British Red Cross and the Refugee Council, which have both done so much work directly with the families affected and which know the issue so much better than any of us in the House?

I pay tribute also to UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which also provided detailed and substantial briefings for today’s debate. I cannot improve on quoting the former. It says: “The lack of safe and legal routes to Europe, or within Europe, for those fleeing conflict and persecution is forcing children into the hands of traffickers and smugglers, and putting the lives of refugee and migrant children at risk. Restrictions in the current UK refugee family reunion rules for unaccompanied children alongside delays in expediting the Dublin III procedure for family reunion are combining to mean that children are often stranded alongside delays in expediting the Dublin III procedure for family reunion are combining to mean that children are often stranded alone in Europe, or facing even longer stays in makeshift camps, and which know the issue so much better than any of us in the House?”

UNICEF says—this is its first ask in regard to the rules—the Government must provide safe and legal routes to family reunion by applying the UK’s rules and practices on refugee family reunion more flexibly and widening those rules to ensure that children can be reunited with extended family members; and by implementing the EU’s Dublin III regulation as intended, enabling unaccompanied and separated children to have their asylum applications transferred to countries where they have family members to join. I hope that the Minister will address that ask from UNICEF when he replies to the debate.

Let me turn, then, to the Dublin III agreement, under which children are able to be reunited with their extended family. The UK immigration rules apply to children anywhere in the world and can therefore provide a safe and legal route for children, avoiding the need for them to embark on perilous journeys to Europe. That is in keeping with the Government’s own stated policy objectives. However, the UK’s own rules on refugee family reunion apply only to spouses or partners and to children under 18 and born before the family fled. There is provision for exceptions to be made outside the immigration rules, but the extent to which children benefit from judgments based on the “serious and compelling family or other considerations” or “exceptional circumstances” test remains unclear, as the Government do not specify which cases involve children. Overall, 175 visas for family reunion under “exceptional circumstances” were granted in the last five years. That is 175 over five years; there were 77 cases in 2011 and the number fell to 12 in 2014. It is worth putting those figures in the context of the upheaval that we have seen during that period.

The rules fail to recognise that after years of conflict, many of these children have been orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents but they may have grandparents, aunts and uncles or adult siblings in this country who could care for them. Children in that situation would have no choice but to make the dangerous journey to Europe before they would be able to be reunited with their family under Dublin III.

Further, the refugee family reunion rules do not permit a child to sponsor their parent or main carer to join them in the UK. When a child is granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, that is in recognition of the fact that the child cannot live safely in their home country and therefore cannot join their parent there. By preventing children from applying for their parent or main carer to join them in the UK, the rules are enforcing family separation, rather than enabling family reunification, and they risk depriving children of their right to a family life.

It is worth pausing to reflect on what the purpose of the rules should be. It seems to me that if the purpose of the rules is to reunite families, that is exactly what they should do, but the implementation of the rules has exactly the opposite effect. We do not have family reunification rules; we have family separation rules.

The agencies and non-governmental organisations ask that we widen part 11 of the UK immigration rules in various ways. They ask that we include an expanded group of extended family members who have refugee status or humanitarian protection, including adult siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents, to sponsor the children in their family to join them. They ask that we allow unaccompanied and separated children to sponsor their parent or main carer to join them in the UK, and they ask that we include children born after the family fled from their country of origin. To put it another way, they ask that we start looking at families as families, and not as a disparate collection of individuals connected by consanguinity.

They ask also that we interpret and apply the UK immigration rules on family reunion in a generous and flexible manner, which the Minister will hopefully agree is in the best traditions of the British Government and British civil service. They ask that we promote the protection of children and do not act as barriers to children in precarious situations being sponsored where other criteria such as family relationships and the children’s need for protection are met.

They ask that we clarify UK immigration guidance and practices, including in relation to evidential requirements and the definitions of conditions of “serious and compelling” circumstances—again, that is a test—and collect disaggregated data on exceptional cases relating to children outside the UK rules. Their final ask is that we should waive the accommodation and maintenance requirements and the application fee for children falling outside part 11 of the immigration rules.

As a set of rules, the Dublin III regulation has been agreed by 32 countries in Europe to determine the state responsible for considering an asylum application submitted in one of them. Under this regulation, unaccompanied children are entitled to be reunited with family in the UK through the transfer of existing asylum cases to the UK from another EU member state. However, the implementation of Dublin III is far from working in the best interests of the children.

Unaccompanied children across Europe have been understandably reluctant to seek access to the asylum procedure. Such children lack trust and confidence in
the system, and in many cases lack knowledge or the language skills to understand family reunification procedures. Procedurally, the maximum time limit for Dublin III transfers is 11 months, and cases are typically taking that long to be processed. That is far too long for a vulnerable child to wait to be reunited with its family.

The cases of unaccompanied children in northern France are the nearest and most visible of children trapped in vulnerable situations and on dangerous routes who have a legal right to join their families in the UK. Putting an effective, sustainable process in place for the processing of Dublin claims by the UK in northern France and across Europe would ensure that no more of these children are unnecessarily kept in limbo, so close to family and yet so far from safety.

In terms of the implementation of Dublin III, my asks of the Minister are these: the Government should ensure adequate investment and resourcing of the system across Europe, enabling family reunion in the UK, including the deployment of further Home Office staff to Europe. The Government should publish guidance on the handling of Dublin III family reunion cases, including a clarification of responsibilities and procedures for assessing UK-based family members of unaccompanied children seeking transfer. At the local level, central Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient funding and capacity to conduct such assessments to enable Dublin transfers to be expedited while safeguarding the best interests of the child. The best interests of the child is a test that we apply routinely to children in our own legal system. Again, why should we apply a different test to the children who come here in such desperate circumstances?

Working in partnership with other European Governments, the Government should invest in ensuring that unaccompanied children have access to high-quality legal assistance. We will all have seen from our constituency casework the impact that the removal of legal aid from those seeking access to the asylum and immigration legal processes has had over the years. That is now becoming acute and really does need to be addressed.

The Government should ensure that children in Europe have child and language-accessible information about the procedures for reuniting children with their families in the UK via the Dublin procedure. Again, I draw on my own personal experience as a solicitor in practice and previously as a prosecutor. The way in which we provide information to children in dealing with court systems, for example, is light years away from the standard and quality of information that is provided to children seeking refugee here. Why do we treat these children as though they are somehow worth less than our own?

I expect that the Minister will speak about the rules for family reunion visas being granted outside the set criteria in the exceptional circumstances to which I have referred. However, the figures speak for themselves. Given the massive upheaval in the middle east and elsewhere and the vast number of people on the move, the number of visas that have been granted in such exceptional circumstances is painfully low. Refugee family reunion is about protecting lives. It has its basis in refugee law, so it should be considered part of the refugee and asylum process, not just part of the immigration system.

My final ask of the Minister is that we should allow more refugees in through the Syrian vulnerable persons scheme. At the current rate I am not sure how the Government will meet their own target of 20,000 by the end of this Parliament, let alone do more as we all believe they should. We should take refugees from Europe through our own scheme or by signing up to the European relocation scheme. We should take unaccompanied refugee children who have made the journey alone and are now vulnerable to traffickers in Europe. We should offer safe and legal routes to cut off the air to smugglers and we should do this hand in hand with our European and other international partners. All that would help, but a change to the family reunion rules is the necessary first step. That is the place to start. I look forward to hearing what the Minister can offer us by way of some assurance.

3.18 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is indeed a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate and on his excellent speech. I also congratulate him on his excellent article, which I read this morning on PoliticsHome and which I would commend to other Members of the House. It has been invaluable in preparing for this afternoon’s debate.

Few would challenge the reasons why protecting the family unit is a fundamental principle of international law, and international refugee law in particular. As the United Nations declaration of human rights states:

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”

Fleeing persecution should never require a refugee to have to give up that unit and have to choose between safety and family. There is a second fundamental reason for protecting the family unit and reuniting families, which is that family reunion is also about saving and protecting lives, as the right hon. Gentleman argued, because many of those applying to join family members here will themselves be in grave danger. That has never been as true as at present.

Family reunion is about providing safe legal routes to a place of protection. A failure to provide such routes will push many to turn to people smugglers and dangerous routes in an attempt to be reunited with their loved ones here in the UK. I pay tribute to the many organisations that work so hard to highlight the issues. As the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, the British Red Cross has been running a campaign called Torn Apart, which has perfectly captured the reasons why family reunion is so important. The powerful campaign video featuring Muhammed and Amal puts human faces on the numbers and arguments. A UNICEF campaign for reuniting unaccompanied children in Europe with families in the UK has attracted more than 100,000 signatures to a petition. As ever, the Refugee Council has been a persistent advocate of the cause.

The right hon. Gentleman highlighted concerns about the scope of the UK’s family reunion rules and problems with how they function in practice, even for those who qualify. As to the scope, he set out examples in which there was a lack of compassion or fairness, including the very restricted provision for children over the age of 18. Similar arguments are relevant to parents, siblings and other relatives. It is only fair to acknowledge that
there will always be different views as to precisely where lines should be drawn, but I think most MPs and most members of the public would agree that currently the lines are drawn too restrictively.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the case of adult children. How can we justify a policy by which an 18-year-old woman who was living as a dependent child with her parents and younger siblings in Syria cannot join them in the UK and must instead be left behind, possibly alone, in a refugee camp in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey? Returning to the principles behind the rules, it is very hard to defend in terms of the impingement on her right to family life and the family life of her parents and children, it is absolutely indefensible in terms of her safety, and it creates a situation in which we can easily imagine that resorting to people smugglers and dangerous journeys would be a significant temptation.

Similar arguments could be made in respect of other relatives too. It is particularly true of child refugees. The UK and Denmark are alone in the EU in not allowing parents to apply to be reunited with them. The Government’s justification is child safeguarding, but we do not know what the evidence for that is. In fact, in the recent legal case of AT, the President of the Upper Tribunal concluded that the evidence suggested, contrary to the Government’s position, that allowing reunification would promote, rather than undermine, public interest in safeguarding of children. Another example is the exclusion of post-flight family. Again, that is a case where the rules appear to run contrary to the principles behind family reunion and protecting family life.

I expect the Minister will highlight the fact that provision is made for adult children and other dependent relatives to join their refugee families in “the most exceptional compassionate circumstances”.

However, I do not think that is good enough—for a number of reasons. First, it just does not work. From my dim and distant past as an immigration solicitor, I can remember how incredibly difficult it was to have a client meet the threshold of “most exceptional compassionate circumstances”. From the briefings that we have received, that still seems to be the case. Secondly, that test is particularly inappropriate just now. To be living alone, far removed from the family unit that they have previously lived with and that they remain dependent on, is far from an exceptional circumstance for people in the current migration and refugee crisis. If the Minister cannot be persuaded to make a permanent change to the rules, surely he will consider a change to last for the duration of the current crisis. There are other problems with the rules, including the fact that they place financial tests on the refugee family to show they can support their relative without recourse to public funds.

Instead of hearing the Minister highlight the exception that would allow a few dependent 18-year-old children to join Syrian refugee families in the UK—families that they have always lived with—we want to hear him explain why on earth that is an exception in the first place. Why is it not the mainstream principle to allow family reunion in such circumstances? The wording of the exception simply highlights a far better place for lines to be drawn, if lines have to be drawn at all. Dependency and having been part of the household should be enough in itself. We should take out the financial requirements and the near-impossible task of showing “the most compelling compassionate circumstances”.

As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked, what does that phrase even mean? Does it incorporate the example I have given of an 18-year-old girl alone in a refugee camp in Lebanon?

The right hon. Gentleman also pointed out that when we consider the exercise of discretion outside the rules, it is noticeable how rare an event that is. There have been about 65 cases outside the rules in the last three years, against a background of 20,000 family reunion applications. Such cases are rarer now than they were in 2011. I ask the Minister, as the right hon. Gentleman did, to explain that decline in the number of successful cases outside the rules, particularly given the current refugee crisis. We support hon. Members and campaigning organisations who favour a broadening of the categories of people who qualify under family reunion rules, and we ask the Minister whether he will work with experts, for example from the international Red Cross, and legal experts to broaden the scope of family reunion rules to reach a fairer and more just policy.

I want to echo some of the concerns raised about how the rules work in practice, even for those who are fortunate enough to fall within their ambit. First, it is true that family reunion is far from straightforward. Many require support, including legal support. In Scotland, solicitors can still provide help through advice and assistance funding from the Scottish Legal Aid Board. I can safely say that in my time as an immigration solicitor I never felt I was in any way wasting public funds by providing that service. The evidence gathered by the British Red Cross in its report “Not So Straightforward” backs that up. On the contrary, legal advice and support is often pivotal. I urge the Government to consider a similar scheme in England and Wales.

Secondly, there must be a change to the ridiculous procedure whereby very short entry clearance periods are issued to those seeking family reunion. That often leaves poorer families facing a near impossible task of gathering together funding for travel in the short time allowed. Will the Minister look again at the limited entry clearance period that is granted? Thirdly, we must find ways to make it easier to submit applications. Many applicants, 95% of whom are women and children, are required to travel to third countries to find their nearest British embassy. The Red Cross has highlighted the risks of violence, torture and harassment that a majority face when making that journey, and there is evidence that certain high commissions fail to follow correct practice in dealing with applicants—for example, turning away children in Rwanda because they arrived without passports. Will the Minister work with organisations such as the Red Cross to explore alternative ways of submitting applications?

Fourthly, as all hon. Members will have experienced in general immigration work, there is sometimes—not all the time—an infuriating tendency for entry clearance staff to refuse applications because there is one missing document, or one part of the form that has not been completed properly. Instead of clarifying the situation with a simple phone call, they simply refuse applications and protracted, expensive appeals follow. Can the Minister
ensure that all possibilities of seeking clarification or further information are exhausted before family reunion applications are refused?

Finally, we could have a whole separate debate on the operation of the Dublin regulation and processing of "take charge" requests. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland made many valid points about that. It is pivotal for children—and others—living in the awful conditions at Calais and Dunkirk or in camps in Greece to be reunited with families as quickly as possible. It has been difficult to monitor progress, and some of the answers to parliamentary questions have been frustrating, but we should all be pushing the Government to do everything possible to speed that process up, and we will continue to do that.

The Government have provided protection and shelter for refugees in regions neighbouring conflict zones, and they have done some admirable work in that regard. That is beyond doubt, and other countries should follow that example. However, the Government have also recognised that work in the region is not enough and that offering a place of safety to many is also important. In doing that, surely it makes perfect sense to include the broader set of family members of refugees who are already here. It is the right thing to do to protect people and families, stop perilous journeys and make a just contribution to alleviating the awful crisis that continues to rage.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate and on the tone of his contribution. The reference to his family was a powerful way of driving home the point about the cut-off point at age 18. We often say in the House that there is a refugee crisis on a scale not seen since the second world war—and that is right: we have seen the numbers from last year and this year. However, it has been frustrating, but we should all be pushing the Government to do everything possible to speed that process up, and we will continue to do that.

When I was in Dunkirk—things have changed since I was there—nobody was in a position even to identify and count the number of unidentified children there. That demonstrated the mismatch between the approach we have to children in this country and the approach that was applied in Calais and Dunkirk. When I visited, I went on the Eurostar from London and the journey took one hour. It was extraordinary that there should be a place such as Calais or Dunkirk where there were unaccompanied children who were not being assisted in the way that I would hope they would be if they were in the UK.

In the UK, we have recognised for many years that if children are to exercise their rights to reunification—or, indeed, any rights—somebody has to assist them to do so. It is simply not good enough to say to a child, "There is a mechanism. Why don't you access it?" There has to be somebody to assist in that process.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am sorry to have missed the opening remarks of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). My hon. and learned Friend will know from his visit to Calais of the concern about the 157 unaccompanied children, all of whom appear to have links with families in this country.

In the Bishop of Durham’s evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs on Tuesday, he said in answer to a question I put that he believed that the children should already be here. Does my hon. and
learned Friend agree that where links can be demonstrated and have been established—not as a matter of rule, otherwise it will encourage more people just to send their children—the children ought to be allowed to join their families here?

**Keir Starmer:** Yes, they should be allowed to join their families here. The rules provide for that and they need to be effectively applied. That means somebody assisting in the process on the ground. I was particularly struck at Dunkirk that there were simply no officials at all in the camp when I was there. The only officials were gendarmes on the gate, whose sole function was to stop people bringing pallets on to the site, which they wanted because the ground was so wet that they simply needed to get the tents off the ground. That was the only official presence in Dunkirk.

It is not just about the right to reunification; it is about that being within a reasonable timeframe. Months go by and that is a long time for a child. Those children are on their own and they are particularly vulnerable. We have had debates about the number of children missing in Europe; some months ago, Europol put out a figure of 10,000. Time is measured differently by children, as we all know, and those children are not only young, but vulnerable. They should not be in parts of Europe or the rest of the world without assistance. This is about the speed of the exercise.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate; I was speaking in a debate on carers in the main Chamber. To follow up the point made by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), the shadow Minister noted that we need someone in place to help. Almost 1 million Christian refugees have left Syria and have been dispersed not just across Turkey, but across the whole of Europe. Some of those are young families and young individual children. May I suggest that one group that could, should and would be keen to help is the church? Will the Minister, in his reply to the shadow Minister, look at that as a possible solution to trying to find a family background for the many children who have been left on their own and who are isolated and vulnerable at Calais and elsewhere across Europe?

**Keir Starmer:** Of course the churches should, and do, play a part in providing support, as do many others. There are people in the camps across Europe who are trying to provide the best support they can, and that is welcome. It is, of course, a tall order to provide the help wherever it is needed, but that goes to the question of how many staff are deployed and where. In a sense, we need to step back, take a look at the rules and the reunification framework in the round, and review it across the board.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The hon. and learned Gentleman quite rightly emphasises the importance of time, particularly for children. He will be aware that a few months ago four or five children from the camps were admitted, thanks to a tribunal ruling, on human rights grounds because the Dublin procedure was so slow. Does he agree that one option for the British Government, rather than challenging that decision, would be to implement it more widely? That way, rather than having to wait for the children to go through the French process first and then make a take-charge request, the children could be brought to the UK straight away.

**Keir Starmer:** That challenge was brought by, among others, lawyers working in Doughty Street Chambers—the chambers that I am still associated with. I think the children arrived in St Pancras, which is in my constituency. That demonstrated how quickly things could happen if a court approved the process. In fairness, it is not for me to tell the Minister what approach the Government should take to the appeal, but clearly speed is of the essence. There have to be practical and effective ways for children and their families to exercise the rights to which they are entitled. It is marked that there are still children relatively near, in parts of northern Europe, who have a right to reunification here but that the process is working far too slowly.

It is often said that when we respond to refugee children on their own, in Europe or elsewhere, there is a risk that if too much is done, it will encourage others to follow their path. I have been very cautious about that argument for two reasons. First, although when we talk about immigration more widely we might have to engage with the pull factor argument, when we talk about refugees we should recognise and focus on the push factors. Refugees are fleeing. Over the years, families have split as they have fled across borders. Secondly, there are children right here, right now who are already on their own in different parts of the world. For my part, and I expect for everyone else, I am not going to say, “We mustn’t extend the support that they need right here, right now lest others follow in their wake.”

**Keith Vaz:** I am most grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for giving way to me a second time. I agree with him, but does he not agree that we need to be careful about messages? The first people who pick up such messages are the people traffickers and the organised criminal gangs, and we simply have not done enough to address those gangs. They are the people who are able to transport individuals, and they are the people who prey on the vulnerable. They never put their lives at risk in the Mediterranean. We and our EU partners, including Frontex, need to do much more to deal with them.

**Keir Starmer:** I heartily agree and endorse every word. Ultimately, the refugee crisis will be addressed effectively only if we start at the very top, which means de-escalating the violence, and then work upstream to stop the work of those who are engaged in trafficking and putting people through the illegal and dangerous routes. I completely agree with that. In a sense, what we are discussing this afternoon is what we do much further down the line, when people and children have arrived in Europe. I am simply cautioning against the argument that has been made in the House when we have debated similar issues—although not in today’s debate—that it would somehow be wrong in principle to provide the support and assistance that is needed in Europe lest other people follow.

The problems highlighted by the British Red Cross’s campaign are real. Where over-18s were living with their family before the family split and fled across the world because of persecution, they are, of course, over the age of 18, but still vulnerable and still wanting to
reunify with their family for the reasons powerfully put earlier in the debate. Refugee children not being able to sponsor family members is an issue where there simply is not sufficient flexibility to address the injustices that arise. There is the unresolved question of wider family members beyond mothers, fathers and children, and there is the problem of there having been no legal aid since 2013. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on legal aid, I take it particularly seriously that since 2013 it has been difficult to mount effective challenges unless lawyers are prepared to act on a pro bono basis, which is not how we should be proceeding on such issues in this country.

Labour has pressed these issues. Our amendment 122A to the Immigration Bill was defeated in the House of Lords, so there have been efforts, but it is good that we are debating the issue again today—not to resurrect those discussions in the other place, but to step back and ask: is it now time for that wider review? I call on the Government to look at and review the entire framework for family reunification, and I ask the Minister to make a commitment to that effect and to update us on the ongoing review of the Dublin III arrangements.

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees (Richard Harrington): I add to the small but impressive list of right hon. and hon. Members today who have said what a pleasure it is, as ever, to serve under your Chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate.

My history in the legal profession often feels inadequate in Parliament, but particularly so today. I do not compare in any way to former practising solicitors nor to someone as eminent as the shadow Minister of Doughty Street Chambers and the great office he achieved afterwards. As a mere holder of a law degree, and not a very good one, I have not looked at a law textbook since 1979, but I will do my best.

Family reunification is a serious subject that is easy to paint in terms of good and bad, black and white or right and wrong. However, it is the beginning of a process, as the Government have realised in, for example, the funding of the five-year resettlement programme. I hope that many of those refugees and their families will not need the funding, because I hope they will be able to work and get the benefits of life generally, but the Government realise that it is important that that funding is available.

I apologise to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland; the point that I wanted to make about family reunion was that the Syrian resettlement programme is predominantly for families. More than 50% are children, but within family groups. The Government are not completely oblivious to the issue. However, I return to his specific points about family reunion. His first ask was simple compared with the others: would I meet the Red Cross and the Refugee Council? I am happy to meet them, but I do anyway. I am happy to meet them on any occasion; in fact, I would have met most of them this morning, except that I could not have got to east London and back in time for this debate.

If the right hon. Gentleman would like to facilitate further meetings, I am happy to go to them, but I assure him that the Red Cross and the Refugee Council are partners of ours in many things. I know that the Minister for Immigration met the Red Cross to discuss many of these issues today, but I am happy to do so as well.

As part of the latest review of the family reunion policy, we have listened carefully to many arguments in favour of widening the criteria and effectively creating another resettlement programme for family reunion alone. The debates in both Houses during the passage of the recent Bill, and in the wider community—including representations received for this debate—demonstrate the level of compassion felt about the issue. Unquestionably, right hon. and hon. Members have made eloquent and forcible arguments in this debate for doing so.

We recognise that families may be separated by conflict and persecution. It happens quickly, and the speed and manner of it is often not controlled. The motivation of most people is unquestionably just to get to their family in the UK. However, it is easy in discussions like these not to stress that we already do a lot of family reunification. In the last five years, there have been about 22,000 successful cases of family reunification. It is often not mentioned that in our programme for Syrian resettlement, family reunification is a criterion in its own right, quite apart from the other vulnerability criteria for acceptance.
The reunification system takes into account some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. It does not involve visiting a British embassy abroad; the point has been made about how difficult and dangerous that can be. It involves registering with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and going through an interview process with the UNHCR, which I have witnessed. It is lengthy, but it is not dissimilar to the type of interview that might happen at Lunar House in Croydon or other centres in the UK. Family reunification is one of the five criteria, even without the other matters. People are then brought here on one of our charter flights and resettled with their family, with an immediate right to work on a humanitarian protection visa. That is often not mentioned in the context of family reunion, but such people are coming through the Syrian system now.

At this juncture, I would like to say in the presence of the erudite and eloquent Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who came to join us today, that the comment that the Government would probably not make its target of 20,000 during this Parliament is not correct. We are well on track, and we have recently added to the target the up to 3,000 children at risk whom we are taking under the—

Keith Vaz rose—

Richard Harrington: The right hon. Gentleman is hoping to intervene, and of course he will, but I will just finish my sentence—or page, or paragraph, in the hope that we run out of time. Excuse my humour, Mr Bone. That is an additional 3,000 children, not just from Syria and the countries around Syria; it is from the middle east and north Africa as well, and it can include non-Syrians.

Keith Vaz: The Minister does not need to carry on talking, because I am rising to praise him. Universally, all those who have dealt with him have pointed out that he has done a great job as Minister for Syrian refugees. Our concern is that speculation about the target is not correct. We are well on track, and we have recently added to the target the up to 3,000 children at risk whom we are taking under the—

Richard Harrington: I must compose myself after that intervention. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he said. It is true that the Home Office publishes the targets on a quarterly basis, but the resettlement targets are broken down—

Keith Vaz: They are not targets; they are results.

Richard Harrington: I beg your pardon; yes. I meant “results”. The right hon. Gentleman makes me nervous, Mr Bone. I do not know why, because he is a very nice chap and I respect him a lot. The results are published quarterly, and are now broken down by local authority region. That is significantly more information than he felt was previously available.
people to Greece. We have already offered 75 asylum and immigration experts to assist Greece in operating the hotspots; 18 have already been deployed and are working there and the rest are in the process of being deployed.

We are really looking at entry clearance timetables, including with the Red Cross, which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) mentioned. It is open to applicants to tell us when they want the visa to take effect—we are not going slowly. Sometimes there is the implication that we are trying to make the process go slowly to stop people from wanting family reunification.

This is a difficult field. The shadow Minister and the right hon. Member for Leicester East, the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, mentioned people traffickers. There is not a single member of this House who could disagree with anything that has been said about people traffickers. However, family reunification is vulnerable to people traffickers.

For example, we have heard—I accept that this is just the sort of thing that people hear, but it has been heard by people on the ground—that there were 50 people on the Bosnian-Macedonian border who claimed to have the same uncle in a village in Sweden. The people traffickers actually tell people to say that they have family in different countries, even down to individuals. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members would not think that that means that I think “Oh, we shouldn’t have family reunification, because some people try to exploit it”, but it does mean that officialdom has to try to verify carefully that these are genuine family reunification cases.

Keith Vaz: I thank the Minister for giving way to me a second time. However, that is the problem with the Turkey deal. The deal—the £6 billion that has been given to Turkey—is a reward for Turkey receiving illegal migrants back into Turkey. Actually, the resources should be directed at ensuring that we deal with the people traffickers. We are still not able to get into Libyan waters in order to deal with the boats in the middle of the Mediterranean. Surely the essence should be to stop people being given false hope and to stop people leaving in the first place by helping the countries that are the sources of these difficulties.

Richard Harrington: I agree totally with the right hon. Gentleman. In one of his interventions, he mentioned children in Calais and I will concentrate my remarks on that for the moment. The simple question that he put and that was also put by the shadow Minister is, “Should children be allowed in from Calais where a link can be established?” The answer is, “Obviously, yes.”

The impression given in the media—although not by the speakers today; there is no intention to mislead Parliament—is that we are seeing children in Calais and thinking, “How can we stop them from coming to the UK?” That is not the case. That is why the Government have invested a lot of time and effort working with France. Our officials regularly meet French officials and there are discussions at all levels about how to make this quicker. There is now a permanent official contact committee. Since one of our officials was seconded to the French interior ministry, the speed has grown significantly—there is no question about it. The numbers may appear small—

Stuart C. McDonald: I will just finish my sentence and then I will happily accept the hon. Gentleman’s intervention.

More than 30 children were accepted between January and April. Many people say that that is totally inadequate and that things are moving at a snail’s pace, but they are speeding up; there is absolutely no question about that. There are many cases now in train and transfers can happen within weeks; there is often an implication that it is months, or even longer.

However, under Dublin, the children need to apply for asylum in France. There is a French NGO that the Government work closely with, called Terre d’Asile; my French is appalling, Mr Bone, for which I apologise. It is funded by the French Government, with our help, to help us to do this. No one child or adult need remain in those camps, but it is impossible to know how many children there are who fall within this. Whether there are 50, 100 or 150, the numbers do not matter to us, because we want to get them processed quickly.

There is lots of speculation about numbers; it is very easy for very good organisations and very well-meaning organisations to come up with numbers. There have been surveys and there has been sampling. However, it is our job to ensure that those children who do qualify understand the process and that the process is explained by people who can speak to them in their own language and in a simple manner. I understand that there is a lot of fear among the children about the French authorities and other authorities. In the countries that these children come from, people do not think of authorities in the way that people think of authorities in this country. So there is work to be done. However, the British Government are doing a lot to work with the French authorities. We must remember that they are in France; we are operating overseas and our officials are still UK officials. They are not French officials and we cannot ignore the fact that they are in France.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East; I will give way to him now.

Stuart C. McDonald: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me. He has given welcome reassurances that the process of taking children from Calais and Dunkirk has been speeding up. Other Ministers—including, indeed, the Home Secretary—have given such assurances as well. However, when Members submit written questions that ask for hard numbers and processing times, we keep getting answers that say those cannot be provided. An excellent report from the Home Affairs Committee has asked for that sort of information to be made available. Will the Minister encourage his colleagues to ensure that it is made available, so that we can check that these assurances are worth listening to?

Richard Harrington: The hon. Gentleman is asking, “Will I encourage my colleagues to disclose as much information as they possibly can?” I think the answer is, “Absolutely. Yes, I will.” I hope that the right hon. Member for Leicester East would agree that more numbers are forthcoming than was traditional under previous Governments, when there was significantly less information on the subject.

Over the last five years, the rate of family reunification has been 4,000 to 5,000 per year, but I see that increasing with the different schemes that are happening. It is for
our Government to help the other Governments in mainland Europe to provide the machinery, so that we can resettle those people more quickly.

One could argue that the Governments of mainland Europe have been so overwhelmed by the numbers that they have not been able to process the unaccompanied children for family reunification. Again, I do not think that that is down to lack of will. I just think that the numbers have completely overwhelmed them. From our end, it is important that we do everything that we can to help them to catch up.

I will go on to the points that have been made about the immigration rules, which enable British citizens and people settled in the UK to sponsor their spouse or partner and children under 18 to join them here. Obviously, they have to make the appropriate entry clearance application and meet the relevant criteria. That is our international obligation. The rules allow those with refugee leave or humanitarian protection status to sponsor a spouse or partner with whom they have formed a relationship after they fled their country of origin. The rules are wider than many would think, but I accept that they are not as wide as many would want. They were strengthened in the previous Parliament. The Government do not accept that the rules are unfair. We believe that they have the right impact and help to restore public confidence in this country in the immigration system.

An important point that was raised several times this afternoon—

Mr Alistair Carmichael: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: I will just finish this sentence; it may answer the right hon. Gentleman’s question. An important point was raised not about the immigration rules but about those cases outside the rules. The argument has been put forward that, although it is legally within the discretion of officials to go outside the rules, they have not been exercising that discretion. That point has been made several times; my English probably made it sound more cumbersome than I expected it to. Just to reiterate, the point is that there is a power to go outside the immigration rules, but it has not been used a lot. That point was made several times this afternoon. In the next few weeks, the Government will publish a clarification of the immigration rules. I hope that the points where discretion can be and is applied are made clearer. That will help applicants, as well as officials dealing with this.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I understand why the Minister made reference to restoring public confidence in the immigration system, but to pick up the point that the shadow Minister made, conflating refugee and asylum seekers. It is an arguable way of proceeding and does not help public understanding. That will help applicants, as well as officials dealing with this.

Richard Harrington: I understand the argument that when immigration figures are published, they should exclude refugees and asylum seekers. It is an arguable case, but those people should surely be included within the net number of people coming into the country. For whatever reason those people come, they are still people coming into the country. In my opinion, that does not in any way take away from the validity of us taking people from the situations they find themselves in abroad.

Keir Starmer: It is not just about the inclusion of these people in the number; it is also about having a policy driven by one thing—driving that net migration number down. That is wrong when it comes to refugees, and that is why they should be taken out and looked at separately. The number is self-defining; it is the number of people crossing the border. That is the deeper concern here.

Richard Harrington: I understood the point that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was making. I see the argument to separate the two figures. Those who read the detail of the migration figures—it is a small number of people, and unfortunately most of them are not publishers or editors of national newspapers—see the breakdown beneath. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman and other Members interested in the subject read that breakdown. The point is valid, but however the figures are printed or published, I am afraid the media and so, one has to accept, the general population who get their information from the media will take the number in the round. It is others who accept the breakdown.

So many things in Government are a balance. Most of us who go into Parliament, Government and public service do things with exactly the right intention. That is certainly what I have found in my comparatively short period of involvement. I do not think anyone would become a Member of Parliament or, I specifically hope, a Minister in this field if they did not have a lot of compassion for people desperately wanting to come into this country and others. Everything in Government is a balance, however, whether that is financial or in terms of having some form of policy—not everything can be an exception to that policy, but the policy has to try to allow some exceptions. I believe that the number of people coming in under family reunification from the various sources will increase significantly, but in a proper, measured way. There is flexibility within Dublin and the immigration rules to facilitate that.

I thank right hon. and hon. Members, particularly the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, for bringing these issues before us. I am happy to meet with them or anyone else to discuss this matter.

4.14 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, which has been detailed, interesting and measured.

This is not always an easy subject. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), made the point that what we are doing is discussing the size of the bandage or the sticking plaster, whereas what we really need to do is stop inflicting the wounds that we see in Syria, Libya and elsewhere.

Sometimes it is necessary to have moments of high drama and emotion in our debates; sometimes that acts as a catalyst, as it did last autumn, for some real focus and progress on the issue. When not in the middle of such moments of high drama, however, it is enormously helpful to be able to have debates such as this to engage
in the way that all parties have done this afternoon. I am grateful to all parties, and in particular to the Minister—I think we managed to keep him on his feet for almost half an hour. I am sure, whether informally in meetings or on the record on the Floor of the House, this is an issue to which we shall return.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved.
That this House has considered refugee family reunion rules.

4.16 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Foreign Aid Expenditure

[Relevant documents: First Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2016-17, UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, HC 103, and oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 6 June 2016, on DFID’s allocation of resources, HC 261.]

4.30 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 125692 relating to foreign aid spending.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I am pleased to see so many colleagues here to debate this important issue. We find ourselves here today in response to an e-petition started by John Wellington from The Mail on Sunday. I am bound to say that after the events of the past week, The Mail on Sunday is my favourite national newspaper. The e-petition calls for the spending of a fixed 0.7% of the UK’s gross national income on foreign aid to be stopped and instead for money only to be given to "truly deserving causes, on a case-by-case basis.”

I am delighted to have the opportunity to open this debate as a member of the Petitions Committee, because it is the perfect opportunity to set out the arguments clearly. We know that the UK is a world leader on international development.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the UK is a world leader because we deliver spending of 0.7% of gross national income on overseas aid?

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and I will come on to make that point very soon.

We know that in 2013, we were the only United Nations country to achieve our target on aid spending. We know that our 0.7% spending commitment is enshrined in law. Furthermore, let us not forget that our commitment to overseas aid was a clear part of the 2015 manifesto on which a majority Conservative Government was elected. There are people who feel strongly about this issue and feel that we should not be spending this amount of money on international aid. People are perfectly entitled to hold those views, and that is the beauty and very purpose of the Petitions Committee—it gives the opportunity to debate in the House issues that the public raise.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I know that there are concerns about this issue—in particular when we see cuts to local services in our local areas, such as to social care—but does the hon. Gentleman agree that the choice between spending on foreign aid and investing in our communities at home is false? We have a duty to do both.

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Lady. It is not either/or; it is about doing both.

Several hon. Members rose—

Steve Double: I would like to make a little more progress, and then I will accept further interventions.

The issue can be emotive and controversial for some. It is far too easy to get caught up in the attention-grabbing headlines or misled by the wildly exaggerated information out there in the public domain. People want to know how the money is spent and whether it is being spent in our interest, and rightly so. That was clearly demonstrated in the Twitter discussion held this afternoon, in which the Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), and I participated. We had about 3,000 contributions in just an hour. In fact, it was impossible to keep up with the number of people posting, let alone respond to them all, but it was clear from that discussion that there are strong feelings on both sides of the debate.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friend will accept that there are concerns. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) set up the traffic light system that shows how our aid budget is being spent. There are far too many red and amber warnings about how well the money is being spent, and that is what the public are concerned about.

Steve Double: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is absolutely essential that we ensure our aid budget is being spent well and wisely and is delivering value for money for the British taxpayer. I am sure that the Department for International Development is committed to achieving that.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): While we all want to monitor aid spending, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the money has transformational potential, not least for the 11 million children who have gone to school for the first time as a consequence of that spending?

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman. I will come on to that point in a minute. The money is transforming lives around the world, and we should be very proud of that fact.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con) rose—

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con) rose—

Steve Double: I will take one more intervention and then I want to make some progress.

Chris White: I have previously had the good fortune of sitting on the International Development Committee, and I have visited countries where I have seen housing, governance and health programmes working. My hon.
Friend talks about leadership. Can he also explain how our leadership in this country encourages other countries to support international development?

Steve Double: I suspect that is a matter for the Minister far more than it is one for me, but I wholeheartedly agree that this country is providing the leadership and setting the trend on international development. We should be incredibly proud of that and hope other countries follow our lead.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend, whom we congratulate on launching this debate, appreciate that the debate is about the 0.7% and that it would be a tragedy—indeed, it would be repulsive—if it was hijacked by those who want to use it to demonise Palestine and Palestinians? The debate should concentrate on the 0.7% and only that.

Steve Double: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and I agree with his point, but I accept that the debate is wide-ranging and we need to discuss how the money is spent and not just the amount. I believe that the UK can be very proud of how the money is spent.

Mrs Helen Grant rose—

Steve Double: I will take one more intervention, and then I will make some progress.

Mrs Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the aid spending is in our national interest, both economically and in terms of national security?

Steve Double: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. That is the very point I want to make: continuing the spending is not just the right thing to do; it is also in our national interest. The truth is that this country gets great value for money from the aid. Funds are subject to rigorous internal and external checks, and we are helping to create a more stable world.

There are many myths out there relating to foreign aid spending. One example is that aid money from British and European taxpayers has gone to Palestinian prisoners, including terrorists. That is simply not true. Another is that UK aid to the Palestinian Authority funded an £8 million presidential palace. Again, that is simply not true. The myths go on and on, and they are based on out-of-date information or inaccurate reporting. The Government have been very clear on that.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Has my hon. Friend seen the report from the Overseas Development Institute, which found that some of the funding that has gone to the Palestinian territories has resulted in an increase in violence? That is why the Department is re-looking at it.

Steve Double: I have read those reports, but I am assured by the discussions I have had with the Department that that is simply not the truth and is not taking place.

It is right that people have their views heard, and today we will debate the merits and issues surrounding the UK’s foreign aid spending. That is what the e-petition is all about. I am proud that this great country has a strong record of helping those most in need. Helping to save and improve millions of lives is no small task and is something to be incredibly proud of. I believe that as a human race, helping others is something we are designed and created to do. UK aid reaches millions of people across the world.

Let us consider some examples of what has been achieved. Some 11 million children have been supported through school. Some 47 million bed nets have been distributed, which has helped lead to malaria deaths falling by 60% in the past 15 years. Sixty million people have been given access to things that are so simple, yet so vital, and that I am sure each of us takes for granted: clean water, better sanitation and improved hygiene conditions.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Steve Double: I will just make some more progress. From scientific research, health and climate change to economic growth, education, governance and security, there are few aspects of life that our aid does not touch in many of the poorest nations of the world.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Steve Double: Yes, and then I will come back to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin).

Mr Evans: I am extremely grateful. What my hon. Friend is saying is absolutely right and reassuring. If we do not recognise that there are issues out there—that is why we are debating this matter—then we need to address areas where the money has been misspent. Does he agree that when we give money to a charity in America that then spends millions on new headquarters as opposed to ensuring that that money gets through to the poorest people, we do an injustice to the poorest people throughout the world and are probably putting the 0.7% in jeopardy?

Steve Double: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have to ensure that whatever money we have is wisely spent and delivered to the front line. When that is not the case, it needs to be addressed.

Ian Austin: The hon. Gentleman is right about the good work that DFID does, but he is completely wrong to say it is a myth that the Palestinian Authority fund terrorists. The fact is that nearly all of DFID’s funding in the region goes directly to the Palestinian Authority. That is a matter of concern because of the allegation that the Palestinian Authority continue to fund payments to convicted terrorists and their families, which is in direct contradiction to the demands of the international community.

Steve Double: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I will give way to my right hon. Friend the Minister.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Sir Desmond Swayne): Of course we fund the Palestinian Authority. Our funds are paid to named civil servants and pensioners from an audited and scrutinised list for the delivery of public services. British taxpayers’ money does not fund terrorism.
Steve Double: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

Between 2010 and 2015, more than 28 million children under five and pregnant women were helped through the Government’s nutrition programmes, more than 5 million births took place safely with the help of nurses, midwives and doctors, and more than 13 million people were given emergency food assistance—and the list goes on. These are not just facts. These are real people living in the same world as us who deserve to have their basic human needs met. What kind of world would we be living in if we reduced or stopped this spending and did nothing or little, or if we idly sat by and watched while the most vulnerable in our world suffered? I put it to this House that the majority of British people wish not to turn a blind eye and see innocent people suffer, but instead stand tall in this world, side by side with those who most need our help.

Comparisons are casually and carelessly tossed about regarding how much is spent abroad and how that money could be spent here at home on nurses, schools and more bobbies on the beat, but it is not that simple. It is not that black and white. It is not about being solely reactive as and when disasters, crises and epidemics happen; it is about being constantly active in this world. This money goes a long way and we should judge our commitment to the rest of the world not solely by figures, but by the effectiveness of it, too.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): On that point, does my hon. Friend not think that one of the problems is that the public have difficulty conceiving what 0.7% of GNI really means? It is a fact that the value of the food we throw away is more than 0.7% of GNI. The amount we spend on takeaways every year in this country is more than we spend on overseas aid. A few of those comparisons can be quite illuminating.

Steve Double: I agree with my right hon. Friend. A statistic that I read today said that in the UK we spend more on ice cream than we give away in international aid.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his presentation of the debate. My fundamental concern is that we have a twin deficit in this country: a current account deficit that is exacerbated by international aid spending and a public expenditure deficit. Although aid is incredibly worthy—no one would argue with that—can we truly afford to sustain such levels, given the public finances?

Steve Double: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, but I believe we cannot afford not to spend money on aid. In the world as it is today, with the many crises and the needs that we meet around the world, it is in the interest of the UK to continue spending on international aid.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Will my hon. Friend address the way in which aid is spent, and on ensuring that organisations around the world, where it is needed the most, are aligned with the UK’s national interest. Money is now going straight to the frontline—to non-governmental organisations around the world, where it is needed most. More emphasis than ever is being put on reforming the way in which aid is spent, and on ensuring that the money is spent as effectively as possible.

Steve Double: I want to make a little more progress, and then I will. The Government have been very clear and consistent in their principles on this issue: our development spending will meet our moral obligation to the world’s poorest, as well as supporting our national interest, a point I will come on to later. Let us not forget the history of how Britain made its wealth. We took resources from countries around the world, especially those in the empire, and then left them as independent nations, giving very little back. Some of the issues that those countries face today have been compounded by the historical actions of this nation, so I feel strongly that we have a moral obligation to help these countries now, in their time of need.

The Government have also been very clear that we will keep our promises and put international development at the heart of our national security and foreign policy, but how do we do that is changing. Our official development assistance spending is now shaped by four strategic principles: first, strengthening global peace, security and governance; secondly, strengthening resilience and the response to crises; thirdly, promoting global prosperity; and fourthly, tackling extreme poverty and helping the world’s most vulnerable. Through this, it has been made clear that the Government are committed to ensuring that every last penny spent on ODA is spent well and offers good value for money.

It is true that in the past there have been cases where the way in which our money has been spent could have been brought into question, but it has been made clear that funds are now subject to greater transparency. In fact, DFID has been congratulated on being the most transparent aid donor in the world.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate; my hon. Friend is setting out the issues very carefully. Does he agree that it is important for the Government to focus on specific, not open-ended support? In other words, we should focus on results-based projects, rather than general budgetary support.

Steve Double: Absolutely. I agree that we have to ensure that the money is spent as effectively as possible and delivers measurable, tangible outcomes that we can assess. We must accept that there may be times when we do not achieve what we set out to do, and we should be honest with ourselves and admit when that is the case.

Derek Thomas: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We know that when there is a crisis in the world, the British people are quick to dig into their pockets to give money. Does he agree that international aid is a tool that can be used to promote human rights in countries where the rights of minority groups and vulnerable people are often not upheld? Does he agree that international aid helps to transform the wellbeing of many people?

Steve Double: I agree with my hon. Friend. Our foreign aid funding and budget can achieve many things. Addressing the issues of equality and human rights around the world is one of the positive things that we can do.

I have set out the strategic aims of our foreign aid budget, and the UK’s aid will be used to meet those objectives, all of which support poverty reduction and are aligned with the UK’s national interest. Money is now going straight to the frontline—to non-governmental organisations around the world, where it is needed most. More emphasis than ever is being put on reforming the way in which aid is spent, and on ensuring that...
DFID is a world leader in aid transparency. It is clear that how aid is allocated, used and spent has changed for the better. The calls that the petition makes are impractical and could prove counterproductive. Rather than simply responding to crises and requests for help, our aid spending needs to be strategic and to take a long-term view to be most effective.

Three years ago, the UK became the only G20 country to achieve the UN target of spending 0.7% of its gross national income as official development assistance. This is a massive commitment to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable, and it is disappointing that other countries are not doing the same. I had the pleasure and humbling opportunity to travel to Nairobi with Christian Aid last year to see our aid in action. I went specifically because I wanted to see for myself how our overseas aid money was being spent.

Kenya has a population of 43 million people and is the biggest economy in eastern Africa, yet around 25% of Kenyans do not have enough income to meet their basic food needs. A massive three quarters of the population are dependent on agriculture. This proves troublesome when their weather patterns are becoming increasingly erratic. That beautiful country and those wonderful people face a number of issues, including the unequal distribution of political, social and economic power; tax and governance issues; high maternal and child mortality rates; and—the main focus of my trip—climate change.

Droughts and intermittent flooding are becoming increasingly frequent, each time growing more severe. With each devastating blow that a drought brings, farmers lose a significant percentage of their assets. When that is combined with snowballing vulnerability to disasters that result in severe displacement and human suffering, and an increasing lack of resources such as food and water, it is easy to see how, without any assistance from countries such as the UK, Kenya could find itself stuck in a never-ending cycle of suffering and hampered long-term development.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I agree with the tone that my hon. Friend is taking on this issue. Just a few days ago I was in Ethiopia. I saw the effects of the drought in that country, where more than 16 million people are dependent on food aid to survive. I am proud that this country is stepping up to the mark, because nobody in this country did anything to deserve being born in the relative luxury that we live in. It is pure luck, and the least we can do is help those people.

Steve Double: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; he makes a point that I will come on to.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman also recognise another grave threat in Kenya: that of young men, in particular, being seduced by extremism? We saw that extremism again yesterday in a country such as Bangladesh, which has been ravaged by floods year after year; a strong reason for keeping the 0.7% commitment is that it has particularly helped women? He has given many reasons, but he has not mentioned women yet. Women have been lifted out of poverty. That has been particularly apparent in Bangladesh, where Muhammad Yunus has helped to provide microfinance for women’s start-up businesses.

Steve Double: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree that if we do not address these issues, they will come home to roost in western countries. One way we can address them is through our international aid spending.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am very proud of the contribution that this country makes to international development, but in my constituency, and I am sure constituencies up and down the country, we have a plethora of food banks. Some of my constituents are not able to feed their families. Until those problems are addressed, the same question will keep arising: my constituents will continue to ask me, “Why are we spending this money on foreign aid, when our children are hungry here?”

Steve Double: I understand the hon. Lady’s point, but my point is that it cannot be a simple either/or. We need to fulfil our responsibility in the world and address some of the challenges facing it; that is in our national interests. If we do not, those issues will come closer to us. It is still the right thing to do, although I understand the concerns of her constituents and, indeed, many of mine.

Although I had visited Kenya a number of times before in my previous charity work, my most recent visit was a chance to see Kenya with a different focus. I spent three jam-packed days in the country, meeting members of the Kenyan Government, UK representatives, campaigners and charity workers. One occasion, I visited an extremely rural area, where the impact of climate change is felt most acutely, and met a local farming community. Rainfall is now much less frequent but heavier, which creates significant challenges of soil erosion and flash flooding. I visited a farm where a partnership of the UK and Kenyan local government has helped to fund the construction of water-capture pits for the farmer. When it rains, the pits enable him to store water, which can last for several months during a drought. This means that farmers can expand their farms and provide employment for more local people—so simple, yet so effective.

Having met these people and heard their stories, which begin with anguish but have a positive and hopeful outcome, I understand much more clearly why this spending is so necessary. My trip made it very clear that climate change, as well as every other single issue facing those who receive aid, is being felt in the poorer countries of the world, where people are less resilient and less able to adapt.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful point about the environment and natural disasters. Does he agree that in a country such as Bangladesh, which has been ravaged by floods year after year, a strong reason for keeping the 0.7% commitment is that it has particularly helped women? He has given many reasons, but he has not mentioned women yet. Women have been lifted out of poverty. That has been particularly apparent in Bangladesh, where Muhammad Yunus has helped to provide microfinance for women’s start-up businesses.

Steve Double: Just to be equal, I have not mentioned men either, but I totally agree with the hon. Lady’s point. I shall press on and finish my contribution, rather than taking any more interventions.

The next reason why overseas aid spending is so important is to protect our national interests. Whatever we may feel about the moral responsibility we have to other countries, it is in our own interest to continue this
spending. One of the biggest ongoing challenges facing the world is the migration crisis. People are fleeing not only war and conflict, but poverty. If people find, as a result of our changing climate, that life is not sustainable, especially in rural areas that are totally dependent on farming, the likelihood of them migrating to western Europe will only increase, putting more and more pressure on our country. Granting aid that can help communities to adapt and enable people to live sustainable lives in rural areas is not just the right thing to do, but the sensible thing to do.

The choice is simple: we tackle the issues at their roots or we wait for them to arrive on our doorstep. As a result of global communications, people in poorer nations are far more aware than ever of the huge gaps between the quality of life in different countries. Young people growing up in places such as Africa are bombarded with visions of the affluence of life in the west. On a global scale, there are very few poor people in the UK. I strongly believe that those of us who have had the luck to be born British have already won life’s lottery. Nearly half the world’s population—2.8 billion people—survive on less than $2 a day.

The generosity of the British people never ceases to amaze me. Reacting to major incidents around the world, we step up and help those who have fallen to get back on their feet, instead of just peering down on them from our platform of relative comfort and safety. A phenomenal £372 million was raised by the UK public in response to the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami, and £107 million was raised in response to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Our foreign aid spending is no different. It follows the same principle of us, as human beings, wanting to help others; it just comes in the form of money.

I hope that I have made my point clearly. I believe it is both the right and the practical thing for the UK to maintain its commitment to international aid. Although I acknowledge the right of those who have signed the petition to do so, and I understand the strong feelings that many people hold on this issue, I respectfully disagree with them. The UK has a proud history of playing a leading part on the global stage in assisting countries that are desperately in need. That is something we should continue to do. It is part of what makes us who we are; it is part of the values of our country; it is part of what makes Britain great.

Several hon. Members rose—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Members do not need to be told that quite a lot of them want to catch my eye, so I will introduce a time limit of five minutes straight away. The first person I shall call, who will stick to that limit, I am sure, is Joan Ryan.

4.58 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Three weeks after Labour won the 1997 general election, we pledged that Britain would meet the UN target to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on international development. That is one of the acts of which I am most proud from our time in office. I do not deny the important role that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have played in ensuring that it has become a cross-party national commitment—one that only a handful of countries in the world have met.

However, none of us who support international aid believes we are writing the Department for International Development a blank cheque. We must always ensure that aid meets three tests: it must be effective and transparent, and it must reflect our country’s values. In the case of the aid we give to the Palestinian Authority, we are failing those three tests. Let me give one example: the issue of the PA’s payments to convicted Palestinian terrorists, including, we must assume, Taleb Mehamara, the uncle of the Sarona market murderers, a member of a terror cell that in 2002 targeted Israelis, killing four in a shooting attack. We are not talking about, as one DFID Minister claimed in 2012, “social assistance programmes to provide welfare payments”.

Instead, by operating a perverse sliding scale where people receive more money the longer their sentence—in some cases as much as five times the average monthly wage in Ramallah—the payments actually incentivise people to commit the most terrible acts of violence. I simply do not see how that advances the cause of a two-state solution. What are the Government doing about it?

Last month, Palestinian Media Watch showed how the PA sought to deceive international donors by shutting the Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs and claiming that the Palestine Liberation Organisation would assume responsibility for those payments, but that was merely financial sleight of hand.

Sir Desmond Swayne: I have had discussions with the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister of the Palestinian Authority and other officials, and I continually make the point that the right hon. Lady rightly makes: if these are welfare payments, they must be made like welfare payments. The reality is that we do not pay them. Our taxpayers’ money goes to build the Palestinian Authority so it is able to morph into the Government of a Palestinian state when that opportunity arises. We pay named civil servants to provide public services.

Joan Ryan: I think the Minister understands the point I am making and wilfully will not look at this. In fact, the payments we make enable the Palestinian Authority to make its payments to prisoners.

In 2015, the PA raised its annual transfer to the PLO via the Palestinian National Fund to 481 million shekels—the amount it needed to fund the newly created PLO Commission of Prisoners’ Affairs. That amount was virtually identical to the budget of the old PA Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs—the point I am making to the Minister. I wrote to Ministers last month demanding that direct aid to the PA be suspended while these serious allegations are investigated. In response, I was told by Ministers that the Palestinian Ministry of Finance has confirmed to DFID—we have heard this again today—that “prisoner payments are fully administered” by the PLO. With respect, I urge Ministers to dig a little deeper. They should be asking questions about the source of the money, not who is doing it out.
Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I would like to ask my right hon. Friend two questions. First, is she saying that aid to the Palestinian Authority should be suspended? How does she respond to the passage in the report that was referred to earlier, which says:

“To the extent that collapse of the PA or the Palestinian economy would massively increase unemployment, this would raise the chances of a violent escalation”?

Secondly, is she saying that every Palestinian prisoner in Israeli custody is a terrorist?

Joan Ryan: On my hon. Friend’s second point, I have not said that. He just said that, not me. On his first point, I think, as we have said, that tests for aid are very important if there is to be public confidence in where aid goes to. It is important that the aid is suspended subject to an inquiry, which could happen very quickly. I am not in any way against giving aid to Palestinians, as long as it is spent in the right way.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that one of the ways forward in this debate about how DFID aid is spent in Israel and Palestine is for there to be increased spending on people-to-people co-existence policies?

Joan Ryan: I absolutely agree. I am not going to take any more interventions, as I want to finish my remarks. My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point.

Repeated warnings have been ignored. Nearly two years ago, for instance, the International Development Committee suggested that there is a real risk that the payment of UK aid to the PA in this fashion simply enables it “to release alternative funds which allow these payments” to convicted terrorists “to continue”. That is the very point I am making.

While our aid potentially helps to line the pockets of the men of violence, we are providing pitiable support to the co-existence projects that bring Israelis and Palestinians together, as my hon. Friend has said. I have written to the Secretary of State listing a number of co-existence projects that enable Palestinians and Israelis to work together, demonstrating what they have in common, not what divides them. I have calculated that less than 13% of the £1.14 million from the Government’s conflict, stability and security fund spent in Israel and the Palestinian territories funds co-existence projects. That represents a mere 0.2% of the roughly £72 million that DFID spends in the Palestinian territories.

Britain can and must help to work towards an independent, democratic Palestinian state living alongside an Israel that is safe and secure within recognised borders. At the moment, I fear that our aid to the Palestinian Authority might be taking us further away from that goal, which is why, as I have previously argued, we urgently need an independent inquiry and a radical rethink.

5.5 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to support the 0.7% target, in particular with reference to the impact that DFID has made to reaching more than 62 million people with clean water, sanitation and hygiene—WASH—support. Behind that statistic, the lives of so many individuals have been transformed. I saw that when I went to Nepal as a member of the International Development Committee last year. We saw a scheme that had recently provided piped water to a remote village of 600 people, including to two elderly former Gurkha soldiers. One of them proudly showed me the water tap to his home and his vegetable garden, which he was able to tend lovingly as a result of having a water supply. He told me that the children of the village are now able to spend more time in school because they do not have to spend hours every day carrying water for the villagers.

That scheme was led by a young engineer from the current Gurkha regiment. It was administered by the Gurkha Welfare Trust and funded by DFID. What was truly remarkable was not only that the scheme engaged villagers from the whole village in implementing it, but that it cost just £18,000 in UK aid. Some 600 lives have been transformed—there have been improvements in health, hygiene, nutrition, education and life chances for all of those people and their families—for just £18,000. Those who criticise UK aid’s value for money will, I hope, think again on hearing of that scheme.

We can be very proud that DFID’s WASH investments have led to improved health and life chances outcomes across the globe, just as in that Nepalese village. As WaterAid’s report “Water: At What Cost? The State of the World’s Water 2016” states:

“The lack of access to an affordable, convenient, improved water source is one of the biggest barriers to escaping a life of poverty and disease.”

As evidence from another DFID-funded scheme in Bangladesh shows, DFID’s WASH programmes have a wide impact on development. There have been reductions in infant diarrhoea—a major cause of infant sickness and death in developing countries—in child stunting, and in the effect of parasitic worms and other infectious diseases, including water-borne diseases. There have been improvements in school enrolment and attendance, and a reduction in school drop-out rates, particularly for girls. There is evidence of reduced gender inequality, as it is often not just children but women who spend time fetching water.

UK aid helps with WASH programmes not just in remote rural areas. DFID’s WASH programmes are increasingly exploring the challenges of providing water and sanitation improvements in urban slums. About 80% of the estimated 1.7 million inhabitants of Mozambique’s capital, Maputo, live in barrios, often in shacks partly built with corrugated iron. Just 9% of homes are connected to the sewerage system, and half of all Maputo’s faecal matter is buried in people’s backyards, which contaminates the water system. A WASH scheme has been helping by providing investment and equipment, building skills and helping the Government to create appropriate regulations to enable the cost-effective collection and disposal of sewage by small local contractors. DFID is funding a not-for-profit company called Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor, which is helping to develop cost-effective models for providing WASH in urban settings. For the detractors of UK aid expenditure’s value for money, I repeat that it is a not-for-profit company.
Mrs Hodgson: The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. On the detractors of the UK aid spend, I wish she could print that list of those great projects in a national newspaper. We need to advertise the great work DFID is doing around the world. We all know about it, but I do not think that the public appreciate it, and nor do they know the details she has highlighted.

Fiona Bruce: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point, and I agree with her. The International Development Committee has been urging DFID and Ministers to do that, because she is absolutely right that the public will wholeheartedly support and endorse such schemes.

Mrs Helen Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the huge public response to the Nepal earthquake, which she mentioned, shows that British people care about the plight of the poorest?

Fiona Bruce: I absolutely agree. The wonderful thing is that DFID’s funds often lever in other, additional moneys through the schemes that the Department so intelligently implements.

DFID set itself ambitious results targets for WASH. Its initial commitment, only six years ago, in 2010, was to provide 15 million people with first-time access to it. That figure was doubled, and then redoubled, to a target of reaching 60 million people during 2011 to 2015. In 2015, after investing almost £700 million over the previous five years on WASH programmes in 27 countries, DFID announced that it had exceeded its target by reaching 62.9 million people. That is the number of people that DFID states have gained access to clean water, toilets or hand-washing facilities, or have been reached through programmes to encourage better hygiene practices. Following that, DFID has committed itself to reach a further 60 million people with sustainable access to safe drinking water or sanitation by 2020.

Levels of disease from living in insanitary conditions that families across the globe still suffer in the 21st century were last seen in this country in the Victorian era. Those families have children for whom they have the same hopes and dreams as we do for ours. Is it too much to ask that we commit only 0.7% of our gross national income—out of all our abundance—to help combat that?

5.12 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased to be serving under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, and I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on his introductory speech.

I first visited Bangladesh 20 years ago. On that occasion, at a charitable health facility that someone had taken me too, I met a lad probably aged nine or 10, literally dressed in rags. It was explained to me that he was not able to go to school because he had to earn a living and worked at the local hotel. At the time, I think only about one half of primary-age schoolchildren in Bangladesh were in school; today, the equivalent figure is more than 90%. A remarkable transformation has been achieved over the past 20 years. It reflects great credit on Bangladesh, with enrolment among girls at a much increased level, as well as among boys, but British aid has made an important contribution to that change.

In February—I am sure other hon. Members have had similar experiences—in Dhaka I visited a little, one-room school run by that remarkable organisation BRAC, which receives a great deal of support from DFID. I met hopeful, eager and enthusiastic primary schoolchildren, optimistically looking forward to their future, which underlined for me just how important the transformation that British aid has contributed to over the past 20 years is. I have no idea what happened to the boy whom I met 20 years ago—rightly, he might have his own children now, but, if he has, they can expect a much better start in life than he had. Our aid has made an important contribution to bringing that about.

Tom Brake: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the problems he has seen in Bangladesh are unlikely all to be resolved by 2020? Does he hope, as I do, that all parties in the House will want, in their 2020 manifestos, to maintain the commitment to 0.7% of GNI?

Stephen Timms: I would welcome that, as I welcome the broad support across the Chamber for that commitment. It is interesting to reflect on the reasons for that cross-party support for the 0.7% target, which I think go back to the Jubilee 2000 campaign in the run-up to the millennium, and the tremendous public support for Britain being more generous to the poorest countries in the world. That was then renewed and strengthened by the Make Poverty History campaign in 2005—the great rally in Edinburgh addressed by Nelson Mandela, with the summit at Gleneagles, chaired by Tony Blair, whose decisions made an important contribution.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a lot of respect has to be paid to the role of the Churches in driving Jubilee 2000? The role of the Churches demonstrates that this matter is not party political, but something that speaks to the good instincts of the British people.

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. During those campaigns, I remember that a Treasury Minister turned up to work one morning to find the Treasury surrounded by campaigners, arm in arm all the way around the building. They inundated the Treasury with postcards with £1 coins selotaped to the back of them, one of which we worked out had been sent in by Gordon Brown’s mother. The organisers of the two campaigns—Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History—estimated that about 80% of the people who supported the campaigns and did those things were from the Churches. That is the reason for this cross-party consensus. It is a remarkable example. People sometimes say that the Churches never achieve much anymore; in this instance, the Churches achieved a huge amount, and it is important to recognise the source and strength of the existing consensus.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that in the same way as Make Poverty History was a huge issue then, climate change is a huge issue now? Value-for-money programmes in Bangladesh, such as those to do with flooding, have an enormous impact. They can prevent not only flooding, but famine, helping with unwanted migration and so on—issues we need to look at. Even terrorism can be linked to the failure to address climate change.
Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is completely right. I welcome the progress, but a huge amount more remains to be done on that, as well as on education. More than 120 million primary-age children around the world are still not in school, with more girls out of school than boys. A great deal more is still to be done.

Finally, although I welcome today’s cross-party support for the 0.7% aid commitment, I hope that there will also be support throughout the House for the amendment tabled to the Finance Bill by my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) that would affect country-by-country reporting—the arrangement under which each year international companies would publish the profits made and the tax paid in each country. Years ago, I worked on that idea at the Treasury, and I welcome the growing momentum behind it now. I hope that the support rightly and encouragingly expressed in the debate will enable the House to agree my right hon. Friend’s proposal.

5.18 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am a member of the International Development Committee and co-chair of the all-party group for sustainable development goals, so it is a pleasure to support colleagues on both sides of the Chamber who are speaking in favour of the 0.7%. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on foreign aid spending and, to be precise, the 0.7%. Given the backdrop of the need to secure the UK’s economic recovery, it is right to consider the spending of all Departments, not only DFID’s. We need to ensure that we deliver value for taxpayers’ money and that we understand what does and does not work.

Before I was elected to this place, I had the opportunity through Project Umubano, which was set up by the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), to spend time in Rwanda, Burundi and Sierra Leone, so that I could learn about international development by seeing it for myself. I took that opportunity because I wanted and felt that I needed to gain a more detailed understanding of international development. I visited schools in rural Rwanda, a health clinic in Kirambi and NGO projects where they were showing people how to build livelihoods and encourage enterprise. I have many stories I would love to share with Members this afternoon, but I will move on because time is pressing. UK aid has contributed to many of those successes and many others around the world. In the last 40 years, extreme poverty has halved. Since 2000, deaths from malaria have decreased by 60%, saving more than 6 million lives. There are many other examples.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): UK investment in immunisation saves a child’s life somewhere in the world every two minutes. Does the hon. Lady agree that such immunisation programmes not only enable better health in poorer countries but provide an important roadblock to more widespread epidemics?

Wendy Morton: The hon. Lady makes a very valuable point. The benefit of such debates is that they enable us to share many examples of projects and the experiences that we have all had. We face a choice: either seek to tackle the root causes of poverty and therefore many of the great global challenges we face, or wait for the problem—to that I say: the threat of mass migration, terrorism, disease, corruption or global climate change—to arrive here on our doorstep, by which point it is often too late.

We have already heard that the 0.7% target is not new. To be honest, I was surprised to find while doing my research that it was actually back in 1974 by the then Labour Government. Subsequent Conservative Governments also accepted it in principle, and it was finally enshrined in law by the coalition Government. It is important to remember that the 0.7% aid target that we are discussing is 0.7% of gross national income. Let us be clear: that is not “wealth”, as indicated in the title of the petition. That means that aid spending could in theory come down: if GNI comes down, that 0.7% as an amount will also come down.

Critics will say that we should spend only what we need to spend. I get that. I understand that we have to deliver value for taxpayers’ money, but that has to be balanced and put in context. We are often faced with very complex situations. For example, with Ebola, I fear that if we had waited for too long, the situation that we faced would have been much worse and we would yet again have faced the charge of having done too little, too late.

There is growing global inequality in terms of peace. The most peaceful states are more peaceful than ever, but some of the most fragile states are more fragile than ever. That is why I welcome the shift in the Government’s aid strategy to place a greater focus on supporting such fragile states. That often requires a much longer-term approach, which can often bring challenges, and it is certainly not without risks, but without security and stability, development is not possible and it is not possible to move beyond dependency upon humanitarian aid.

I will turn briefly to governance, accountability and transparency. The e-petition states that our aid is leading to “waste and corruption”. I believe it is for DFID to always answer and account for the work it does. I am a member of the International Development Committee, which holds inquiries into the Department’s work, and the Department is also scrutinised by the
Public Accounts Committee, which recently published a report, the National Audit Office and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which I believe was set up while my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield was Secretary of State. The purpose of that organisation is to scrutinise DFID’s work and ODA spending. I would like to see more scrutiny. We have yet to fully make the case for aid to the British public. We all have a part to play in doing that. I would like to see more cross-Department inquiries to better reflect the way that the 0.7% cuts across Departments. The case for 0.7% is an important one. It is worthy of scrutiny and debate, but in my view it is worthy of our support.

5.26 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), a fellow member of the International Development Committee, and I agree with many of her points. It is important for Members to understand the reason why we are here today, which is not only the petition but the fact that it was started by The Mail on Sunday, which said when talking about our aid budget:

“Rather than helping people who desperately need it, much of this money is wasted and...fuels corruption, funds despots and corrodes democracy in developing nations.”

Quite frankly, that is lazy and wrong, and it is irresponsible for anyone who cares about our national security and global security—

Mrs Main: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Stephen Doughty: I will give way in a moment, but let me make a few points. It is important to note that there is both a moral argument and a practical and national security argument for why we should spend 0.7% on aid. The moral argument should shame us all. As a Christian, I think it is appalling that 800 women die every day in childbirth and 20,000 children die every day from preventable diseases. We can list the statistics, which should shame us all. It is irresponsible for us to ignore those in a world where poverty, insecurity and instability have consequences for our streets and our cities.

Gross poverty has fuelled instability in Yemen. There are ungoverned spaces there where militants can train and extremism can flourish. The Mail on Sunday is quite happy to tell us about the immigrants flooding towards us—it was happy to put that on its front page instead of the massacre in Orlando—but what it does not tell us is that many of those people trying to find a better future are fleeing because of the very poverty and insecurity that our aid aims to tackle. Do we seriously think that diseases such as Ebola and other pandemics, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, resist borders? Of course they do not. Our aid plays a crucial role in tackling such diseases.

Mrs Main: The hon. Gentleman said that there is nothing in the corruption point. If he reads the ICAI report on anti-corruption and DFID, he will see that it is on red-amber, showing that there are serious concerns about our 0.7% budget being used corruptly in some areas.

Stephen Doughty: I will come on to that point directly. It is absolutely right that any allegations of corruption or aid money being used by terrorist organisations, or any other allegations of that nature, are robustly and efficiently investigated. I have every confidence that DFID will do that. Indeed, we have the Independent Committee for Aid Impact, which the hon. Lady mentioned, which is investigating those very issues. I am convinced that we have one of the most robust regimes in the world, and it has been regarded as such by many other Governments.

The fact is that there is a paradox. If we operate in risky environments, some things will not work out. We would not say to a small business, “Don’t use your capital, because something might go wrong and you might lose some of it.” We would not say to our troops, “Don’t go in and fight that battle, because something might go wrong.” We should not say, “Let’s not give aid in risky environments, because something might go wrong with it.” On balance, we are far better off being in there trying to deal with the root problems and consequences than not engaging at all and pulling up the boundaries and saying, “None of this matters and none of it affects us.”

The fact is that corruption thrives in poverty and insecurity. We have withdrawn our aid from countries where there has been absolutely categorical evidence of it being used inappropriately. When I worked in Government at the Department for International Development, we removed aid from the Malawian Government when they said that they were going to spend it on a jet. We have never given money directly to many aspects of the Government of Zimbabwe because of concerns about that—we give aid through charities instead. To say the aid is all going to despots is completely wrong.

Ian Austin: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend is saying, but I just want him to understand that those of us who are concerned about the Palestinian Authority’s support for terrorists are not saying that we should withdraw, walk away and leave them to it—not at all. We are saying that perhaps some of that money would be better spent supporting projects that work across both communities, with Palestinians and Israelis, building dialogue and putting in place the building blocks of the peace process that we all want to see.

Stephen Doughty: The point I am making is a wide one. It is right to look carefully into any allegations of such a serious nature—and several have been raised today. I listened to what the Minister said about specific cases, but that is not the point I am making. I am speaking generally, with reference to the impression created by The Mail on Sunday petition. The fact is that the countries that our aid supports have been regularly reviewed. The coalition Government made different choices about which countries to support from the Labour Government that I was part of; but that was right—we should review those things. We have stopped giving aid to India, and places such as China—it was a difficult decision but I think it was the right one—yet a myth is perpetuated that we are still giving them money.

As has been said, there is increased independent oversight from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which, incidentally, reports to the International Development Committee, not the Government. That means
there can be independent scrutiny of what our aid is being spent on. Things have also moved on in the sense that cross-Government co-operation has increased. I welcome the steps that have been taken to increase co-operation between defence, diplomatic and development activities, through the National Security Council. It is the right decision, and it ensures that we are co-ordinated across our international sphere. It is not a zero-sum game. I firmly support the 2% spending target for defence, but I also support the 0.7% aid target. I am in favour of supporting charities and those tackling poverty in my constituency, such as food banks, but I also support providing life-saving drugs to people dying from Ebola or HIV across the world. That is not a zero-sum game—we can do both. Indeed, if I want to ask why people in my constituency are living in poverty, I will have far more questions for the Government about some of their other policies than about what the international aid budget is being spent on.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the Government’s increasing tendency to double-count spending both to the 2% NATO target and the 0.7% GNI target?

Stephen Doughty: I think there is a danger of things sometimes being blurred, but there are activities that can legitimately be described as measures contributing to security and to development. It is not a zero-sum game. I saw that in Afghanistan. I saw the close working between our development staff, armed forces and Foreign Office staff—there is overlap, but we need to be cautious about completely skewing things in one or the other. As to proportions, the fact is that in 2014-15 defence spending was 75% of our total international spending. Aid, diplomacy and intelligence made up just 25%. That is a perfectly reasonable balance, and the co-operation that is going on is absolutely right.

The growing chaos in Yemen, parts of the horn of Africa, and north and central Africa, shows exactly the consequences of ignoring gross poverty and instability. Our aid is a tiny investment—less than a penny in the pound. It helps us to tackle threats. It is morally right and it shows us to be a compassionate and progressive global power. In my view it is madness to slash the budget that is focused on tackling those threats to our national and global security that drive people to flee their countries and drown, and that, most importantly, degrade us all.

Several hon. Members rose—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. I am going to have to drop the time limit for speeches to four minutes because there are still more than 20 Members who want to speak.

5.33 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): As the chair of Conservative Friends of International Development I felt compelled to speak in the debate. Yesterday we celebrated Her Majesty’s 90th birthday. As always, watching and joining in with the celebrations, I felt incredibly proud to be British. To me, a part of being British is having compassion and helping those who are less fortunate than we are. I am fully supportive of the fact that our country supports those overseas who are less fortunate by giving 0.7% of our GDP in aid. I have always believed that this country should be nothing but proud of its work to support developing countries and those who are less fortunate than us, and proud of what it does in worldwide emergencies. Last year, when Ebola broke out in Africa, we gave support to treat and contain the disease. As the scale of the Syria crisis has continued to grow, we have given continuous support, and taken steps to react and to help the most vulnerable at the heart of the situation.

I have visited Rwanda with Project Umubano and seen first-hand how the country has managed to start rebuilding itself after such horrors, and I have never had any doubt that we should help those who are less fortunate than we are. I have also visited Jordan and seen refugees, in the camps and in the host communities, and have spoken to them about their aspirations to return home to the country they love. I have no doubt that we should be giving hope to those who have so little hope. We are often blind to the daily challenges so that many people face around the world—the humanitarian crisis that might not be reported in the news, and the underlying problems at the root of things in some nations that make a quick fix an impossible task.

I wholeheartedly agree that we must have a rigorous process in place to ensure that the right money gets to the right places, and I believe the Government should ensure that there is the right level of scrutiny. I believe that that does happen. It is, after all, the public’s money that is being spent. We must be able to demonstrate that it is being done effectively.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Britain is of course a humanitarian nation, and it is right that we do our duty by the world’s most vulnerable, but there are legitimate concerns that the requirement to meet the target of 0.7% each year creates a risk that poor-value projects will be approved, and that money will be shovelled out of the door as the financial year end approaches. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if that target were to apply over a longer period, but allowing for annual variations to reflect need, that would give taxpayers greater comfort that British money was being spent properly?

Amanda Solloway: One thing we must do is protect the 0.7%. I am fully committed to the idea that we need to do that annually, because so many projects are needed each year. All aspects of the spending of the 0.7% are rigorously scrutinised. That is in addition to internal monitoring and evaluation to ensure that projects stay on track and deliver value for taxpayers’ money. We must also remember that the UK’s aid budget is without doubt one of the most transparent in the world. We have taken steps to ensure that taxpayers know exactly how their money is spent. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who has left the Chamber, spoke about making the way DFID money is spent more public, and I think we should do that.

Economic growth is undoubtedly the best way of driving people’s incomes and reducing poverty in the developing world. The private sector has a vital part to
play in generating and sustaining economic growth, as it creates jobs and opportunities for men and women to support their families and build more stable futures. It is fast becoming a key priority of our international development programme and in the long term could result in less investment being required in many nations.

As a nation we have never shied away from helping those who need it most. Every day we do so much fantastic work. I said earlier that I am proud to be British, and I am. I am proud that we lead the way in providing aid to those who need it most, and proud that we enrich people’s lives and save people’s lives. I cannot support anything that detracts from that. A life is to be valued wherever we live in the world and I fully support the fact that we help and develop those who are unable to do that for themselves.

5.37 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Wilson. I draw the House’s attention to my relevant entries in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I visited Jordan last autumn with Oxfam to meet Syrian refugees, and I worked with the Aegis Trust charity, which does important work preventing genocide, including in Rwanda.

As Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, I welcome today’s debate and the high attendance and public interest. As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) said, this is not a new issue. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 0.7% target in 1970, and, as she said, Governments of all parties have committed themselves to it ever since.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con) rose—

Stephen Twigg: I give way to the former Secretary of State.

Mr Mitchell: On the hon. Gentleman’s first point, about the number of people here today, will he join me in urging the usual channels to go back to the principle that used to exist of having an annual full-day debate on the Floor of the House on international development? Today’s attendance shows that we are missing that and need to have it restored.

Stephen Twigg: I will certainly do that.

The 0.7% target was first achieved by the UK in 2013. Just five other countries achieved it as well: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg and the United Arab Emirates. We need to recognise that there is genuine public concern—the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) spoke about the Twitter debate earlier this afternoon—with some saying we should simply not be spending that amount of money and some raising issues about what the aid is spent on. It is important that we engage seriously with those concerns that our constituents are raising. That is why the International Development Committee takes its scrutiny role very seriously. As others have said, we have unique support in doing that. Not only do we have the work of the National Audit Office, but thanks to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), we also have the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. The onus is in particular on those of us who support the 0.7% target to ensure that the money is spent properly and that we deliver value for money. I pledge today as Chair of the Committee—I know other members of the Committee, from all parties, have done this too—that we will seek to ensure that that is delivered.

There are many practical examples of the real difference that this investment makes. I want to refer to a small number of them. One is Ebola, which has been referred to by a number of Members. Our report on the Government’s response to the Ebola outbreak praised DFID for playing a strong, leading role in co-ordinating the response in Sierra Leone, which made a real, practical difference and saved lives. DFID set up Ebola treatment facilities in Sierra Leone to improve the response, providing additional beds and greatly improving the country’s capacity to fight Ebola. On polio, the United Kingdom is supporting the programme for polio eradication, with the aim of ensuring the full vaccination of 360 million children by 2019. Those are real examples where we can make a difference to people’s lives.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Africa is now clear of polio, which is still present in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. If we take our foot off the gas, we will slide back. We will see outbreaks. It is not “job done” yet.

Stephen Twigg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. In my experience, when we make these arguments and talk about challenges such as polio and Ebola, our constituents see the real, positive benefits of investment by DFID.

I will say something about the Syria crisis, because I think that as a country we can be proud of our Government’s response to the Syria crisis, both in Syria, with support for those who are internally displaced, but also, crucially, through the work being done in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. I saw that for myself when I went with Oxfam to Za’atari last year, and also when I visited families living in host communities. The practical differences to things like education, health, and jobs and livelihoods ensure that those Syrian refugee families are able to live the best life they possibly can in the most appalling of circumstances.

That is not just the right thing to do morally; it is actually in our interests to ensure that those people thrive. There is an economic case for that, but, bluntly, there is a security case for it as well. If we are supporting those families to stay in the region, they are less likely to risk their lives and try to come to Europe. I think we should be proud of that work. My Committee has decided that we will be conducting an inquiry into DFID’s work on education. Education is a crucial part of both humanitarian relief and development assistance in the long term.

I will finish by talking of the need to look beyond aid. We are not going to achieve a more equal world, or a world in which economies in Africa thrive as much as they do in other parts of the world, solely with aid. I want other wealthy countries to match our 0.7% achievement, but I also want us to recognise the role of remittances and the brilliant work that the diaspora communities do on that, and the importance of genuinely free and fair trade. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) reminded us about the key issue of taxation and country-by-country reporting, and also ensuring that countries can collect their own
taxes. In the end, aid is important, but it is not sufficient if we are to address those issues. As a House, let us engage more with the public on a cross-party basis about UK aid and development and call on other countries to do more so that they reach the 0.7% target, but also remind ourselves that aid on its own is not going to deliver the end of poverty and a more equal world.

5.44 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. For the most part, DFID delivers global goods, lifts people out of extreme poverty, champions the rights of women and girls, and delivers humanitarian relief when disaster strikes. However, support for helping the poorest people on our planet is harmed, and DFID suffers reputational damage, when behaviour that contravenes aid agreements is unchallenged and when, despite being presented with evidence, DFID takes no remedial action. There is no greater example of that behaviour than the support DFID provides to the Palestinian Authority. However, I do not wish to dwell upon that as my views on the subject are well known. Where I seek to take this debate is to how DFID spending can assist in the quest for a two-state solution—something that all of us believe in.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I had the great pleasure last year of visiting Israel and Save a Child’s Heart, a wonderful charity that has helped about 4,000 children, half of whom are from the west bank and Gaza. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the kind of co-existence project that DFID funding should be supporting?

Dr Offord: I absolutely agree, and I, too, have had the pleasure of visiting that hospital. I am very proud of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who makes a monthly donation to that hospital out of his own pocket, which is something he should be commended for.

However, I do not wish to dwell on the Palestinian Authority and where they spend money. There is a need for greater support for individual projects actively promoting peaceful co-existence in the region, as Save a Child’s Heart does. That would support the UK Government’s own stated goal of securing a lasting and peaceful two-state solution, which, once again, is something that all of us in this room want.

Sir Alan Duncan: Does my hon. Friend understand the foundations from which he wishes to build that co-existence that we would all like to see? Will he unequivocally confirm that he endorses the Government policy that Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are wholly illegal?

Dr Offord: I can confirm that I think that. Indeed, the Israeli Supreme Court says that as well, so there is no misunderstanding about that.

In April the Minister announced that DFID is “open to considering further support” through the conflict, security and stability fund “for strong co-existence projects that bring Israelis and Palestinians together”.

Chloe Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend on the thrust of his remarks on peaceful projects. Does he agree with me that this is an example of how we should be looking to move away from general budgetary support and to specific project support, which I believe has already been done in countries such as Rwanda and Malawi?

Dr Offord: I certainly agree with that sentiment, and the examples I wish to raise are of ongoing projects that do not achieve the aims that are sought.

Less than 13% of DFID’s £1.17 million funding of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs goes towards projects that bring the two peoples together. That represents around 0.2% of the £72 million that DFID spends in the Palestinian Territories. A number of NGO projects currently sponsored by DFID in Israel and the Palestinian Territories carry out laudable activities, yet have a questionable outlook of endorsing violence. Some of those NGOs engage in activities that undermine peace efforts and increase tensions, and a number are heavily involved in “lawfare” and the so-called Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

UK-funded NGOs have their own NGO, through something called NGO Monitor, that looks at how some of the funding is spent through the conflict, stability and security fund. NGO Monitor seeks to hold NGOs in Israel and the Palestinian territories to account, and regards UK funding to a number of those NGOs as “a manipulation of the democratic process, an attempt to change ‘Israeli civil and military judicial practice and decisions’ and government policy” and notes that some of those groups are “engaged in anti-Israel efforts.”

NGO Monitor has also said that “a significant proportion of the NGOs receiving British funds promote the Palestinian political narrative, focusing only on allegations of Israeli human rights violations.”

The UK Government currently funds 10 NGO projects in Israel through the conflict, stability and security fund: the Peres Centre for Peace, INJAZ, Kids Creating Peace, Yesh Din, Gisha, Peace Now, Terrestrial Jerusalem, the International Peace and Co-operation Centre, and Rabbis for Human Rights. Because of the limited amount of time, I will look at just one of those. Yesh Din describes its mission as working “to oppose the continuing violation of Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory...documenting and disseminating accurate and up-to-date information about the systematic violation of human rights in the OPT, by raising public awareness”.

In October 2013, members of Yesh Din took part in an Arab celebration on the ruins of a Jewish community in Homesh, with attendees desecrating Jewish symbols and waving anti-Semitic posters, including one depicting a Jew with a spear through his head. That is where our money is going.

I would like the Minister to hear our concerns today and not to continually view this problem through a prism of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Our money is going to some causes that I am sure he would be ashamed of. I hope that we can take that message to the Government today and make sure that we actually look at our spending.
5.50 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on opening the debate on this petition and on the manner in which he did so.

I welcome the commitment to 0.7%—a cross-party commitment, as has been said—and, in particular, the fact that the previous coalition Government and the current Government have enacted it. I have supported it for some time and have worked on it with others. I am also a member of the International Development Committee and have seen many of the projects that have been undertaken. We have a good record of scrutinising the Government on this issue.

Like everybody else, I want to see good housekeeping from DFID on ODA—that 0.7% of our GNI—just as I want to see good housekeeping on the 99.3% that the Government spend on other issues. We need to use our finances well and get value for money. Having listened to the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord), I certainly do not want to see ODA going on terrorism, whether that be state terrorism, organisational terrorism or individuals and groups that conduct it. Nobody wants to see that, but we do have a good record in this country and we must be proud of it.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to stay to hear the Minister winding up, but I know that when we scrutinise him and his Department and raise issues, they come back with answers. It is very important that our job as a Select Committee to scrutinise gets taken seriously by this Government—that work is open and transparent to the public: it is on transcript—and that we work together with civil society. The Churches have been mentioned, and credit needs to be given to them. It is also important that we as parliamentarians raise the issues that our constituents raise with us. I recall that during previous campaigns—the millennium goals, Make Poverty History and many others—hundreds and hundreds of people wrote to us. Many of them asked us to have 0.7% in statute. We have delivered that; now we expect the Government to deliver value for money on that 0.7%.

The supporters of this petition need to understand that what we are doing abroad is good for this country, and I will finish on this point. We took evidence on the Ebola inquiry from British doctors and nurses who put their lives at risk in those countries, not just to stop the disease in west Africa, but to stop it crossing the globe to Britain. It is in Britain’s interest that the money is well spent. It is in the world’s interest, and, as a communitarian, I support my local community, the national community and the international community. As proud British, that is in our DNA. We must ensure that the Government give value for money, but we must be proud of 0.7% on ODA.

5.54 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Wilson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on introducing this debate and on his excellent speech. There have been many excellent speeches; in fact, I am honoured to follow a very good one.

Across the House the word “pride” is mentioned constantly. Of course it is a source of huge pride that our country delivers its spending target to the international community and the national community and the international community.

I accept that there is an overwhelming governmental mandate for this policy and I welcome the consensus across the House, but my concern is that there is a danger of complacency. We have a very large current account deficit in this country and a persisting public expenditure deficit in terms of public borrowing. Of course I have immense trust in the predictions of our Chancellor, not least in terms of the outcome of certain decisions we might be making shortly—unlike some—and I am sure we will go back into the black soon, but what if we do not and these issues persist? My personal view is that I would like there to be some consideration, when we protect Government budgets, that we do so on the understanding that some of it comes from a surplus.

In other words, that it is clear we can afford it and that we are not borrowing the money and putting charitable spending on a credit card, which worries me.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I do not want to turn this into a political debate because it has been remarkably consensual, but let me tell the hon. Gentleman that I and many of my colleagues could give him a whole list of alternative things that we think the Government could make different decisions about rather than aid spending. He can wait for the Government to be at a point where they can say, “These are now lavish times: these are times when we are actually going to afford for children not to die of diarrhoea or afford for them to go to school,” but we will never reach that moment. He is arguing for the end of aid spending, not something else.

James Cartlidge: It is a political debate, and we have to debate this issue. Of course I am not arguing for the end of aid spending; that is a ludicrous thing to say. Japan, the United States, Italy, Portugal and Spain are not international pariahs and they spend 0.2% of their GDP on aid. That is disappointing, but that is a £8.5 billion difference. When we make a choice in this country to protect DFID when there is a deficit, it is a statement of fact that we will inevitably impose tougher reductions on other Departments. That means things like social care and long-term care of the elderly; we have to be open and honest about that.
[James Cartlidge]

That is my concern, especially in this political climate. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who is not in the Chamber any more, made the point that she had constituents who were concerned because we have food banks. Many years ago Charles Dickens wrote about telescopic philanthropy: the perception in humanitarian spending that we are prioritising the problems abroad rather than those at home. In those areas where there is an anger at politics and a feeling of disengagement—I fear I know how some of those people will be expressing that shortly—and in this climate we have to be very open and transparent. We have to show the public that we are debating these things and are prudent in our use of public finances.

Albert Owen: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out that charity begins at home, but it does not end at home. We as internationalists have an obligation and people understand that in this country.

James Cartlidge: That is a very fair point. We are in the era of Donald Trump—let us be clear that there is clearly anger out there at politics. We all know that and we therefore have a duty, even if we continue at this level—that there is massive support for that and the Prime Minister has an incredibly strong mandate for it—to be seen to be debating it, to be very clear about every aspect of the expenditure, and to hold it all to account. That message must go out strongly and we should not just blithely accept this.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Does the hon. Gentleman not think that we also have a duty to explain what our aid does and achieves and that it is audited in a technical way? We do not actually talk about the fact that polio was nearly eradicated or about peace building in Rwanda. Future wars will be about water, not oil, so we need to include climate change and do the job of explaining to the public what our aid is trying to achieve.

James Cartlidge: I agree, and some other hon. Members will shortly have a chance to do that. I am aware that time is ticking by, so I will simply conclude: I support the point that she had constituents who were concerned because we have food banks. Many years ago Charles Dickens wrote about telescopic philanthropy: the perception in humanitarian spending that we are prioritising the problems abroad rather than those at home. In those areas where there is an anger at politics and a feeling of disengagement—I fear I know how some of those people will be expressing that shortly—and in this climate we have to be very open and transparent. We have to show the public that we are debating these things and are prudent in our use of public finances.

6 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, and to take part in this debate as a member of the Select Committee on International Development and because the Department for International Development in Scotland is based in my constituency.

Mike Gapes in the Chair

It is estimated that UK aid helps to save a life every two minutes. It has provided 13.2 million people with access to essential TB treatment. Since 2011, it has reached 62.9 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene interventions and has ensured the safe birth of 5.1 million children by making appropriate medical assistance available. However, aid from the UK does not just save lives. It helps to tackle social inequalities and to encourage prosperity. It supports those suffering from poverty to overcome hardships and helps to provide education opportunities to children, including girls, across the world. It increases people’s abilities and skills to earn a living, and generates employment, fosters trade and develops markets. It helps to address climate change, to reduce conflict and to increase stability across our world. All that is in the interests of developing countries and the developed world.

Evidence indicates that our aid is effective. Thanks to significant progress in international development, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty declined by 60% between 1990 and 2011. This means almost 1 billion people have been lifted out of poverty. To meet the valuable aspirations of the sustainable development goals, it is vital that the UK continues to meet our strong aid commitment of 0.7% and encourages other countries to follow suit.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): My hon. Friend is setting out the compelling case for continuing overseas funding at this level. Does she agree that there is real concern that the same section of the right-wing press is whipping up public concern based on misinformation to undermine the whole notion of foreign aid spending altogether?

Dr Cameron: I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention. She made her point very well.

Long-term planning realises sustainability and provides leverage to transform millions into trillions, which is required to achieve our sustainable development goals.

In the run-up to this debate, I was contacted by a constituent and former Minister, the right hon. Adam Ingram, who expressed concern about the spending of international aid via the Palestinian Authority. He requires further reassurance from the Minister on transparency and whether the payments are needs-based and affordable, alongside independent vetting.

I was contacted by another constituent who was keen for me to support foreign aid spending in this debate. In her email, she advised me that she cares about people living in poverty around the world and loves helping them with the UK’s aid budget. Importantly, she said it is good when politicians keep promises. I very much hope that we will continue to keep this one.

The Scottish Government’s international development policy and £9 million aid fund convey our party’s vision of Scotland fulfilling its place in the world as a good global citizen, committed to playing its part in addressing the challenges facing the world. It focuses on seven countries around the world and links with our world-leading climate justice fund.

As a country, we cannot act with credibility overseas if we are blind to inequality at home, but our ambitions for a fairer Scotland are undermined without global action to tackle poverty, to promote prosperity and to tackle climate change. As a Christian, I believe we have a moral duty to fulfil our commitment to achieving the sustainable development goals around the world. As humans, we share one planet and we must contribute to making it fair, healthy and safe for all.
6.4 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. This has been an interesting debate and rather than being sniffling or patronising about The Mail on Sunday, we should thank it for raising the issue and giving a voice to the concerns felt by many people. I do not share those concerns. I have always robustly defended the 0.7% and will continue to do so, but in this age of Trump politics, or whatever they are, when many of the public are disenchanted with politicians, it is not for us here to be patronising and sniffling about those who have a different view. Instead of being rude about people with such views, we must go out and win the debate.

I have always been robust with my constituents. When one points out to them the spending on HIV/AIDS and fighting polio and TB, people say of course they want that to continue, but not the other bits—the bad bits and the cover-up bits. None of us wants that, but we must be honest about the fact there is some corruption and some misuse of our aid budget, and we must do something about that. I think the Minister and his Department have done a good job in trying to tackle much of that, but obviously there is still work to do.

Another point that we must make to constituents is that if we as a nation do not project through foreign aid our own values and those of western democracies, it will be left to others who perhaps do not share our values in spending money in poorer countries to project values that we would not wish to see projected further. Again, that is a point that constituents are responsive to. We should accept the genuine concerns in this area and we must be prepared at all times to justify our spending and to improve it where we can.

There may be some groans, but I will say something about funding to the Palestinian territories. I heard the Minister's intervention and I think he is right in much of what he said in that the Department has tried to get a grip on this and is keen to do more, but concerns continue that while we might be able to say that British money is not directly funding individual terrorists in prison, it is perhaps displacing other funding in the Palestinian Authority general fund or elsewhere that is being used to fund terrorists. We should be concerned about that. I welcomed the article in The Jewish Chronicle last week saying that the Secretary of State and the Department are reviewing that.

As the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) said, there are people engaging in terrorist activities, including Hamed Abu Aadi who last year confessed—

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, having been corrected by the Minister and told that UK Government funding is not, for example, paying salaries to Palestinians prisoners, he is now conjecturing something else. On reflection, would he and others not think that hijacking this important debate effectively to give cover to the Netanyahu-Lieberman regime is a gross abuse of an important subject?

Andrew Percy: I mentioned patronising and sniffling, and the hon. Gentleman's intervention is a prime example. It was so patronising it is not worthy of a response. Members are allowed to come to this Chamber and speak as they wish on a matter of international aid, and this is about international aid from British taxpayers' money. The hon. Gentleman can patronise all he wants, but I won't be silenced from saying what I think I am entitled to say in this Chamber on this issue.

Ian Austin: It is not just supporters of the Netanyahu Government who are concerned about this. The central point is that the Palestinian Authority receives our aid money because it has signed a memorandum of understanding with DFID which is underpinned by renunciation of violence and a commitment to peace. That is directly contradicted by funding terrorists, whether or not the money comes directly from the UK, and is directly contradicted by the Palestinian Authority's routine incitement of violence. On both grounds, the Minister should be examining the matter in greater detail.

Andrew Percy: I am conscious of time, and I will perhaps give way to the Minister in a moment. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right in a lot of what he says. The Overseas Development Institute stated that our aid money to the Palestinian Authority had failed to promote peace and a peaceful attitude. There is more to be done.

I mentioned a terrorist who confessed that he had engaged in his behaviour to obtain payments. I also want to mention NGO funding, particularly the Ibda'a cultural centre, which will receive £5,602 from DFID this year. Last year, it hosted an exhibition to honour martyrs, including Mohanad Al Halabi, who killed one and injured 11. We must be careful about where our money is going and always be prepared to review.

Sir Desmond Swayne rose—

Andrew Percy: I will give way to the Minister out of respect.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Let me say that we take the issue of incitement very seriously indeed. With respect to the hon. Gentleman's point about The Jewish Chronicle, I assure him that both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State keep that matter under review continually, precisely because it is so controversial. With respect to the matters raised in relation to integration and so on, I understand that I am receiving a delegation from the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) to discuss that on Wednesday.

Andrew Percy: I thank the Minister and I hope that he will look at the Ibda’a cultural centre grant that I mentioned.

In my last minute or so, I want to talk about some of the co-existence projects. We had a wonderful meeting last year in Jerusalem with a group of Palestinian and Jewish young people from MEET—the Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow. It was a really inspiring meeting. Those Palestinian youth and Jewish youth were being educated together. Both were very open about what they thought about each other beforehand and how that project had helped to bring them together. We should be supporting projects such as that, as we should—in these last 46 and a half seconds—be supporting Save a Child’s Heart, which I am proud to serve as a UK patron of. It is a wonderful charity. I was very moved when we visited it last year, particularly when we were meeting and talking with the young Gazan children.
who receive treatment through it. That organisation supports heart surgery not just for Palestinian children—it is mainly Palestinian children, with Israeli doctors—but for Tanzanian children and Iraqi children. It trains doctors and nurses and is a project that has a reach beyond just Israel and the Palestinian territories. I hope that that is one of the projects we can look at funding in the future.

6.11 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. First, I declare an interest as a former trustee of ActionAid and an ambassador for that fantastic non-governmental organisation, and also as president of the British and Foreign School Society, a grant-making trust that gives grants to developing countries across the world.

It is vital to say at the start of this important debate that I do not believe that aid is a panacea. I lament some of the adverts that we see on television every week showing emaciated black and brown children with bloated bellies, and, frankly, the poverty porn behind too many of our great NGOs. I am also concerned that, whether we are talking about Comic Relief or Sport Relief, there is an armchair approach to aid, whereby people just sit back, give money and do not ask hard questions about countries’ governance, transparency and trade—and in the end, it is trade that we want to see across the developing world.

That said, this debate goes to the heart of the poverty that still exists in our world. Across the world, 124 million young people are not in school and not being educated. This country has a proud tradition, but it also has a colonial past inextricably linked to that of many of the countries mentioned in this debate. As a descendant of people from one of those countries—my parents are from Guyana—I think it is important to put that on the table. As we move from empire to Commonwealth, we remain interconnected.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman is making an exceptionally important point: aid alone is not enough. One particularly clamant example that I can offer him of that is this country’s tax treaty with Malawi, which was entered into before Malawi was given its independence. The partnership needs to be recast as one of equals, rather than us having the relationship of exploitation that we had in the past.

Mr Lammy: I am grateful for that intervention. The right hon. Gentleman will also recall Jubilee 2000, the campaign to write off debt, and our deep history with many of the countries where there is that debt and that environment. Yes, there must be aid, but there must also be very important discussions—discussions that we are failing to have as a society about how these countries move into economically stronger positions.

Mrs Helen Grant: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says about aid not being a panacea, and not being enough, but does he agree that legislation is quite useful because it provides certainty and predictability, and therefore allows smarter long-term investment, and so increased aid impact?

Mr Lammy: I do agree with that point, and that is why I stand by the 0.7%. That target was first established in 1970 by Jan Tinbergen, a Nobel prize-winning economist, and he came to that figure because he believed it was the amount that would allow developing countries to get into growth. That is why Britain should stand firmly in a leadership role. I represent a north London constituency that has seen two riots in a generation and that has deep pockets of poverty. Many of us in this House have talked richly today of travelling to developing countries; it is important that we understand that that is a privilege that many of our constituents do not have, and for that reason we play a leadership role in this debate. We lead and explain; we do not simply follow those who act understandably, given that they face poverty. However, we should always remember that constituents such as mine give far more in remittances to the developing world than is given in aid by the British taxpayer. The money is from people from all corners of the world who are working hard and paying their taxes, but also from those sending small amounts of money—indeed, I am one of those people—to relatives who barely have shoes on their feet. It is important to put that firmly on the table.

I remind the House that one of the biggest aid programmes was the Marshall plan. That was, in a sense, the birth of aid. It came at a time when this country was in rubble. We got $3 billion from the United States of America. That plan involved wheat, raw materials and industrialisation that was needed across Europe, and that money came through aid from the United States and birthed much of the current aid debate. It is important to preserve the 0.7%, which we put in statute, but also to have deep discussions about and scrutiny of where those funds go. Let us remember that this debate is not isolated. A long history ties us to these countries, which we now stand beside. We must remember our position in the Commonwealth, but also a history that carved up Africa with arbitrary borders and created lots of strife because of different tribal wars. For that reason, this is not the time to walk away from the important aid discussion.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. As there is so much interest in the debate, I will have to reduce the time limit on speeches to three minutes, and I will call the Scottish National party spokesperson, the Opposition spokesperson and the Minister from 7 o’clock, so I would be grateful if hon. Members could restrain themselves from intervening; then more of them may be able to speak.

6.18 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on starting the debate off. We have heard many interesting speeches and lots of facts and figures from various hon. Members. I would like to bring this down to just one example, and if anybody
feels, after they have heard this example, that we should not be spending 0.7% on aid, they must be pretty hard-hearted.

I have been a member of the International Development Committee for six years, and we visited Burundi—a country that is in a much worse situation than it was. Some members of the Committee were embedded with various families overnight. Everybody else in the group had a very happy family, with a mum, a dad and some very smiley children, but I was put with two girls, one of 22 and one of 14. The mother had died, as well as the five-year-old son. I suspect of HIV/AIDS. The girls could not afford to go to the funeral and did not know where their mother was buried. The father wanted to kill the children because they were living in their grandmother’s house and not with him. The villagers hated them.

We went to Burundi with the charity ActionAid UK, which was helpful in putting us with the families. These people had nothing. I asked the girls how often they were able to wash their clothes and they said, “Not very often. Probably about twice a year because we can’t afford soap.” Now, how many people in this country cannot afford soap? The only meal that they had was beans, rice, sweetcorn, and a bit of onion and tomato. They only ate that one meal a day, and they had only one bowl, which they shared with a neighbour’s child. The three of them sat around the bowl eating. They had three chairs, three forks, three spoons, three knives and a platform for a bed. The only other possessions they had were three guinea pigs. Unfortunately, I am not very keen on guinea pigs, so although I was quite happy to sleep on the floor, I had to ask to sleep on the platform because I could not bear the guinea pigs running around me throughout the night. Those guinea pigs were not for eating. They were there because the girls needed something to love, and something for affection. The guinea pigs did not run away. There was no door on the hut, as it was a mud hut. Those people lived, in my view, in absolute poverty. I saw nothing in that hut except those things. I saw no more clothes. Anyone who is not in favour of 0.7% should be ashamed.

There is some merit in the petition supporters’ argument that the focus should be on outcomes, and not just on spending targets. It is true that we should not just spend money for the sake of reaching a target. Each and every project should be carefully vetted and monitored, which is precisely why we have systems in place. Between the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, the Select Committee on International Development, the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office and the eagle-eyed MPs in this room, the Secretary of State and her Ministers can hardly move for monitoring, but that does not mean that things do not go wrong.

MPs and newspapers are very good at highlighting when things do indeed go wrong. However, when things go wrong in the national health service, we fix it. We do not use it as a reason for cutting the NHS budget or shutting down the NHS. In the same way, when things go wrong with the international aid budget, we should fix it. We should not stop all the other fantastic work that is going on, and we have heard lots of speeches highlighting all that good work today. I agree with other hon. Members that being a leader on international aid is in our interests. Without international aid, problems and crises would become more significant, immediate and dangerous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) was due to speak today, but unfortunately cannot owing to family circumstances. She wanted to deliver a message from the children of Wallacewell Primary School in her constituency, who have designed paper school satchels that my hon. Friend will deliver to the Prime Minister. Their simple message is that regardless of where children come from and how much money they have, they should all be entitled to an education. It is pleasing that the Chair of the International Development Committee agrees with those children and will be holding an inquiry on the subject. I give the target my full support, and I am pleased that so many other hon. Members do as well.

6.24 pm

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a long few years since I was at anything that you chaired, Mr Gapes. I think that last happened during our days at the British Youth Council about 45 years ago. I congratulate the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) on his knighthood, which was announced over the weekend.

I, too, am very proud of the 0.7% spend on international development, but it is not unreasonable, during times of stringency, to address the quality as well as the quantity of that aid. The impact of our funding, especially on conflict-stricken regions, is of the utmost importance, and I particularly want to talk about the conflict between Israel and Palestine. DFID’s stated goal in aiding the Palestinians is to help to secure a lasting and peaceful two-state solution. That is very sensible, but I regret that the funding does not follow that laudable ideal. As the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) pointed out, we are talking about 0.2%, and that does not seem to be a point at which we can readily move on.

I must say to my right hon. Friend the Minister, with great affection and respect, that it is no good just saying, “We don’t fund terrorism.” There is a kind of knock-on effect. If my right hon. Friend is saying,
determinedly, that not a single one of the civil servants whom we fund has committed a criminal act, and that their job has not been left open for them, that is a wonderful thing, but the report from the Overseas Development Institute says:

“For public sector employees the opportunity cost of conflict is lowered as their employment will be kept open when they return from detention, and their family will continue to be paid their salary”.

That needs to be addressed.

Richard Burden: Has the right hon. Gentleman read the ODI report entitled “Does the wage bill affect conflict? Evidence from Palestine”, from February 2015? It states that

“some of the factors linked to the development of grievances at least in the West Bank, including the construction of the West Bank Wall and the Palestinian prisoners, are associated with increases in conflict intensity. Removing these factors may well be a more effective strategy in reducing the conflict in the long-run than any employment opportunities provided by the public or private sector.”

Does he agree with that as well?

Sir Eric Pickles: I want a two-state solution. I want young Palestinians and Israelis to work together. I do not want to change Government policy; I merely want to see the actuality on the ground reflect it.

My hon. Friends have spoken with great powers of persuasion about the various groups that we have seen on visits to Israel and Palestine, particularly the Middle East Entrepreneurs for Tomorrow. There was one thing that really struck me about that. When I was talking to a young Palestinian, I said, “What’s the big difference?” and he said, “I’ve never met an Israeli before. The only Israeli I’ve ever met is a soldier with a rifle and body armour. This gave me an opportunity to actually meet an Israeli.”

The organisation Save a Child’s Heart provides an opportunity for parents to talk about the future of their children, and about working side by side with Israelis. That must be for the better, but worrying reports have emerged that some NGOs that support the Palestinian territories have been promoting violence on social media pages. Surely it is not unreasonable for us to ask the Minister and his officials to check what is going on on those pages. Surely it is not unreasonable to say that if people are to receive money from the British Government, they should unequivocally renounce violence in all its forms and work for a two-state solution.

6.28 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I apologise for missing the opening contribution of the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) owing to a flight delay.

Like others, I am here because I have been contacted by a number of constituents, most of whom support the 0.7% commitment for many of the reasons that hon. Members have given. Indeed, Foyle is the constituency where the sixth fewest people have signed the petition. In fact, of the constituencies with MPs who take their seats here, only the two small island constituencies represented by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) have had fewer signatories to the petition. That is because the city of Derry has always had an outward-looking approach, and the diocese of Derry has always made the highest per capita contribution to the annual Lenten collections for Trócaire, the Irish equivalent of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. People support the 0.7% contribution not just because, after many years, it is about time that we finally stepped up to meet that long-standing commitment, but because they know that such a commitment will, of itself, be transformative. Aid should not just be transactional; it should be transformational.

The petition talks instead about taking action on a case-by-case basis. If we were to reduce aid by doing that, the situation would be impossible; the problems would far outstrip the solutions. There is a gear change that results from the sort of commitment that the UK has made—we would see that if we could get more Governments to follow the UK’s excellent example—as we have seen in recent years with the commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which has made a big difference.

Big differences have also been made on education; 20 years ago, one in 10 children died before they reached the age of five, and now that is down to one in 20. Of course, not only are more children reaching the age of five and going to school, but there are more schools for them. We need to do more. We should not be content to get more children, particularly girls, into education; we should move on to guaranteeing them 12 years of education. In responding to humanitarian crises, we should think about education, which is often one of the last things to be thought about because of all the other pressures and crises. Front-loaded commitments to a healthy level of predictable and sustainable aid can ensure that we make our commitment to the sustainable development goals meaningful. We cannot meet our goals through intermittent top-ups. The sustainable development goals need sustained aid at 0.7%.

6.31 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): At the risk of sounding like Mark Antony at the funeral pyre of Julius Caesar, I genuinely come here to praise international aid, but I come as a critical friend, in the knowledge that several hundred of my constituents signed “The Mail on Sunday’s” petition. As a general rule in politics, if we brush aside the fears of our constituents, it only damages the goals that some of us wish to further. I do believe in international aid. Today’s debate has been extremely good, but relatively few of us have acknowledged the views, if we are honest with ourselves, of millions of citizens of this country. If we believe in international aid and a 0.7% commitment, as I do, it is absolutely right that we try to acknowledge and address some of those concerns, so that the commitment remains for future generations to benefit from.

The concerns that I hear from my constituents fall into a couple of categories; we have discussed many of those concerns today. First, of course, are the concerns, some legitimate and some not, about waste, and the lack of scrutiny of some of the poorer decisions that DFID has made over the years, as well as the many good ones. There are also concerns about politicisation,
as we have heard in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. We have already heard a lot of that debate, and time is pressing.

The other point I would make on behalf of some of those who are concerned about the 0.7% commitment is that the commitment may not be the best way to do government. Those of us who have pressed the Government to spend on particular projects know that, because of the 0.7% commitment, there is often a lower bar for getting a project approved in DFID than in any other Department; we all have to address that if we care about the maintenance of this public commitment. We have to be able to say to our constituents that this money is being spent as well by DFID as if it were being spent on the NHS, on education or by any other Department. One way of doing that is by measuring the 0.7% commitment not in one year, but over two or five years, or even over an entire economic cycle, so that we could be sure that projects were not being pushed through at the last minute, as we all know they frequently are, and that the quality of projects was sufficiently high to allow us all to stand tall at hustings and in conversations with our constituents, and to defend them, in the knowledge that they were furthering the cause of poverty alleviation across the world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Mr Gapes, I think this is the second time that you have been back in the Chair in Westminster Hall. It is good to see you.

International development aid is no different from spending in any other Department: Departments are accountable to their Ministers; Ministers are accountable to this House; and Select Committees scrutinise the work of Departments. I support the target of 0.7% of gross national income, but as the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) and the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) have said, accountability is needed within that process. The Public Accounts Committee recently said:

“The value for money for the UK taxpayer of the Department’s funding of UN agencies is undermined by the overlapping remits of the agencies and inflexibility in their systems.”

The Committee noted that there is something wrong, and there clearly is.

I have a couple of quick examples from Palestine. Two Palestinian terrorists who repeatedly stabbed two women, killing an American lady and leaving a British man with life-threatening injuries, are receiving a salary from the Palestinian Authority. A convicted double killer—he was interviewed by a newspaper and confirmed that he murdered two people—receives a monthly salary. My constituents are appalled by the examples of DFID’s spend, which is why they support the Israel-Britain Alliance’s campaign to stop such abuses. My constituents are even more incandescent when they receive responses from British Government Ministers in both DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office restating the collective denial that such payments are made.

Let us make this very clear to the Minister: we know that the Palestine Liberation Organisation pays the prisoners, and we know that the Palestinian Authority pays the PLO. We further know that the World Bank pays aid money to the Palestinian Authority. Finally, we know that British aid money is sent to the World Bank, which is clearly where the issues are. Will the Minister ensure that British aid money does not support Palestinian Authority incitement to commit violence? All he has to do is turn on his computer and visit www.palwatch.org to see for himself that the Palestinian Authority is misusing the funds given to it by Britain.

In Northern Ireland, parties to peace had to sign up to the Mitchell principles. They had to sign up to using democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues. In 2011, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the UN assessed that the PA’s governance functions were sufficient for a functioning state, but that it had to renounce violence, and it is clear that the PA has not done that to the extent it should have. I therefore call on the Minister to commit to implementing the recommendation of the 2014 International Development Committee report that set out how the payments-to-prisoners issue can be resolved.

I further ask the Minister to commit DFID to tackling the PA on the evidence of its incitement to and support for violence. If the PA does not end its support for the men and women of violence, our support for the PA must be reviewed. A demand without an incentive is worthless. Middle east peace will be achieved only if both sides participate in the process, yet DFID’s support for co-existence programmes between the Israelis and the Palestinians is pitiful. I ask the Minister to use some of DFID’s mammoth budget to help make those things happen.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on moving the motion and on doing the House a favour by encapsulating most of the key arguments. I look forward to seeing his words repeated faithfully in The Mail on Sunday next weekend.

Nothing antagonises our constituents more than the stories of hard-pressed taxpayers hearing that their hard-earned money has been spent corruptly. DFID is one of the most transparent Departments, if not the most transparent, in Whitehall, and it is precisely to promote the necessary openness that in 2010 we set up the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which has been much mentioned this afternoon. The commission was not entirely welcomed by the development community because it is independent and because it reports not to Ministers, who can sweep inconvenient truths under the carpet, but to Parliament—it reports not to DFID but to the International Development Committee. That Committee is not appointed by Whips; it is elected by its peers and encompasses a large number of independent-minded Members. The Committee is led, of course, by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) who, though burdened by being a member of the Labour party, is nevertheless a fearless, independent operator. I say to the House and to The Mail on Sunday that the ICAI is their friend. If there are allegations or suggestions of improper use of aid, it is to the ICAI that they should be referred.

Of course, the independent commission covers the whole budget, not just the money spent by DFID. Nearly 25% of money now goes through other Departments. I stopped aid to China and to Russia, which inexplicably was still receiving aid in 2010, and
negotiated the winding down of the programme in India, which since the second world war had always been our biggest programme. If the Foreign Office chooses to spend money in China, or indeed south America, where DFID no longer has any programme, it is no good for the Foreign Office or other Departments to try to hide behind DFID’s skirts and coattails. They need to explain to the public why they are spending money. If they cannot do so, they should not be spending it.

I have a lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) said. This is an important debate, and the Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday have done a service by emphasising it. As a Ugandan Foreign Minister once said to me, Ministers in this country and in his go straight not because they see the light but because they feel the heat. The campaign led by the Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday puts the heat on Ministers, who must respond to these matters. Although I do not have time to discuss it, I hope that The Mail on Sunday will allow a rebuttal of the wholly inaccurate points that it has made about the Centre for Global Development and the airport at St Helena.

6.41 pm  
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Like so many other people who have spoken, I welcome and support the commitment of 0.7% of national income to foreign aid, but to depart from some of the comments that have just been made, and understanding some of the comments made earlier in the debate, I recognise that some of our constituents have concerns. However, I urge every Member of this House not to underestimate the power and the effect of the hysterical right-wing tabloid press, which has aggressively campaigned to discredit not just the 0.7% commitment but the idea of foreign aid altogether. That is not being snippy or sniffy, or whatever word was used; it is simply asking for more responsible journalism.

The commitment is the right thing to do. The UK has a good story to tell, and it is about time that we were on the front foot in telling that story, although of course we must ensure that what is spent goes where it is supposed to go. How much support we offer those much less fortunate than ourselves is a measure of who we are. As was said much earlier in this debate, the choice between austerity at home and aid abroad is a false one, and we should have no truck with it. We can gradually turn our backs and come around to the view that the people we are discussing live far away from us, that it is not our problem, or we can continue to open our hands and hearts and recognise that such suffering in the world diminishes us all. It diminishes us even further if it is within our power to do more to prevent or mitigate it, and we do less.

I do not think that that is who we are. That is not who the people of Scotland are, and it is not who the people of the UK are. It is about time that we were prouder of and more vocal about the support that we give.

Ian Austin: There is a difference between being concerned about individual aspects of DFID spending and being opposed to international aid completely. The idea that the British people who have signed this petition are so stupid that they have been taken in by right-wing propaganda, and that we should dismiss their concerns out of hand instead of considering them and trying to address them with fair and reasonable answers, is completely wrong.

Patricia Gibson: What I am talking about is journalism that is not responsible. There are some—

Ian Austin: Are the public so stupid?

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order, Mr Austin, please.

Patricia Gibson: No, but there are some sections of the right-wing media, where, if I read the football scores there, I would need to check them. I would not believe everything that I read in certain sections of the right-wing media.

Dr Offord: Does the hon. Lady accept that there are also some unacceptable left-wing media as well?

Patricia Gibson: I am confining my remarks here to the misinformation perpetrated about foreign aid with the sole agenda of undermining that 0.7% commitment. That is despicable. In effect, it is waging a press war against the most vulnerable people on our planet, which is wholly outrageous, and we should be willing to say so.

Joan Ryan: As far as I can see, nobody in this room who has put questions about aid, particularly to the Palestinian Authority, and about the desire for transparency, is saying that the 0.7% is wrong. In fact, everyone who has made that point has expressed a firm commitment to the 0.7% and the desire for transparency.

Patricia Gibson: Absolutely. I have not suggested that we should not scrutinise the budget, and I apologise if I have come across as doing so. I am saying that the agenda of certain sections of the press is to undermine the entire ethos of the 0.7% commitment, and of foreign aid altogether. I recognise what the right hon. Lady says about nobody questioning the 0.7%, but we must be careful where that agenda takes us.

Aid at its current level must continue. To reduce it is to say that we have no particular commitment or humanitarian responsibility to those born into the very worst poverty. Although foreign visits might give an insight into such poverty, people in this room probably cannot comprehend it. We are talking about some of the least well-off people on our planet. I do not think we want to say that we do not have a particular responsibility to them. We must be very careful and mindful where the right-wing agenda in certain sections of the tabloid press takes us.

6.46 pm  
Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I refer to my entries in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Almost all the work that I have seen carried out with the support of DFID tackles individual poverty. It also supports global public goods, which is in the interests of us all. As the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) mentioned earlier, if we take our foot off
the gas with diseases such as polio, malaria or neglected tropical diseases, the tremendous work done over the last 15 or 20 years will be undone. We must continue it.

The same is true of the work on water and sanitation referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). DFID’s work has reached 60 million people over the past four years—vulnerable people in remote rural areas and the most difficult of circumstances. We have heard about the work with Syrian refugees who can have an education as a result of the work funded by DFID. Just two or three months ago, the International Development Committee saw the tremendous work being done with children in the north of Nigeria to ensure that they have an education fit for the 21st century, and last year we saw forestry work done over more than 20 years in Nepal, increasing forestation there by around 15%. That is important in tackling climate change.

I want to mention five ways in which DFID could look for improvement. The first is always, where possible, to consider the use of returnable capital instead of grants. In many cases, grants are most appropriate, but in many other cases, particularly involving work with the private sector, it would be better to use concessional lending or returnable capital, which can then be recycled.

The second is maximum leverage. We find, for instance on health, that many of the countries where we work committed in Abuja in 2001 to spend 15% of their budgets on health, but are nowhere near that at the moment. If we can connect the work that we do with them with reaching the target that they themselves set, we will get tremendous leverage from our spending.

The third, mentioned by the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), is effective partners such as BRAC. If we can use effective, low-cost partners that are prepared to work in difficult circumstances, we will find that our aid goes much further.

The fourth is to encourage the backing of small grants. Often, as hon. Members have mentioned, grants aimed at organisations working from our own constituencies can do a tremendous amount of good, perhaps matching the money that we raise locally. DFID says that that is sometimes too difficult for it to do.

Finally, DFID needs to be more rigorous in planning and more efficient in spending. There is much more work to be done on that.

6.49 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy).

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), I have received many letters and emails from constituents about this debate, most of them agreeing that the 0.7% commitment to foreign aid should remain intact. I have not received a single letter or email in correspondence attempting to undermine it.

According to opponents of foreign aid, it is the source of all economic ills, and this 0.7% of GDP could fund our NHS, build all the homes we need and end relative poverty. Although those issues are very important in their own context and in the UK generally, it is also important that we fund work in other countries.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid that I must now finish. I have some more questions, and we will have to finish at 6.52 pm.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Our commitment to overseas aid was a manifesto commitment that I supported wholeheartedly, having been brought up in developing countries for the first 20 years of my life. It is our responsibility as one of the world’s largest and most prosperous economies to help those in need and those in danger of exploitation. We should feel a sense of pride and involvement in the amount of aid that we deliver and the benefits it brings, but obviously we need to do more at home to explain exactly how our aid is delivered, because sadly now it has become a target for the press. However, it is also important that we debate these issues, because we must always ensure that public money is well spent and directed to the right ends.

In fact, 86% of people believe in the importance of overseas aid. We are debating this petition because it has crossed the threshold of support, but I personally receive far more correspondence supporting the work of the Department for International Development than correspondence attempting to undermine it.
The work that we have done with Rwanda shows that even the most chaotic states can get on the road to recovery with the right intervention, and Britain has been the birthplace of many of the world’s most important charitable and voluntary organisations. Those organisations are key partners of DFID in delivering aid, as well as raising funds themselves.

However, this issue is never just about spending money; it is also about deploying British expertise that has been built up over decades. We are a trading nation. We must always be on the look-out for new markets and new partners to deal with. The investment in developing countries brings them into our markets, as we can see now across Asia. It is also vital that we get the world’s young into work, for their own dignity and personal development as well as for their economic future.

With the rise of the internet, people in poorer counties can see the lifestyle that we enjoy here in the developed world and it is no surprise that they want to migrate here. By developing other countries, we also help to prevent the large amount of migration that is denuding countries of their most valuable resource—their informed and educated population. Our foreign aid must be directed towards building the economies of developing countries and it must continue to do so until it is no longer needed.

6.54 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Nearly all the direct UK grant to the Palestinian Authority is provided through the Department for International Development’s “Statebuilding and Service Delivery Grant”, and the Minister must do much more to assure us that it is not simply being paid—untied and un-earmarked—into the central treasury account of the Palestinian Authority, and that the verification of the funds is more than simply a notional accounting exercise. The Overseas Development Institute concluded that it is of “questionable robustness” and “provides few fiduciary assurances”.

By contrast, as we have heard, just 0.2% of 0.2% of the money that DFID spends in the Palestinian territories goes to projects bringing Palestinians and Israelis together. I have visited the group that was mentioned earlier and that brings Israeli and Palestinian students together to break down barriers and acquire new skills. Actually, it would be quite useful if the Minister noted some of this down, so that he can answer the specific questions that he has been asked when he sums up at the end of the debate.

For example, can the Minister consider funding the Cherish Project and the One to One Children’s Fund, which tackle the mental health problems suffered by children affected on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Would he consider funding OneVoice, which gives mainstream Israelis and Palestinians a voice, helping them to campaign for a peaceful two-state solution? The Aviv Peace Impact fund creates jobs and boosts prosperity by investing in growing businesses that employ Palestinians and Israelis side by side. Also, will he go to Rawabi, a new city that I have visited, which has new homes for 40,000 people in the west bank, a hospital, sports and community facilities, a shopping mall, offices and a business park that will provide jobs and prosperity for thousands of Palestinians, but which needs support and investment? He ought to look at funding Rawabi.

I have some specific questions for the Minister. Will he publish the memorandum of understanding with the Palestinian Authority? Will he commit to DFID implementing the 2014 recommendations on prisoners?

Joan Ryan: I simply rise to ask my hon. Friend a question: does he agree that when we ask for this forensic analysis of DFID spend, we do so in order to support the 0.7% commitment, because if there is any question about that spend it will undermine the whole project?

Ian Austin: I agree with my right hon. Friend entirely and I am grateful for the extra minute that she has given me to speak.

I also want to ask the Minister whether he will tackle the Palestinian Authority on the evidence of incitement. We should use Britain’s aid spending to bring people together by promoting peace and co-existence, tackling poverty, and creating jobs for Palestinians by promoting trade and economic development in the west bank and Gaza. The British people would be proud to support projects such as the ones I have mentioned, instead of being so concerned about support for terrorists that they back the Daily Mail campaigns against international aid.

The truth is that British aid feeds 25 million under-fives, educates 11 million children, has helped 4.3 million babies to be born safely, has helped to tackle Ebola in Africa, feeds the starving, helps refugees and builds stronger economies around the world. It does all that and so much more, but I am afraid that it also funds the Palestinian Authority, which in turn funds terrorists, and that undermines much of the good work that it does.

6.57 pm

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Gapes, for calling me to speak. I will keep my contribution very short, very brief and to the point.

First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on securing this debate, which is a really good idea? Secondly, I declare my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I am the chairman of the all-party group on Zambia and Malawi as well. Indeed, I was in Zambia with the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) last summer, where we learned quite a bit about how it is that places such as Zambia are being affected very badly by tuberculosis and HIV. As hon. Members know, HIV ends up cutting down the immune system and makes a sufferer much more likely to get TB. During the course of this year, we have seen a lot of people coming into this country by ship and we do not know whether they are coming in with TB. That is one very good reason why we should most certainly remain committed to spending the 0.7%.

The other issue that I will talk about very briefly is the whole business of what is happening down in southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe. I am the vice-chair of the all-party group on Zimbabwe—and, indeed, I will be going to Zambia and Zimbabwe, and hopefully Malawi too, during the course of the summer, including for the Zambian presidential election. There is a very bad
problem developing with El Niño, which is badly affecting people. It looks as if 2.8 million households will face real difficulty, including difficulty in just getting food.

This issue is incredibly important and we need to take it seriously, and if I am honest I am rather surprised that we spend much more time talking about the middle east than we do talking about a really important part of Africa, which, frankly, is part of our home, because we have a responsibility there. Actually, my great-uncles were both deputy governors down in Malawi and I know the place very well indeed.

6.59 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I pay tribute to you and to the previous occupant of the Chair for having been able to call so many Members—admittedly, though, not everyone who wanted to get in has been called. I am aware that a number of Members came along to show solidarity with the debate without any intention of speaking or expectation of being able to do so, but that emphasises the point rightly made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) that this is the kind of issue that thoroughly deserves a full day’s debate on the Floor of the House. I am happy to back that call.

I refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Before the election, I worked for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and was the vice-chair of the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland.

One message that comes through loud and clear from the debate is that aid works. No one is disputing that aid from the United Kingdom Government, and indeed from the Scottish Government, has saved and changed millions of lives around the world over the years. There is a consensus about that and there does not, fortunately, seem to be any suggestion that aid should stop altogether. The substance of the debate seems to have been the effectiveness of aid and the appropriate amounts of spending and, to a certain extent, questions of public support for aid. I think that there is public support.

The debate was triggered by a petition—these Monday debates are becoming something of a highlight of the parliamentary week, which is to be welcomed—but there is a difference between a petition that people voluntarily sign and broader indications of public support. Repeated opinion polls show that a majority of people in the United Kingdom, and indeed across OECD countries, support the principle of aid. The point about public understanding was made relatively early in the debate. Interestingly, in 2011 a Chatham House-YouGov survey showed that the average estimate of UK aid spending was £79 billion, when in that year the actual spend was £8.5 billion. Polling across OECD countries consistently shows that people believe their Governments spend between 10% and 20% of their gross national income on aid and think it should be between 1% and 5%. In fact, the public think that more should be spent than is.

In my own constituency, the sum total of 95 people signed the petition, and only 5% of the signatories came from Scotland, which is far less than Scotland’s proportionate share. Mention was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) of how our hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) had primary schoolchildren who signed up to the Send My Friend to School campaign, and I have met primary schoolchildren from the Glasgow Academy who want to send the message to the Prime Minister loud and clear that children’s education must be an important aspect of our international development spend.

Three key points have been touched on in the debate, the first of which is the principle of aid itself and the importance of the target. The second is the impact aid makes and why it is in our enlightened self-interest to spend money on it, and the third is how we go beyond aid and the role of the sustainable development goals. I will try to touch on all three points and still leave plenty of time for other Front-Bench colleagues.

As I have said, there is a consensus that there is a need for aid. I join other Members in giving credit to Labour for the creation of the Department for International Development as a stand-alone Department, and to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, first for maintaining DFID and secondly for passing the legislation that was in all the party manifestos. I hope that the commitment remains in those manifestos, for which people voted and which they, and Members in this Chamber, have endorsed.

The need for aid is clear, as we have heard in the many statistics, stories and anecdotes we have heard. As the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) said, 124 million children are out of school—63 million of them girls—and some 650 million people are living without clean water. That is why continuing to provide aid is incredibly important, and it is something to which the Scottish National party has given its long-standing support. Indeed, the White Paper on independence for Scotland suggested that an independent Scotland would want to go beyond the 0.7% target to about 1%.

If the principle is established that there should be aid, the question is how much and why. The 0.7% target was agreed 40 years ago. It is not just a target for the United Kingdom, as many Members have recognised; it is the target for developed countries around the world. It was calculated that it represented the amount of money that would need to be generated to end poverty and bring people up to an equitable standard of living comparative to that which we enjoy. If the UK had been meeting the 0.7% target ever since it was agreed in 1970, an additional £87.5 billion would have been made available for aid spending and perhaps some of that would have lessened the need for aid today.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that, if all the rich countries of the world had met that commitment when they made it, we might be dealing with very different problems now?

Patrick Grady: That is exactly my point. I did not necessarily mean what I said to be a criticism; I am trying to offer a bit of context about why the target is so important.

As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) said, it is a proportionate target, so it will go up, or indeed down, depending on the strength of the economy. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) made an important point about how the target, and
that predictability, allows people to plan and provide the step change—that is needed to really make an impact. Speaking of the need for and the importance of impact, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) was absolutely right to address the hunger crisis in southern Africa. Predictable aid flows allow agencies to put measures in place that mean that when disasters strike, the resources are there to be mobilised immediately, rather than our sitting back, as the petition seems to suggest, and waiting for something to happen before scrabbling around and figuring out how much aid we can spend.

Aid does work. We have heard the statistics. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) said that every two minutes immunisation sponsored by a United Kingdom aid programme saves a child’s life. At the same time, no one is disputing that everything is not perfect, but my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East made the valid point that not everything is perfect in the NUS, or rather the NHS. Not everything is perfect in the Government Union of Students either. [Laughter.] I do not see many petitions calling for the national health service to be shut down, although there probably are elements of the right-wing press that would support doing that.

It is right that questions have been raised about the use of funding in Palestine, and it is also right that the Minister has had the opportunity to respond. That is why we have structures of scrutiny in this Parliament. DFID is one of the most highly scrutinised Departments of Government but it is important to recognise the work that is done. Of course, DFID funds organisations by funding specific projects. It does not fund global headquarters for organisations. If an organisation wants to build a global headquarters, it has to get the funding from somewhere else and justify the spend to those funding sources. DFID gives money for specific projects that are fully accountable back here, and that is why we have this kind of debate.

A point that has so explicitly been made by many today is that this is not just a moral argument. Aid is in our enlightened self-interest. Some members clearly want to prevent migrant flows, displacement and the spread of tropical diseases, and investment through our international development funding is absolutely crucial to that. However, as has also been said, not least by the chair of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), aid is only one part of the development process. We have to look at how we go beyond aid, and ultimately get to the stage at which it is not as necessary because countries are able to stand on their own two feet. There is a need for fair trade arrangements, support for civil society and good governance, the development of national infrastructure, fairer tax treaties—mentioned by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael)—and fair and effective implementation of the sustainable development goals. A coherent policy approach across the whole of Government is something that the Scottish Government are keen to take forward, and I hope that the UK Government will do so too.

It would be useful to hear from the Minister when DFID expects to publish its bilateral and multilateral aid reviews. It would be interesting to hear any further reflection he can offer on double-counting towards the NATO and Overseas Development Institute targets, and to know how DFID plans to drive forward the sustainable development goals across Government.

I am a big fan of my tartan ties, and the one I am wearing is the Zambia-Scotland tie. As with many tartans, it is an expression of solidarity, and solidarity ought to be, as I said in my maiden speech, the basis of human relationships.

7.9 pm

_Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House._

7.34 pm

On resuming—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is resumed and the debate may continue until 7.54 pm. I call Diane Abbott.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on introducing this important debate.

I emphasise that it is possible passionately to support our commitment to spend 0.7% of GDP on aid and yet feel very strongly about accountability and transparency, as I do. It is not only a question of the accountability and transparency of the Department for International Development, although I appreciate that it is doing a lot of work on that. It is about accountability and transparency in the big non-governmental organisations, which do excellent work but have more to do on transparency, and it is about the accountability and transparency of the UN institutions, which are often the least transparent actors in development.

I feel strongly about accountability and transparency not just on behalf of the _Daily Mail_ readers in Hackney North but because my family and those of many of my constituents come from the global south. I assure Members that people who live in the global south feel as strongly about accountability, transparency, good governance and minimising corruption as any _Daily Mail_ reader. That is the context in which I wish to make my remarks.

We have spoken a lot about aid, but development is not only about aid. It is worth reminding the House that Africa loses $58 billion more in flows out of Africa than it receives in aid. Aid spending is dwarfed by the financial flows out of countries in Africa. Every year, the continent receives around $30 billion in aid, but it loses $192 billion—more than six times as much as it receives in aid—in debt repayments, lost tax revenue, tax transfers, multinational profits and other financial flows.

When we discuss this subject, we should not think that aid is the only instrument of development. Aid is important, and I defend the 0.7% contribution, but there are other important issues for the developing world. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) pointed out, the value of remittances to some countries of the global south are even more important than aid. The value of those remittances is that they go directly to communities, with no top-slicing through bureaucracy. In the event of a humanitarian disaster, it is often remittances that get to the affected communities faster than any aid.
As the Labour party spokesperson on international development, I have been privileged to have been able to make a number of visits to all parts of the world in the past few months and see for myself how DFID money is spent. I went to Uganda with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance to see some really impressive projects focused on women and young people with HIV. I went to Ghana with ActionAid, where I saw how important women's health projects were funded. I have also been to Somaliland, where I saw evidence of the drought that is sweeping across eastern and southern Africa. Anyone who says our money is being thrown away should see, as I saw, the starving peoples who have lost their livelihoods because their livestock has perished. They are dependent on the aid funds that come from overseas.

Stephen Doughty: Is not Somaliland a perfect example, because our aid, security support and diplomatic support are working, together with the Government there, to bring peace and stability in a region that is not known for its peace and stability? It is a perfect example of how we are doing things right.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that Somaliland is an example of how we are doing things right, although we would not see that on the pages of The Mail on Sunday.

Mr Mitchell: Is the hon. Lady aware that Somaliland absolutely makes her point? It has a budget of around £50 million, of which Britain provides something like £10 million, while the remittance value is more than £400 million. That shows that we must all look at more creative ways of ensuring that remittances are well used.

Ms Abbott: I agree. I come from a community that sends remittances. Not only are they very important and the diaspora communities that provide them the best partners in development, but it is important that they are used creatively. I have been to the camps in Lebanon with Human Appeal and I visited Syrian refugees in Turkey, so I have seen for myself how well our aid can be used and how important it is.

Some very unpleasant remarks have been made about the Palestinian Authority. I am all for transparency and accountability, but let us remember that the United States sent its money to the Palestinian Authority. I am all for transparency and accountability, but let us remember that the United States sends remittances. Not only are they very important and the diaspora communities that provide them the best partners in development, but it is important that they are used creatively. I have been to the camps in Lebanon with Human Appeal and I visited Syrian refugees in Turkey, so I have seen for myself how well our aid can be used and how important it is.

Ms Abbott: I agree. I come from a community that sends remittances. Not only are they very important and the diaspora communities that provide them the best partners in development, but it is important that they are used creatively. I have been to the camps in Lebanon with Human Appeal and I visited Syrian refugees in Turkey, so I have seen for myself how well our aid can be used and how important it is.

Some very unpleasant remarks have been made about the Palestinian Authority. I am all for transparency and accountability, but let us remember that the United States sent its money to the Palestinian Authority. I am all for transparency and accountability, but let us remember that the United States sends remittances. Not only are they very important and the diaspora communities that provide them the best partners in development, but it is important that they are used creatively. I have been to the camps in Lebanon with Human Appeal and I visited Syrian refugees in Turkey, so I have seen for myself how well our aid can be used and how important it is.

Andy Slaughter: I wonder whether my hon. Friend shares my dismay that there has been a concerted campaign today to demonise the Government’s funding of the Palestinian Authority, which the Minister has rightly requested. Does she agree that, if there is concern about UK and EU money going into Palestine, we should be most concerned about the demolition of Palestinian homes and villages funded by the UK to make way for illegal Israeli settlements?

Mr Mitchell: Is the hon. Lady aware that Somaliland absolutely makes her point? It has a budget of around £50 million, of which Britain provides something like £10 million, while the remittance value is more than £400 million. That shows that we must all look at more creative ways of ensuring that remittances are well used.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend puts it very well. It is of no help to people in the region, particularly ordinary Palestinians on the west bank, to demonise the Palestinian Authority. I am confident that DFID is exercising scrutiny and is not giving money directly to so-called terrorists.

I said at the beginning that being committed to 0.7% is not the same as saying that we should not have more accountability and more transparency with all the key actors. I listened with interest to the testimony of Ian Birrell of The Mail on Sunday on 6 June to the International Development Committee’s inquiry into the Government’s use of private contractors. I want to let it be known that I am interested in the issues he raised. I share his concern that the Government might be allowing “excessive profiteering off the back of British taxpayers on the one hand and off the backs of the poor” on the other. Those issues are worth looking at. I know that the Chair of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), thinks that, too.

I am also concerned about DFID’s use of the big four accountants, which I believe to be contrary to sustainable development. PricewaterhouseCoopers, for example, is involved in industrial-scale marketing of tax avoidance schemes for corporations in the global south. I have other concerns about how the Government are spending aid to subsidise the fossil fuel industry and on deportation deals and building prisons. However, having expressed my concerns, overall I think that every single speaker in this debate has spelled out how British aid has helped strengthen health and education systems across the global south and contributed to cutting extreme poverty between 1990 and 2011 by 60%. Our contributions to the global health fund and the Ross Fund have played an enormous role in the battle against the killers malaria, HIV/Aids and TB.

As it is, the UK spends less on aid as a proportion of gross national income than Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and Holland, but we are the first country to commit to the fixed 0.7% provision. When aid is spent efficiently—that will often mean locally or through small grants, as has been said this afternoon—it builds capacity in local institutions and reduces poverty and inequality. When Labour formed DFID, we did not do so to set up an aid industry; we did so with the aim of ending aid dependency.

Supporting 0.7% does not mean that we can suspend our critical faculties in regards to how efficiently and well some of the money is spent, but we should be proud of committing to spending 0.7% of GDP on aid. The money we spend through aid often gives us more influence and moral suasion than some of the money spent on military adventures. I am glad that almost every Member who has taken part in the debate has supported 0.7%. Certainly on this side of the House we stand not just for a commitment to 0.7%, but for a continuing commitment to scrutiny and accountability. That is not just for our voters, but because the people of the global south deserve no less.

7.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Sir Desmond Swayne): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). She is very well informed, and
she speaks on the subject with passion. If I may, I would like to take the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) as my own; it was excellent.

A number of my constituents have been driven into a state of apoplexy by stories of how their hard-earned tax money is shovelled out the door without scrutiny of any kind, particularly towards the year end. I am glad that I have been able to refer them to the dfid.gov.uk website, where they can find a point-by-point rebuttal of all the accusations.

I respect the petitioners, however, and I thank them for the opportunity that they have afforded us to debate this important issue. I am glad that a number of Members have used the opportunity to evangelise about international development aid, and I want the debate to go well beyond this Chamber. My ambition is to ensure that by the end of the Parliament, more people write to thank us for what we as a kingdom are doing on international aid than to complain about the level of it.

I have a duty to represent all my constituents—not only those who have written to me complaining about the level of international aid, but those who have been tweeting all day about how proud they are of our international aid. Equally, I must represent the views of the 99.99% of my constituents who have expressed no opinion whatever. I am glad that the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) reminded us that we have a duty to represent all our constituents, whether they have written to us or not.

I have a duty to represent all my constituents—not only those who have written to me complaining about the level of international aid, but those who have been tweeting all day about how proud they are of our international aid. Equally, I must represent the views of the 99.99% of my constituents who have expressed no opinion whatever. I am glad that the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) reminded us that we have a duty to represent all our constituents, whether they have written to us or not.

Overseas aid is also undoubtedly controversial; it has to be. If I am spending British taxpayers’ money on helping the people of Bangladesh who live on the chars to deal with climate change and flooding, it is clearly not available to deal with flood defences in Durham, York or elsewhere. However, I put it this way: we have pledged to spend 0.7% of our national income on international development, which means that we have 99.3% to spend on ourselves. I do not know anyone who spends 99.3% of their income on themselves; I am not sure I want to know such a person, and I am not so sure that they would have any friends. That is equally true of a nation. What influence would we have in the world, and how could we carry our heads high, if that were the case, and we were to abandon this important pledge? It is important to focus what we spend, rigorously demanding value for money, and ensuring that we have the systems to secure that and to drive down costs, so that we get proper value.

I am sorry to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) is not in his place, because he referred to a low bar. I invite him to see me in DFID to explain to me and my officials what this low bar is, because I am the “low bar”. I am the one who has to be persuaded that the projects are value for money, so I shall be very interested to hear his explanation.

The reality is that over the past five years, we have delivered education for 11 million schoolchildren; 69 million people have received financial assistance and services to trade their way out of poverty; 29 million people have benefited from our nutrition programmes; 5 million people, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) said, have benefited from having healthcare professionals attend at birth; 63 million people have had access to clean water; 15 million people have been able to cope with climate change; 44 million children have been immunised; and we have delivered emergency care to 13 million people in the wake of 33 disasters. That is a measure of the importance of what we are doing.

The bit of the development picture that people get is humanitarian relief. They put their hand in their pocket to the tune of over £100 million after the Nepal earthquake. What we need to get over to them is that the people who appear suddenly to provide that relief and do the search and rescue have to have their core funds covered throughout the year when there is not an earthquake. The success of our intervention in the Nepal earthquake was built on years of investment in resilience beforehand; there was a blood bank in place and a logistics centre for the distribution of emergency aid, which saved seven weeks cumulatively. People rehearsed and rehearsed how to deal with the aftermath. This is what we spend the money on. I believe passionately that we have to get the democratic legitimacy from our people by demonstrating to them. The moment we explain this to them, they get it. We need to hold their attention and get the opportunity to do that, and this debate gives us that opportunity, so let us build on it.

7.52 pm

Steve Double: I thank everyone who has participated in this debate. I am sure that we all agree that it has been an excellent debate with many passionate contributions. I also thank all the petitioners and the Mail for enabling us to have this debate; it has been absolutely right to hold it. We have had clear cross-party support for spending 0.7% of GDP on international development.
It is absolutely right for genuine concerns to be raised. Those concerns must be addressed, and I am sure that the Minister has listened.

As the Minister has said, we should welcome the opportunity for this debate, because it allows us to celebrate all the good things that our nation achieves around the world using our overseas aid budget. Millions of people have been helped in so many ways, and the debate gives us the opportunity to spread the word. If there is one thing I will take from this debate, it is the need for us to communicate far better exactly how the money is spent and what it achieves on a global scale, as millions of people are helped. The point has been made many times that the more we can communicate that, the more the public will understand how important the funds are, and the more support there will be.

The debate has been great. I thank everyone who has taken part. There is a very clear message that I want to take away: we should not be talking about cutting the UK’s aid budget; we need to put more pressure on other nations around the world to increase theirs.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 125692 relating to foreign aid spending.

7.54 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Tuesday 14 June 2016

[SIR DAVID AMESS in the Chair]

Affordable Housing: London

9.30 am

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House has considered affordable housing in London.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David.

First, I should draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests as the owner of a rental property and a member of the Residential Landlords Association.

To say there is a housing crisis in London has become a cliché, but it is more than that for our constituents who want to be able to stay in London and to afford a roof over their heads. Affordability is defined by what is affordable to people who live in London, or want to live in London. Living in London should not be seen as some sort of privilege. Not only should our constituents have the right to live in London among their community and family support networks, but London needs people to keep our great city’s economy and public services going. I will show just how difficult that can be when teachers, nurses, daycare assistants, chefs, cleaners, baggage handlers and so on cannot afford to live in London.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): First of all, I apologise, as I will not be able to be here for the whole of this timely debate. There is a particular problem in the housing market in the centre of London that has a knock-on effect in suburban areas. The hon. Lady refers to various jobs and how people feel squeezed out of the London market, but that also applies—dare I say it—even to those who would be regarded as incredibly well-paid City professionals. I hear from senior partners in law firms who say that junior lawyers on almost £100,000 a year simply cannot get on to the housing ladder without having a hell of a long commute, and often they work very long and untimely hours as well. As she rightly says, the problem affects all of us here in London. All of us MPs, of whatever political colour, feel strongly that we hopefully can make a contribution to ensure that the Government are aware of the particular problems we have in the capital city.

Ruth Cadbury: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Of course, in his constituency he has many people working at very high salaries. We know there is a crisis when people on almost £100,000 a year cannot afford a home in London.

The problem goes to the heart of London’s ability to function and to serve the rest of the UK. Let us look at the problem from the perspective of a few people who want to live and work in London and see what their choices are. In the teaching and social work professions, there is a chronic shortage and a recruitment and retention crisis, as all of us who have recently met headteachers or directors of social services know. Inner London salaries range between £27,000 and £37,000. If we take a mid-point of £32,000, someone could get a 25-year mortgage with a 5% interest rate and they would be able to afford between £87,000 and £131,000, but in my constituency a teacher could not get anything. The cheapest home for sale in my constituency, apart from a boat, is £190,000, and that is for a one-bedroom flat in a house that is in a shocking condition.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that in the W4 postcode, which is in her constituency and mine, just to have a chance at having a one-bedroom flat—a so-called starter home under the new scheme designed to alleviate the crisis—one would need a salary of £90,500? Starter homes have been misnamed. They are not starting anything, but ending dreams for a generation.

Ruth Cadbury: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I will move on to that subject shortly. Certainly a salary of more than £90,000 is not the average mid-point for a teacher or social worker.

Time and again when I talk to employers, housing is the issue. For some nurses there has been some key worker housing, which was introduced to deal with market failure and to provide cheap housing, but that is all but disappearing. Those entering nursing will also face a mountain of student debt now that the Government have announced the scrapping of the NHS bursaries. The Royal College of Nursing survey recently showed that many nurses will leave London if they cannot afford anywhere to live, which will add to the problems in the NHS.

At the lower end of the pay scales are people who are essential for London to work. A daycare assistant is paid £6.70 an hour to work in a nursery here in London; that is about £1,000 a month. No one with a family can do such work when the average rent is around £1,500 a month. Even renting a room takes well over half the daycare assistant’s take-home pay. I have a specific example of a hard-working man and his family in my constituency. Since coming to London he has worked full time in two jobs. He has rented privately for years, taking multiple loans to cover deposits and rent up front, and is now in considerable debt as a result. His landlord has now raised the rent as it is the end of the tenancy, so he now cannot stay there with his family. Letting agents and private landlords will not accept claimants of housing benefit, which he needs to top up his rent, and he cannot borrow any more money for a deposit. Despite never missing a rent payment and despite two previous letting agents confirming that with good references, he cannot rent privately. He has had to apply to the council as homeless in order to get housing.

But my constituent will not get a council home. The current series of “How to Get a Council House” is filmed in my borough of Hounslow. None of the families in that series has ended up getting a council home. If they have been lucky and got through the hoops, and if they have been accepted under the council’s duty to house, they are placed in temporary accommodation, as my constituent and his family will be. Temporary accommodation is private rented housing where housing benefit may contribute to housing costs, but even then my constituent is not out of the cycle of escalating
rents. He may dream of owning a home—a Government objective—but what he needs is a home at a rent he can afford on his low wages.

He is not alone. The ending of a private tenancy now accounts for 39% of homelessness acceptances in London. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government statistics, 32,000 people in London made an application to their council as homeless in 2014-15, which represents an increase of 38% over five years. DCLG statistics reveal that right-to-buy sales between October and December 2015 accounted for 26% of sales. Right to buy is for people who are already fortunate to be council tenants, but, with a Government discount of up to £100,000, it is taking valuable stock away from local authorities, hence their dependence on temporary accommodation.

In the council housing sector, like-for-like replacement is not happening for the council homes bought under right to buy. The new replacement homes that the Government announced could be shared ownership or low cost sale rather than rent. At least 36% of all homes sold by councils across London are now let by private landlords, many of them subsidised by housing benefit because the rents are so high. The sale of high value vacant council homes will have the overall effect of restricting the number of affordable houses for rent. London Councils is concerned that the objective to replace two homes for every one sold may not be sufficient to cover construction costs and land purchases in the right mix of housing. So already we have examples of the failure of the housing market in London that is causing the affordability crisis.

I have not yet mentioned employees in the private sector on middle incomes. Fuller’s Brewery in my constituency is a thriving business with an international reputation. Having spoken to the directors, it has become evident that the housing crisis is affecting their business and their ability to recruit and retain staff. So who can truly afford to buy a home in the area they want to live in, grew up in or want to work in?

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Leyton, which forms the bulk of my constituency, has traditionally been a relatively cheap place to buy, compared with the rest of London, but in recent years all the surveys—for example, by the Evening Standard and other newspapers—point to Leyton as one of the city’s property hotspots, which has meant that property prices and rents have gone through the roof. Does not that point to the fundamental problem: a lack of supply? The imbalance between demand and supply has reached the point where so many people, such as those whom my hon. Friend is discussing, can no longer afford to rent or buy in London.

Ruth Cadbury: [Ruth Cadbury] My hon. Friend is absolutely right. So many people are moving away. Many are moving abroad to countries where their skills are valued and they have a much higher standard of living. Even a childcare assistant can earn £40,000 in the United Arab Emirates. It is through investor visas that east countries who are propping up London’s housing crisis. Many people are moving elsewhere in the UK as well, thus adding to London’s brain drain and skills drain.

Yesterday’s Evening Standard reported that young Londoners spend almost 60% of their salaries on rent. The first year group to leave university with more than £50,000 of debt, because they were the first group of students to have to pay £9,000 a year in tuition fees—my son among them—are now hitting the jobs market. How can someone save, pay off their student debt and afford to eat and keep warm with rents at current levels?

Mark Field: The hon. Lady is highlighting the personal misery of housing in London; would she also reflect on the fact that the housing shortage—there is no doubt that we have a major problem here in the capital—is beginning to put London’s international competitiveness as a business centre at risk? This side of a further referendum in Scotland even the Scottish National party would recognise that as a problem, because if London’s competitiveness suffers the whole United Kingdom will suffer. A recent London First survey said that some 73% of the London businesses surveyed said that housing supply and costs were a significant risk to the capital’s economy.

Ruth Cadbury: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Many business organisations are raising housing as an issue. Two years ago, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry wrote a significant, ground-breaking report on housing costs and the housing shortage. That does not appear to have been taken into account when the Housing and Planning Bill was drafted. I understand that the LCCI will be launching another report in a couple of weeks to highlight the problems again.

A shortage of the total number of homes in all sectors—council, social rented, intermediate and market rented—has driven up open market sale and rental values. Several organisations, particularly the London Housing Commission, have estimated that London needs at least 50,000 new homes a year just to begin to deal with the shortage, and stated that a significant proportion must be affordable, particularly when wages have not kept up with prices. The average Londoner’s salary is £33,000, but the average home now costs 16 times that. As more people are priced out of home ownership, they are putting more pressure on the rental market, in which rents are continuing to rise. In my borough, Hounslow, the rent-to-salary ratio is 58%, and rent levels are out of reach for average earners, let alone those on low wages.

Until around five years ago, councils relied on Government support to add to the stock of council and housing association homes so that they could provide decent-quality, affordable homes to those in acknowledged housing need who were unable to rent or buy in the private sector. In 2011-12, some 12,000 new social rent homes were delivered, thanks to the Labour Government policies that supported housing associations, and later councils, to build, but that figure has been declining, and only around 2,000 new social rent homes will be built this year. That shows how the pipeline supply is declining. The number of council homes and housing association social rented homes built this year will be lower than the number of council homes lost through the right to buy. The total stock of homes for social rent is going ever downwards.

There was always the intermediate market of shared ownership—part rent, part buy—but less of that stock is now coming on stream as the Government focus on
start delivering affordable homes in London. Relying on the private sector to deliver affordable homes has meant that in new developments across London, only 15% of homes are affordable, which is considered “affordable” under the official definition. We are losing social rented homes faster through council house sales than from 106 agreements with developers are delivering new homes.

What are the Government doing about affordable housing? Let us look at their flagship policy: starter homes. When the policy comes on stream, it will apply only to brand-new properties, which, at current prices, are unaffordable to most working Londoners, as the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) said. Someone needs to be earning £97,000 to buy an average-priced starter home. Starter homes will also cut the delivery of all other homes. A third of councils that responded to an Inside Housing survey revealed that their entire affordable housing requirement could be consumed by starter homes if the threshold is set at 20%.

Charities such as Crisis are concerned that the policy will require councils to prioritise starter homes for higher earners and so reduce councils’ scope to meet the full range of housing requirements identified through their local planning processes. London Councils agrees that starter homes should be in addition to other forms of housing, so that councils can still secure the necessary tenure and pricing mix in accordance with the needs in their area, and can discharge their homelessness responsibilities by providing truly affordable housing.

Dr Huq: My hon. Friend is being very generous in taking interventions. She mentioned her own experience as a parent; has she seen the Aviva research that shows that 1 million more people aged between 20 and 30 are going to be living at home with their parents in the next 10 years? We have all heard of the bank of mum and dad, but does she agree that the Government have not only messed up the housing market but seem to be stunting young people’s growth?

Ruth Cadbury: Young people whose parents live in a house in London big enough for them to have their own room, or even to share a room, at least have the advantage that they can ask us to carry on housing them—for I do not know how long—but what about mobility? How can young people from other parts of the UK or other parts of the world come to London? They do not have the landlord of mum and dad to turn to.

Let me return to the implications of Government policy and the Housing and Planning Act 2016. Many London councils, particularly those in inner London, believe that in future there could be areas where there are no affordable rented homes, because the Government expect 20% of all new developments to include starter homes on sale at 80% of market value. Couple that with the right to buy, the decline of housing association stock and the forced sale of vacant council homes, and there will be yet more of a crisis.

Mark Field: I counsel that we should not despair entirely. One of my local authorities, the City of London, owns property not only in the square mile but in places such as Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth and Camden, and is looking to start its biggest house building programme for four decades, since the building of the Barbican centre. That will require being pragmatic about the mix—with some social housing and some at an intermediary level—but it is looking to build 3,700 properties over the next 10 years, which is quite a lot for such a small local authority. If we can work with local authorities to recognise not only the problems but that, because of the cost of land, we have to be a little more relaxed about density than we might have been in the past, there is potentially a route forward, with all local authorities working with the London Mayor and, of course, the Department.

Ruth Cadbury: I will move on to the London Mayor at the end of my speech. The City of London is in a slightly unusual situation: it has capital and other sources of income, and it can use its wealth to deliver affordable housing across London, as it used to do historically.

My council still has several hundred of the last council homes in the pipeline. Labour authorities generally, as well as the City of London, had a much higher propensity to deliver council housing until now, but the current Government policies make that more difficult. There is no specific Government-led initiative aimed at key workers, and the right to buy for housing association tenants is paid for by the sale of vacant council homes, which causes the social rented housing stock to decline further. Other Government policies, such as reducing the benefit cap, extending the right to buy with discounts of £100,000 and freezing local housing allowance rates, exacerbate London’s affordability challenge.

At the end of May, the Chancellor, who was standing in at Prime Minister’s Question Time, acknowledged to me that there is a problem. That is a start, but it is a shame the Government did not acknowledge the scale of the problem before drafting the Housing and Planning Bill. The Chancellor told me that he has met the new Mayor of London—one of my former colleagues, Sadiq Khan—and that housing was top of the agenda. The new Mayor is committed to ensuring that 50% of all new housing in London is genuinely affordable. He has announced that he will introduce a new London living rent, which will be based on one third of average local wages, to tackle the skyrocketing private rental prices, but to do that he needs the Government’s active support.

The Government must acknowledge that there is a problem in London that the current initiatives will not address, and that merely increasing the supply of housing will not in itself provide the housing we need to attract teachers, nurses, social workers, cleaners and childcare workers. The London Mayor, local authorities and the Government will have to work together on new solutions. The Mayor is offering the use of non-operational Transport for London land, but we also need the land of other public bodies, such as the NHS, for key worker housing. We need to return to providing proper support for social rented housing that is truly affordable to working people at all stages of the salary range.

By acknowledging the scale of the problem and accepting their role in addressing it, the Government will make a start. They must accept that their policies are depleting the supply of affordable housing and that they are subsidising market distortions in flats to buy. They must allow local authorities to have the power to invest in new social rented housing, cut the discount on right to buy and release funding for key worker housing. That would be a start.
Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on highlighting this hugely important issue. As she said, now is really the time. The Government, having passed legislation in this area, have recognised that it does not work for London. We have a huge opportunity now that we have a new London Mayor. Although I railed against the Housing and Planning Bill, we have to work with what we have and come up with a solution for London within the current framework; the Mayor should be given some latitude in how it is interpreted.

I want to talk about issues in my constituency that highlight the crisis, and I will touch on the work of the Public Accounts Committee in this area. I have often talked on the record about this issue, but every time I speak, the price of a house in Hackney has gone up. The average property price in Hackney is now £691,969, which is an 85% increase on 2010 prices, when properties cost only £373,000 and a bit. Average wage growth in London over the same period was 1%, so property prices in my borough are out of kilter with reality for every group. We are living in a real crisis.

Hackney is the 11th most deprived authority in the country. Interestingly, we have gone down from being top or second, where we were for many years, because the house prices mean that only the very richest can move in. That has increased the average salary in the borough to £33,000 a year. The variation is great. People often tell me that my constituency is achingly cool, but I remind them that it is also achingly poor—many people are on very low incomes and are struggling to get regular work. That is reflected in the fact that there are 11,000 people on the council’s housing register, which is frankly a bit of a joke. People think it is a waiting list, but given that 1,338 homes were allocated in 2014-15, the demand is certainly not being met through the available supply. In addition, Hackney Council could lose 700 homes through the forced sale of council homes to fund right to buy for housing association tenants. I really worry about where people on low incomes will be able to live in the future. In the private sector—I will speak more about this in a moment—the rent for a typical two-bedroom property is about £400 a week, which equates to just over £20,000 a year. To afford that, someone would need an annual gross household salary of approximately £59,000.

The stark reality for my constituents is that home ownership, renting and social housing are but dreams. Many of them are stuck living with their parents at home as adults. In my surgeries, I increasingly meet families that have people living in the living room, or parents and children living on the sofa—not even a sofa bed, because very often there is not space even for that. I say seriously to the Minister that I fear we are creating modern slums. I acknowledge that Governments over the years have not built enough homes, but now we have this wretched housing Act.

This is not new. Back in 2001, when I was a member of the London Assembly working with the then Mayor, Ken Livingstone—perhaps not so much working with him as I was not in my party at the time—I produced a report and chaired a group on housing for key workers. We looked at nurses, bus drivers, teachers and police officers as a sub-section of that group, and concluded that there was a real crisis looming for middle management. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth highlighted earlier, that is still the case today. I do not like to say that we were right then, but we were, and too little has been done since. As my hon. Friend said, that goes to the heart of London’s ability to function. We predicted that problem. We also had the concern that, as she highlighted, people on low incomes in the private sector are key workers, too: we need people to work in banks, to be chefs and to drive taxicabs. They need to be considered, too.

The solutions that the Government have come up with are key worker housing, shared ownership, starter homes, Help to Buy and, of course, the private sector, but they do not work for Hackney and the expensive parts of London and the south-east. Key worker housing is usually defined by profession, and it is typically for the public sector. That is fine if people can access it, but there are issues with it. For a start, there are not many key worker housing schemes around, and there is also an issue about rent levels.

Together with the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) and other colleagues, I fought hard to preserve some former Crown Estate properties as key worker housing. They are now owned by the Peabody Trust. I met Peabody last week, because many tenants in those properties have raised concerns about the unaffordability of rents, which have been set at 60% of market rent; that is Peabody’s definition of a rent that is achievable by key workers, but given the market rents in Hackney that I have set out, that is beyond the reach of nurses, social workers and teachers.

Even if that model is made to work, there is not enough of it. It is a very ill-defined part of the housing market. Peabody has, to a degree, acknowledged that there is a problem, and it is looking again at what the right rent should be. I am pleased to say that it will meet tenants and residents in July to start the debate about what the best model is for providing sustainable, solid and secure housing for the key people we need to keep London operating. I wish it well in its endeavours, and I hope to be involved. I am also seeking a meeting with the Mayor of London to see whether we can shape this debate at a London level.

Shared ownership is one of the other so-called solutions. In Hackney, we have seen the ludicrous situation of shared-ownership properties on the market for well over £1 million. The defence of the housing association concerned is that four sharers on £70,000 a year could buy a share of the property. That is not what I thought shared ownership was for. The rent levels on the remaining equity can be a real problem—it is sometimes as high as 4%—and there are issues of move-on for families who grow and need a larger property, but cannot afford to staircase up. One of the challenges is the narrow market, and the lack of mortgages available to people who are shared owners. That model is fast heading for bust; we need a rethink, and perhaps to use the money put into shared ownership for more sustainable forms of rental housing, or for better subsidies so that the right people can move into long-term affordable home ownership.

At Prime Minister’s questions, the Prime Minister told me that the solution to the problem in Hackney was starter homes. As my hon. Friend has highlighted,
at about £400,000 for a starter home, who in my constituency can afford that? Hackney Council has estimated that a person would need an income of about £71,000 to buy a starter home in the borough, although my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth highlighted a figure of £97,000. There are different figures, so perhaps the Minister will clarify that point. What is the rate for a starter home in London? My constituents want to know that, because anyone who might be interested in a starter home wants to know whether it is possible to get one.

As for Help to Buy, I need say little about it, except that in my borough it has been fuelling house prices. Miraculously, newly built properties coming on to the market hit only a smidgen below the Help to Buy threshold. That initiative is not helping in areas such as mine. The private sector, too, is a real problem. In my constituency, more people now rent privately than own their own home. Private sector tenants who have been suddenly cast out and have nowhere to go are coming to my surgery at an unprecedented level.

Let me give an example. Only this Monday, a 68-year-old woman saw me at my surgery. She has lived at a property for 52 years, first with her grandmother and her uncle, who are now dead. The property, to use an old-fashioned description, was benevolent housing for the working poor when it was built towards the beginning of the previous century. It was, however, sold on, and the rent is now £382 a week. It is a three-bedroom property, so she has been told that her housing benefit entitlement is only £200 a week, because she is under-occupying, but bear in mind that it has been her home for 52 years. The woman’s income—she has a private pension and a bit of state pension—is £800 a month. She is a proud woman who has never claimed a penny until she had to claim housing benefit, and she is embarrassed about doing that. She is in a desperate state and is in rent arrears. I am working with the council to see if we can find a solution for her, but she is only one of many.

Another tenant, a younger woman of 46 years, works in one of our national museums, but she has been ill and unable to work. The rent was affordable, but the landlord decided to up sticks and move abroad; he contacted an agent, who said, “Hey, you’re not charging enough here, put the rent up.” The landlord did that. That put the tenant notionally into rent arrears, although her rent was enough for the landlord previously. Her ill health and her need for housing benefit mean that no agent is interested in looking at her. She managed to find one landlord who was willing to take her on, but that landlord would only accept her with some sort of rent guarantee, which the council, however, cannot offer on housing benefit before someone moves in, so the whole system is bust. She has looked not only in Hackney, but in the neighbouring five or six boroughs, and she can find nowhere affordable to live, even in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer). She is 46 years old, single and not working—temporarily—and she is unable to find anywhere to live. What is the solution for her? The Government are offering nothing at all, and they are even about to rip away from my constituency any social housing—if she could qualify for that, which, frankly, would be a miracle, even in her circumstances.

What are the solutions? The Public Accounts Committee has been looking into the matter intensely, on a cross-party basis. In September, we published a report on the Government’s land disposals programme. The programme was announced at the beginning of the previous Parliament by the Housing Minister at the time, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), and was intended to dispose of enough land to build more than 100,000 homes—so far, so good. What we discovered, unbelievably, is that the Government cannot tell us how much the land was sold for, how many homes have been built on the land, and whether it was value for money for the taxpayer. The figures even included some land released in the early stages of the previous Labour Government, so the numbers were criticised by auditors.

Perhaps the Minister will respond to one of the Public Accounts Committee’s recommendations:

“In taking forward its new target”,

which the Government had announced,

to release land for up to 150,000 homes between 2015 and 2020, the Department must only count the number of homes built, or commenced, on land disposed of during the programme. This should also include the number of affordable homes.”

We have been told by civil servants that Ministers expressly said that they did not want the homes built on land disposed of by the Government counted. Let me repeat that, because it sounds unbelievable and people might think that I have misspoken: Ministers have expressly said that they do not want to count the number of homes built on public land disposed of for house building. It is more Sir Humphrey than Sir Humphrey, and it is time that the Minister gave us an answer.

We also now have the right to buy for housing associations. I have no problem with people wanting to become homeowners. I am a homeowner myself; indeed—forgive me, Sir David, I forgot to mention my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests—I am a landlord in London, so I have no problem with people buying their own home, but not in a way that is taking homes away from other Londoners. That is the thing. The back-fill is coming from councils having to sell their important social housing. The Public Accounts Committee concluded that not only was there no maths done on the right to buy, but it was not sustainable in its current form, with so little detail about how it will work. This is an opportunity for the Minister to work with the Mayor of London to make the policy work better for London.

There is also pay to stay. I have highlighted the multiple households in my constituency in which there are adult children who cannot move anywhere. They are stuck at home with their parents, and are often overcrowded; even if they are not, they are pushing the rent levels up, because as a household, their marginal taxation rate can be immense. I spoke to Peabody the other day, and it has had examples of people who have been reluctant to take on promotions, because households that go over a certain level of income—a £40,000 household income sounds like a lot outside London, but it is not a great deal in London—are suddenly having to pay a high marginal rate of both income tax, potentially, and extra rent.

I must also rail against the loss of secure tenancies. A stable family is a fundamental political principle for me. It is a building block for life, because with a stable home people can think about a job, getting their family sorted, making progress and contributing to the community and society in which they live. Without that, people are
living in anxiety. In my constituency surgeries, I am seeing some of the worst housing cases that I have ever seen, and I have been elected for 22 years now. For the record, as we are in the middle of debate about the referendum, I have never once, in my 11 years as an MP, had an eastern European come to me about council housing—they all seem to live in the private rented sector, and certainly they have never come to me asking for council housing.

The Government are seriously damaging our city, but they have an opportunity. I ask the Minister to tell us, seriously, how much he will work with the Mayor. I also have a couple of suggestions, including giving back to the Mayor the land that NHS Property Services took away from London, such as St Leonard’s hospital in Shoreditch. The Mayor should be allowed to turn that land into homes, and to count how many homes he can build in total, and how many are affordable or for key workers. That will do more for our city. There might be a deal struck, so that some of the money goes back to the NHS—goodness knows, the NHS budget is under great stress—but those homes would be vital for our health workers, teachers and so many others.

The Mayor should be allowed to develop a solution for London. I hope that constructive discussions with the Mayor of London are ongoing, both behind the scenes and, soon, more openly, because if the situation continues, our city will be hollowed out and people will not be able to afford to live and work here, which will change the nature of our great London.

10.7 am

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I apologise to you and to the Front Benchers, because I have to leave before the end of the debate. Notwithstanding that, I wanted to take part, because the issue is important to my constituents; that, indeed, is why we have debates on affordable housing in London regularly.

I thank my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) for introducing the debate and for setting out the problems so clearly. I also thank the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), although he has gone now, for turning up. He always turns up for these debates, and he is usually the only Tory London MP who does. Perhaps it is not surprising that five of the MPs who turned up represent central-west London constituencies, because although the problem is London-wide, it is particularly intense in those areas of high property values.

To illustrate that, in Hammersmith and Fulham, 58% of average monthly salary is now taken up by private sector rent, and the multiple of annual income represented by house prices—now pushing up towards £1 million, on average—is 20.5, the fourth highest in London. That shows how stark the problems are. That means that, for many people, social housing—council and housing association housing—is the only affordable type of housing. We obviously need a comprehensive solution that includes other forms of subsidised housing, whether those are traditional methods such as shared ownership or newer methods such as controlled rents and discounted sale.

There are a variety of schemes; it is simply that in recent years they have not been implemented. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth mentioned, the previous Mayor’s record was appalling, to the extent that the last year of his reign for which figures are available was the worst for affordable home delivery since records began 25 years ago, with fewer than 5,000 homes built. As she said, his record was about 13%, which simply makes a bad situation worse.

To give an example of what is going wrong and the opportunity cost—I mean that literally—there are more than 30 opportunity areas in London, and three of the biggest are in my geographically rather small constituency. We are told that, over a number of years, those three together will probably provide 40,000 homes. The failure in each of those areas is stark. On the one hand, we have the White City area, where the target for affordable housing was reduced by the previous Conservative council from 40% to 15%—and it is barely hitting that—which is encouraging high-value developers such as St James into the area. Many small penthouse and two-bedroom flats on the BBC television centre site, for example, are going for millions of pounds in what is the poorest part of my constituency and the area with the greatest housing need.

Worse still is what is happening in west Kensington and Earl’s Court, where permission was granted for 8,000 homes, which include not one additional social rented home and only 10% of any type of affordability. Effectively, those 23 acres of prime land owned by Hammersmith Council were given away. Notionally the cost was £90 million, but in practice once the council had the responsibility of buying out freeholders and leaseholders on that site, it was little if anything—it may even be a negative sum. That is beyond negligence. The whole of that site—some 80 acres—is public land owned either by the council or by Transport for London. The new Mayor will obviously take a strong interest in that, because although half of that land has already been disposed of, half of it—the Lillie Bridge depot—remains to be dealt with. Perhaps we can hope for something better, but again that shows the missed opportunity.

Most significant of all is the area that is now the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, which is zoned to provide more than 25,000 new homes. Again, that has been earmarked as one of the key areas for starter homes—in other words, homes that will go for up to £450,000 each, which are not affordable by anyone’s definition of the term. I fear for what will happen in that development because of the combined mismanagement of the previous Mayor and the Transport Secretary, who at the end of 2014 discovered that the construction of HS2, Crossrail and other rail projects in that area was being done in such a way that, as Sir Terry Farrell pointed out, it has prevented the decking of that site so that homes could be built above that work. Therefore, unless the new Mayor can work miracles, the prospect of building thousands of homes on that site has been lost for at least a generation, and perhaps permanently. What appallingly short-sighted planning, and that lies firmly at the door of the previous Mayor of London and the Government combined.

That is not good news. What is good news is that we now have a Mayor who has pledged to do his best to build not the 25,000 homes in London that we have
seen, but the 50,000-plus that we need, and half of those will be genuinely affordable. I wish him luck. I will do everything I can, as will my local authority, to ensure that that happens, but it must be said that that is against a background of a Government doing everything through legislation to prevent people from having a secure, affordable home.

The vindictiveness of policies that enforce the sale of housing association properties by means of the subsidy from the sale of high-value council properties beggars belief. Boroughs like mine will be most affected, with up to 50% of council properties having to be sold over time. Why do we want to create insecurity for people in housing? That has all sorts of detrimental effects on people’s lives, and not just on their housing conditions, but on their health, the education of their children and so on. We have pay to stay; we have benefit cuts that are forcing people out of London; we have short-term tenancies, so people can no longer feel secure in their family homes; and, as Crisis said in its briefing for the debate, we have had a doubling of street homelessness since the coalition Government came in. It is now commonplace to use the term “social cleansing” to describe what is happening in my constituency. That is not an exaggeration, and it is no longer an emotive term but practical Government policy.

Yesterday I went to the funeral of a woman called Kathy Dolan whom I have known for many years. For many years beyond that, as tenants’ leader, she effectively ran the small, very nice Wood Lane estate, just next to the BBC television centre and opposite White City station. She made sure that people on that estate lived comfortable lives—she sorted out their problems and she dealt with the council—but in recent years she also had to fight developers. At mass yesterday, the priest was able to talk about the threat to established communities from developers. What an indictment.

We have strong communities in Hammersmith, as I am sure colleagues do around London, and we have many people who, like Kathy, work incredibly hard for no money and little recognition to sort out problems. They do not need the additional burden of vulture-like developers who have their eyes on their homes and want to make profit out of them, assisted by politicians who should know better.

Yes, there is a crisis in London housing. It can be resolved, but it requires us all to work together in the same direction to ensure that the people who work and live in London and have done for many generations can continue to do so. I am afraid that the policies the Government are pursuing are doing exactly the opposite.

10.17 am

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. It has the whiff of groundhog day about it as we regularly meet to discuss aspects of London’s housing crisis, but it is important to do so, and I very much congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on securing the debate. The truth of the matter is that this is not a static situation. Things are getting worse, so it is important that we review the changing and worsening impact of London’s housing crisis and continue both to support the new Mayor of London—as everyone from the Labour side who has contributed to the debate has done—and to press the Government for a review of the policies that are likely to exacerbate an already critical situation and try to get some support for measures to respond.

Why are things getting worse? As we have already heard, the truth is that the escalation of London house prices, driven in large part by the failure of supply, is worsening housing inequality and therefore general inequality in the city to a catastrophic degree. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) quoted a figure for rising house prices since the economic crash, but I think her figures may be slightly out of date as those I have seen today show that London house prices have risen by 91.6% since 2008-09. I do not have immediately to hand information on what London wages have done since then, but I can say that certainly at the lower end of the spectrum they have had a tendency to fall rather than rise. Therefore, despite the fact that the party in government has always traded as the party of home ownership, home ownership has actually been priced out of the reach of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people, particularly in London.

There has also been continuing pressure on support for people who need assistance to rent their homes; in the private sector alone 250,000 London children are growing up in families who need assistance to pay their rent. That squeeze on housing support is continuing and deepening, and there are further reductions to come in the local housing allowance, which will also exacerbate the situation. Of course, as my hon. Friends have said, the Housing and Planning Act 2016 will have an impact.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): On the point about the LHA, I welcome the Government’s review. I hope it goes the right way and we realise the impact of the cap on supported housing. Does the hon. Lady recognise, not least in relation to Westminster, the impact on places such as Enfield of the pressure on temporary accommodation, and placements of vulnerable children with many needs? There is a need for a better, strategic way of handling such relocations. Property prices are cheaper in Enfield than they are, perhaps, in inner London. Placements of needy, vulnerable children are having an impact on outer London boroughs and there needs to be a better way of handling that across London.

Ms Buck: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, although I am slightly baffled by the implications of his critiquing the policy of his party’s Government. I hope that the Minister is listening, because the hon. Gentleman is right.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 will make the situation worse through reducing the stock of housing to rent; the extension of the right to buy to housing associations; the forced sale of so-called higher value properties in the social rented stock; the replacement, through planning changes, of the scope for negotiation of homes for rent in new developments with the starter homes policies; and the implications of pay to stay and fixed-term tenancies. We had many opportunities to discuss the measures and our concerns fell on deaf ears, but they are a poisonous cocktail and will only intensify London’s housing crisis.
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that in Brent the rent for an average two-bedroom property is £212,500 a year? If the rent for affordable homes was 80% of that, that would be £172,222 a year, when the national minimum wage brings in £13,852. The maths simply do not stack up for people living at the bottom of the scale in London.

Ms Buck: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The result of all the different pressures together, with worse to come, has an impact beyond housing, strictly defined; it is changing the face of London, intensifying housing inequality, and changing the face of poverty and low incomes in London. The typical family in poverty is now, for the first time in modern times, a working family living in the private rented sector in outer London—that takes me back to the point that the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) raised. Poverty is being suburbanised and intensified by what is happening in the private rented sector.

All that is bad for London’s economy. There is ample testimony from London First, the CBI and many other organisations that the housing crisis is making it hard to recruit, and is undermining the effectiveness of London’s economy. It is making it hard to recruit and retain staff in the services on which we all depend. However, it is also undermining London’s civic life—the health and wellbeing of the city—as people struggle to cope with the consequences of the housing crisis. Above all, it is bad for individuals—for struggling families and for young people seeking to find a stable home of their own in which to build a life and family.

Inner London is on the front line, because it has the steepest house prices, broadly speaking. How are inner London boroughs such as Westminster coping with that? Very badly indeed, I am sorry to say. Westminster produced just 46 new affordable homes last year. Over the past three years a mere 12% of all the development in Westminster has been affordable. That is less than half of the already appalling 28% London-wide average. That is the pattern across London. Areas with the greatest housing pressures have the worst supply of new affordable homes.

In the weeks before the London mayoralty election—it is no accident or coincidence—a number of new developments were pushed ahead for approval by Westminster City Council. The Whiteleys scheme in Bayswater has 103 luxury flats, just 2% of which are affordable. Paddington Green has 690 flats, 19% of which are affordable. There are other schemes in the pipeline. Westminster City Council is closing and demolishing the Jubilee sports centre—the Prime Place development—and the developer is marketing its properties in the far east before a single one has been built. In fact, it was marketing in the far east before the closure of the sports centre. Figures out this week show that there has been a 9% rise in the number of London properties owned by offshore companies. It is not simply that we are failing to build—although we are—but we are building the wrong properties, in a way that is part of a process of purchasing from overseas by the super-rich.

Developers are private companies and will behave as the Government permit them to do, and as they are driven to do by commercial logic, unless they are encouraged to do something different. They have been going into the luxury housing market. I was struck yesterday by the marketing brochure of the Galliard company:

“In order to keep up with the trend of trophy apartments and to give buyers what they want, developers are creating properties that offer nothing but luxury and indulgence. In fact, Kay & Co have released statistics that show that 35% of units under construction or completed in 2014 are in 5* developments.”

It adds that according to “Knight Frank’s Global Development Report from 2015, the amount of prime luxury properties…in London” is up threefold since 2009. So we are building luxury properties, in some of which—such as the Vauxhall Tower—hardly anyone lives. We are building luxury properties that are a sponge for global money and the super-rich; and a not insignificant proportion of that money is dirty money.

John Cryer: Is my hon. Friend aware that in many new developments in central London, the flats—because overwhelmingly they are flats—are not even being advertised in Britain? I do not mean that in a nationalistic sense, but they are being advertised only in areas of the world where there are large concentrations of wealth and power. Does she think we are storing up an awful lot of social and economic problems for future years, if the trend continues?

Ms Buck: I do. That is correct and I have nothing to add to it. It is completely in line with my thesis.

Meg Hillier: I am sure my hon. Friend has found in her constituency as I have in my borough that often properties are built and whole blocks are sold over a weekend in Dubai, Hong Kong or such places. Those are not homes for local people. Does she have a comment on that?

Ms Buck: That is absolutely right. It is the well-documented phenomenon of lights-out London. It happens particularly in the wealthiest parts of London, but also with some of those blocks my hon. Friend has mentioned, which are marketed as if they are in the heart of Knightsbridge but are not; properties are being bought up overseas and at the very best used for short-term lets or high-value student accommodation. They certainly do not provide homes. Of course, the consequence, to go back to the intervention by the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, is that London boroughs, and particularly those in inner and west London, cannot meet the demand from the people in the greatest need; so homelessness and housing pressures spill over from those boroughs. As it is, it costs Westminster taxpayers £4 million a year to meet the costs of homelessness that are not covered by other Government costs.

We are placing homeless households from Westminster in Enfield, Barking and Dagenham and Newham. Westminster City Council says that it would like to build permanent homes in outer London. I do not know what outer London thinks of that, because in outer London boroughs such as Hounslow and Sutton, homelessness is rising very sharply. I do not see why inner London boroughs should be allowed to get away with that. As the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate said, those households are being placed far from their support networks, which puts additional pressure on services in the host boroughs.
A shortage of school places is just one example of such pressure. The latest figures show that Westminster has 1,200 unfilled school places, and yet we are exporting our homeless households all over. Meanwhile, in an outer London borough such as Redbridge, which is a receiving borough but also an exporting borough, there is a phenomenal situation, with pressures being dropped there and people having to be placed elsewhere. Only two weeks ago, Redbridge Council revealed that it was going to purchase an ex-barracks in Canterbury in order to place its homeless there, much to the chagrin of Canterbury City Council, which had been negotiating to get the property for itself. This is lunacy, and it is all consequential upon wider problems.

Meanwhile, some get lucky, and some will get luckier as a result of the Government’s Housing and Planning Act. The starter homes policy will be a windfall for households who have the bank of mum and dad and are on joint or single incomes of £80,000 or £90,000. Those people will be able to enjoy the benefits of the discount on a starter home, carry that forward and cash it in. Even Westminster City Council, which is not known for its caution on such things, warned the Government that the potential windfall of tax-free capital gain is “very considerable” and “wholly to the benefit of a first-time buyer”.

Good luck to them, if that is what the Government want to do, but bad luck to everyone else who either cannot afford that or finds they are at the sharp end of the housing crisis.

Some of the people who have been in my surgery in the past few weeks will not be the beneficiaries or be able to afford a starter home, even though they would love to have one. They include the pensioner I met last week, who has been in his privately rented home for 27 years and whose rent has gone up from £750 a month in 2014 to £2,500 now. Many other individuals are in that kind of crisis.

The Minister needs to address that. He needs to make it absolutely clear that he understands the impact of the crisis and will get behind the Mayor in the measures he intends to take to provide a range of affordable homes across all tenures. The Minister needs to work with other Departments to ensure that the pressures that brought about this crisis in London are resolved, for the sake of our city’s health and for the many people who depend upon a decent affordable home.

10.32 am

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow such a comprehensive commentary on London housing policy. The critique from the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) was well put together.

The long-term failure of successive Governments to address the underlying problems in the housing market is undoubtedly more evident in London than elsewhere in the UK. I agree with Members that certain aspects are unique to London, but for the most part this city is just the epicentre of problems affecting the whole UK to a greater or lesser extent. The crisis here in London reverberates to the other nations and regions of the UK.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on securing this debate on a set of issues that have an acute impact on her constituents. I assure her that there is a shared interest in addressing the problems in London, because they affect all of us. Every time the Library updates its briefings on London’s housing crisis, the statistics get more and more shocking. It is clear from today’s debate that the key structural issues are not new. There is a chronic under-supply of new homes, an absolute shortage of property in London and—just as problematic—an ever widening gulf between earnings and house prices, which is the affordability problem that has been the focus this morning. Add to the mix a private rental sector that is out of control and we have a recipe for the housing crisis currently faced by the people who live and work in this city.

Like other MPs whose constituencies are many miles from here, I am not a disinterested observer. I have to live in London for more than half the week during parliamentary Sessions, so I have first-hand experience of London’s housing and rental market, although I am aware that MPs have a much easier time than most prospective tenants. I have repeatedly seen the problems faced by staff members and others who live here permanently, and I recognise the issues that colleagues have highlighted today. I absolutely want to get behind the Mayor in the measures he intends to take to provide a range of affordable homes across all tenures. The Minister needs to work with other Departments to ensure that the pressures that brought about this crisis in London are resolved, for the sake of our city’s health and for the many people who depend upon a decent affordable home.

If the average home in London now costs more than half a million pounds—16 times the average London salary—what hope is there for young people trying to get on the housing ladder, many of whom are already carrying a mortgage in student debt? In what universe is that achievable or even desirable? Who wants to be saddled with a debt of that level in the current climate of economic uncertainty? Every time the Chancellor stands up in the Chamber, he talks about bringing down the debt. I am not the first to observe that...
meeting his own debt reduction targets is something that he has conspicuously failed to do. The levels of personal debt that individuals now need to carry in order to own a home or even buy a starter home, not only in London but in other hotspot areas too, are frankly crippling and completely unsustainable.

The Government’s obsession with home ownership is undermining the affordable rented sector, where, in my view, there is tremendous progress to be made in London for anyone willing to make the tough policy decisions. Points were well made earlier by the hon. Members for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) about the use of public land and the need to measure the outcomes of house building programmes.

In the 2015 Queen’s Speech, the Government confirmed that they plan to force councils to sell off their low-rent homes in high-value areas, mostly as a means of financing the extension of the right to buy to housing association tenants, and—in theory at least—to incentivise councils to build more homes. However, doing that will not achieve either of those things. Its main outcome will simply be to reduce the number of homes for social rent in areas where low-cost housing is most needed and to force those on lower and average incomes to move further away from the communities where they live and work.

We have seen in the past that selling off social housing stock cheaply has long-term adverse consequences. The big sell-off in the ‘80s and ‘90s meant that councils all but stopped building new homes. It made no sense whatsoever to use public money to build new homes and then practically give them away. It has meant that now, right across the UK, there is a chronic shortage of homes for social rent for those on low incomes—those in low-paid jobs, those on zero-hours contracts and those whose ability to work is impaired by health problems. Some of those people will never be eligible for mortgages and will always need affordable homes to rent.

One of the great ironies is that, 20 to 30 years on, many of the same properties that were bought by tenants are once again properties for rent, but this time in the private sector, being let for market-level rents, often to young families in their third private rented flat in three years. Rents are skyrocketing, families in their 30s who are still living at home or by young couples moving so far out of London in order to put a roof over their children’s heads that they severely compromise their family life by enduring hours of commuting each day.

Barry Gardiner: I am delighted that the hon. Lady has talked about the plight of young people in London, but does she realise that this is not just about young people? A constituent who had been living in the same property for 14 years came to me recently, having received a section 21 notice. At the age of 72, he and his disabled wife have not been accepted by the council and are sofa-surfing with friends who live in my constituency. It is not just young people but the elderly who are suffering because they are not accepted as priority-need homeless.

Dr Whiteford: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Frankly, what people are being put through in this day and age is quite disgusting.

The situation we have created is not good for people, for families, for people’s employers or for communities. It is not good for anyone and it compels us to think that the UK Government’s current direction of travel risks compounding the mistakes of the past, fuelling house price and rent increases, and failing to deal with the underlying lack of supply on anything like the scale required. All the fancy help-to-buy schemes in the world will only fuel personal debt, drive house prices higher and continue to inflate rents unless we actually build more homes to meet demand and take action to ensure that we have an affordable housing stock for people on normal salaries.

I am an outer-London MP and I am contacted by constituents day in, day out about the housing crisis in our city—whether that is by parents with children in their 30s who are still living at home or by young families in their third private rented flat in three years. Just recently I was contacted by an older man who had worked all his life but, because of a marriage break-up, is now living in one room in a shared house without even a kitchen to call his own. Rents are skyrocketing, with demand outstripping supply in every section of the housing market. Some local authorities have started doing ambitious, innovative work, but most councils are stretched. One council in my area, Bexley, is often in the position of trying to rent or buy accommodation for homeless families but being it is being outbid by buy-to-let landlords—sometimes the very same ones who caused the homelessness in the first place.

Alongside that, many Londoners’ dream of owning their own home is fading fast. We have heard about house prices increasing enormously across London. Crossrail is about to come to Abbey Wood in my constituency. It will regenerate the whole area, but that also means that people from Abbey Wood can no longer afford to live in the place where they and their parents have lived all their lives. Many Londoners therefore
find themselves in the private rented sector, where the average rent is twice the national average for all property sizes, and the gap continues to widen.

People are stuck in the private rented sector on insecure short-term tenancies, unable to save for a deposit of their own because of skyrocketing rents and letting agent fees. Many living in London are turning away from this wonderful city to pursue work and a home elsewhere, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth set out. As a result of the affordability crisis, many live in poor, overcrowded conditions. The last accurate figures we had were from the last census and they indicated that over 11% of households in the capital were overcrowded. I am sure that most of us will know from our postbags that the number is now far bigger—I think it would be at least double that, if not triple.

Unaffordable, overcrowded and insecure—that is the housing crisis we face, and it is one we must all challenge, because it affects every part of our society. Unaffordable and insecure housing causes problems right across society, from the people living in a Victorian terraced street that now has 25% of the properties as homes of multiple occupancy to the constant churn of pupils in and out of schools. In a primary school in my constituency, 30 pupils moved in and out in one term—that is a whole class in one term. We can only guess what effect that has, not only on trying to teach a class but on each child’s education. In my constituency there is a doctor’s surgery with 12,000 registered patients, a third of whom churn in and out every year. That makes it difficult for any public health awareness campaigns. There is rising TB, and on important issues such as diabetes, obesity and smoking, GPs have very little chance of building any sort of relationship with their patients.

Across our economy, unaffordable housing has far-reaching effects. Beyond the obvious impact on the amount of disposable income that each individual and family has, the impact on our local and regional economies needs to be looked at. There has been widespread concern about the affordability of housing in London from a variety of industries. The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry reports that almost half of London businesses believe that the insufficient availability of homes is one of the top three barriers to London’s competitiveness. The situation is so bad that some big employers have begun to look at ways of solving the problems and have begun to take matters into their own hands. KPMG now offers employees a leg up on the housing ladder with discounted mortgages and Deloitte has taken up flats in the Olympic village in Stratford to rent to employees in order to provide more secure, affordable housing. However, the majority of Londoners do not have that help and are facing the affordability crisis alone.

The Royal College of Nursing has polled its members and reports that four in 10 respondents say that they are likely to leave London in the next five years because the cost of housing is so high—a figure that no doubt reflects the experience shared by many Londoners across the economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch set out, at one time it was care assistants who could not afford to live in London, but it is now junior doctors, GPs and surgeons.

The recent mayoral election was, I believe, a referendum on housing. Londoners resoundingly endorsed Sadiq Khan in that referendum. For eight years, the previous Mayor of London—currently the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—had the chance to tackle the affordability crisis in London and he failed. We now have a Mayor who is committed to building housing to ensure that all Londoners have the opportunity to rent or buy a decent home at a price they can afford. However, the scale of the challenge we face in London, combined with the lack of land and the soaring cost of rental properties and properties to buy, means that things will not change overnight. This is not just about a lack of supply, but about what happens even when things come on stream and the supply is there. In my constituency, 700 new homes are being built on my street but there is not a single affordable property, so this is not just about supply.

The Mayor of London recently revealed that the previous Mayor delivered just 4,880 affordable homes in London in his last year—the fewest in decades. The Government’s new definition of affordable housing includes so-called “affordable rent” homes, for which tenants pay up to 80% of market rent, but 80% of very expensive is still very expensive. The new Mayor’s manifesto for Londoners pledges to set up Homes for Londoners, which will build the genuinely affordable homes that we need, including homes for social rent, homes for London living rent and homes for first-time buyers, while giving Londoners first dibs on homes to buy that are built on brownfield public land. The new Mayor will need the support of all of us in this debate to achieve that, and he will need support from Government for a devolution deal that gives London more power to invest in new homes and open up Government-owned surplus land for development.

This is not just about housing, but about life chances and stable communities. Just last night we saw what is great about our city with the coming together of Londoners for the vigil in Soho, in response to the Orlando atrocity. What makes London great is the Londoners within it, and they deserve a decent roof over their heads.

I will end by posing some questions, which I hope the Minister will respond to; if he is unable to, I hope he will commit to responding in writing. What representations from across the public and private sectors have the Department received regarding employees facing insecure and unaffordable housing? What analysis has the Department made of the impact on the local, regional and national economy of the lack of disposable income due to unaffordable housing? Can the Minister let us know about the work that the Department of Health is doing on the cost to the NHS of poor housing and when it will report its findings? Lastly, will he commit today to working with the Mayor of London to ensure that he is able to deliver the policies that were overwhelmingly endorsed by the majority of Londoners last month?

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on securing this debate on the important issue of affordable housing in London. I can assure her that this is a top priority for this Department and this Government. In the short time that I have today, I will endeavour to respond to the points made by hon. Members.
The demand for affordable housing in London is without doubt challenging. It is clear that the new Mayor has a significant task ahead of him to meet the needs of the growing population in such an important world city. A number of hon. Members asked whether we would work with him, and we certainly look forward to doing so. We all share the same ambitions—to build more homes in London and to help more people to own their own home.

We have a good track record. Since 2010, we have delivered more than 710,000 homes, including 277,000 affordable homes—67,000 in London. Our affordable homes programme delivered 193,000 affordable homes between 2011 and 2015. Last year was a record year for London. We delivered 27,000 homes, including 18,000 affordable homes—the most since records began in 1991. We were the first Government since the 1980s to finish with more affordable homes than when we started. Since 2010, we have helped 290,000 households to become homeowners, thanks to schemes such as Help to Buy and right to buy. However, even though we have delivered a record number of homes in London, there is without doubt more work to be done.

Meg Hillier: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones: I will make some progress before giving way, because I am short of time.

Only one third of new homes in London were delivered through the open market. With London’s housing challenges, the market needs to do more, and the Government are certainly doing more. We are focusing on three things—streamlining the planning system, helping Londoners into home ownership and ensuring that housing stock is managed fairly and effectively.

We are introducing further reforms. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 gives house builders and decision makers the tools and confidence to deliver more homes and streamline the planning system to accelerate delivery. Planning permission in principle will provide greater certainty, and registers of brownfield land will make it easier to identify suitable sites, which are at a premium in London.

However, the reforms need to be implemented effectively in every area. We need to see more homes that are planned for actually being built. We have consulted on a new delivery test that drives action where build rates are below expectation. We have been working with the major house builders on how they can be clearer about their delivery plans, and I welcome the statement of intent published by the Home Builders Federation just last month.

We are doubling the housing budget to more than £20 billion to deliver 1 million more homes by the end of this Parliament. That includes £8 billion for 400,000 affordable housing starts, including 100,000 affordable homes for rent. That is the largest affordable housing programme by any Government since the 1970s.

We know that 86% of people want to buy their own home, and we certainly support their aspirations. That is why our programme to support home ownership is so important. With shared ownership, London’s first-time buyers will be able to get on the ladder with a far smaller deposit: £3,500 will secure a 25% stake in a property. Our new London Help to Buy scheme increases the equity loan available from 20% to 40%, and our help to buy ISAs are helping people to save up a deposit for their first home. Our voluntary right to buy gives 1.3 million housing association tenants the chance to buy their homes.

We will build 200,000 starter homes so that young first-time buyers will be able to buy their first home with a minimum discount of 20%. Legislation will place a duty on planning authorities to embed starter homes in the planning system. That will be supported by £1.2 billion of funding to unlock brownfield land. For high-value areas, the Housing and Planning Act allows for off-site commuted sums for delivery elsewhere. We are consulting on the details of how that will work.

We need to make better use of the existing housing stock. The market value of council housing stock in April 2014 was more than £200 billion. By selling councils’ higher-value housing as it falls vacant, we can release the locked-up value to build more homes and fund the right-to-buy discount for housing association tenants; and we will absolutely ensure that for every council house sold in London, at least two affordable homes will be built.

Meg Hillier: It is all very interesting to hear what the Government are planning nationally, but this debate is about housing in London. On the issue of the sale of high-value council properties, there are properties in my constituency that will have to be sold under the current Government proposals. The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) has no council housing in his constituency, because it was transferred, so homes will be sold in Hackney to pay for people to buy their homes in Devon potentially, unless the Minister is able to commit now to ensuring that there is at least a ring-fencing of the money from the sale of council homes for right to buy, so that it stays within the M25.

Mr Jones: As the hon. Lady will know, we are working up the plan for higher-value social homes that will be sold. At the moment, it has not been made clear which properties will need to be sold, but certainly they will only be properties that are vacant; and just to reassure her, we are absolutely clear that for every house that is sold in London, at least two affordable homes will be built.

Ms Buck: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones: I need to make more progress because I am very short of time.

We have helped to unlock major regeneration sites in London and we are investing £600 million to create 31 new housing zones in London, which will deliver 77,000 new homes by 2026. In the last Parliament, we released public sector land with capacity for 109,000 homes. We will release more land, and at least 160,000 homes will be built. The London Land Commission will continue to be an important way of engaging with the public sector to release more land for housing.

In the short time that I have left, I will pick up a few of the points that hon. Members raised. First, there was an assertion that people buying starter homes would
need a minimum salary of £90,000. I am sure that many hon. Members will have seen that Shelter has done research on that, based on 2016 housing values. It came to the conclusion that people would be able to buy on salaries of £45,000 and it predicted that 30% of the people in London who are currently in private rented accommodation would be able to buy a starter home on that basis.

Another assertion was about the supply of homes. I find it difficult to comprehend that so many Opposition Members are criticising this Government’s action on providing affordable housing when, between 1997 and 2010, 420,000 affordable houses were lost from the system. I can assure hon. Members that this Government are absolutely committed to bringing forward new affordable housing. We are introducing an £8 billion programme to deliver 400,000 more affordable houses; 135,000 of those will be for shared ownership—that was a concern raised during the debate—and 100,000 of them will be affordable homes for rent.

Let me settle some concerns about the right to buy in London. Since the reinvigorated right to buy was introduced by my party as the lead party in the coalition during the last Parliament, in London, where right-to-buy housing sales have been made, on average roughly two additional homes have replaced that stock. I am getting a polite stare from you, Sir David, so I will conclude now for the mover of the motion.

10.59 am

Ruth Cadbury: I regret that the Government have not acknowledged the distorting use of the term “affordable” and that none of the Government initiatives will be of any help to people on low or average pay or those on uneven incomes, such as those on zero-hours contracts. There is so much that is wrong in the starter homes and right-to-buy initiatives. They do not deliver truly affordable housing—new housing—to Londoners in need.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).
community. Thousands of jobs will be created as a result of the £20 billion investment, and Copeland will become one of the fastest growing economies not just in the UK, but in Europe. It has taken us 10 years to reach this point, working with successive Governments. The developments have taken place not by accident but, as the Minister knows, by design.

In stressing the national Government’s obligations to my community, I make the case for plutonium as a national asset. West Cumbria and Britain have the potential to lead the world with an effective plutonium disposition strategy. The management of the UK’s plutonium stockpile is an important and pressing issue facing the nuclear industry in my constituency and the whole country. Although movement on the issue has been going forward incrementally for a decade, it has been substantively delayed for too long.

The decision to be made by the Government is this: do we view the 140 tonnes of plutonium oxide sitting in my constituency as waste or as an asset? The three prevailing options that have been considered by the Government in recent years for the management of plutonium include: treating it as waste and looking to dispose of it deep underground; converting it into mixed oxide fuel, otherwise known as MOX; or using it as a nuclear fuel in a new type of reactor, such as the PRISM fast-breeder reactor.

If we choose to view the stockpile as waste, it will cost billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money in treatment, storage and eventual disposal. That would be to reject taking a long-term effective and strategic approach to the management of the material. In essence, the Government would be opting out of adopting an integrated approach to Britain’s commitment to new nuclear technology.

If, however, the stockpile is classed as an asset, its value will be enormous—perhaps unquantifiable—and it will be of significant worth to the British economy now and in the future. To facilitate the realisation of that potential, I hope that the Minister will commit to avoiding further delays by implementing a structured plan with a fixed timeline, so that the plutonium that is stored in my constituency, which is the largest stockpile of its kind in the world, can be utilised as nuclear fuel. Britain would then benefit, and not simply economically; such a decision would help us to meet our non-proliferation objectives, secure our energy supplies and fight climate change.

I fully expect the Minister to state that we have already made the decision to classify the plutonium stockpile as an asset and not waste, and that we are now evaluating which technical process and commercial platform we wish to utilise—MOX, CANMox or PRISM. Without a structured, timetabled plan, there is the same practical policy outcome, whether the plutonium is theoretically an asset or waste: indefinite storage. The inadequacies of the approach are obvious, not least because of the changing nature of some of the stockpile owing to the presence of americium and other actinides, all of which make future disposition more difficult and expensive. A delay will have consequences, and a deferred decision will have real effects and a real price tag.

I will focus a little on what plutonium disposition means for my community. West Cumbria is a global centre for nuclear excellence. Skills and expertise in decommissioning at Sellafield, research and development at the National Nuclear Laboratory, and future investments at Moorside and the National Nuclear College all require a joined-up, holistic, forward-thinking, integrated approach to plutonium management and technology development. To continue to lead in the field, west Cumbria and the country must be provided with the necessary investment and tools needed to transform a complex and, for some, intractable policy problem into what should be a powerful asset for the benefit of everybody in the country.

West Cumbria has proven, time and again, to be an invaluable partner for Governments of all colours. Our skills, and our ability and willingness to host nuclear facilities, are unique and invaluable. As I have outlined repeatedly over a number of years, if the Minister provides the urgent clarity required on this significant issue of public policy, my community can and will provide the partnership to find the solutions that Britain needs to manage our nuclear stockpile. That is clearly an excellent, unprecedented opportunity for the Government and for my community.

In addition to contributing to the British, west Cumbrian and Cumbrian economies more generally, the use of our significant plutonium stockpile as an asset will help us to produce the fuel we need, through carbon dioxide-free electricity generation from new nuclear, and thus secure our energy supplies. My community and the country need that, and my constituents deserve nothing less.

There is a need for speed. The case for using our plutonium stockpile as an asset is substantial. We know from the coalition Government’s response to the consultation on the proposed justification process for the reuse of plutonium that the Government’s preferred option for managing the stockpile is to create MOX fuel for sale on the international markets. Lord Marland set that out during his time as Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Climate Change. In January 2011, he stated:

“If we have the biggest plutonium stock in the world, we must turn that liability into an asset...It is madness to have it sitting there if we can make it a non-cost exercise.”

In the same speech, he set out the importance of sending “a clear message to the people of Cumbria, because that is where the Mox plant would be located...”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 13 January 2011; Vol. 723, c. GC177.]

However, disappointingly, the overall illustrative timeline for plutonium management in the UK, as set out in the coalition Government’s consultation response on the long-term management of UK-owned separated civil plutonium, has not come to fruition. In fact, little movement has been made on the issue. Given the existence of the technology and the ability of the industry to provide such a facility, further delays should not be allowed. Time is of the essence. The longer we wait to make a decision on the issue, the more difficult it will become to implement.

Industry, investors, the supply chain, the workforce and the community in my constituency now require overdue clarity and certainty from the Government; I would be asking for the same clarity and certainty if my
party were in government. Understanding the Sellafield workforce and their role in our national story over the past 60 years is essential, and it has not been broadly understood by successive Governments, or in Whitehall.

Sellafield is unquestionably home to some of the most highly skilled, uniquely talented workers in the United Kingdom—and, in a nuclear industry context, the world. They are a knowledgeable, practical and pragmatic workforce who routinely work in some of the most challenging, high-risk environments anywhere on the planet. Make no mistake: our country’s ability to decommission Sellafield safely and to budget rests on the shoulders of that workforce, and, as such, they should be valued. Of course, improvements can and should be made to better utilise the workforce’s abilities—they would be the first to suggest that—but they are not the workforce that is described by the Department; they are not a feather-bedded, entitled, unproductive workforce. On the contrary, they mend the problems that politicians often create.

Those who visit Sellafield, as I believe the Minister has—I am grateful to her for taking such a close interest in these issues over a serious length of time—see that a political decision usually stands behind every decommissioning challenge that can be seen on the site, from the original Windscale pile chimneys and the legacy fuel issues created in part by the chaos brought about by the miners strikes of the 1970s to the closure of the Sellafield MOX plant in August 2011. I am tempted to write the political history of Sellafield, which is arguably more important than the technical or engineering history of the site, at least in so far as it can explain why the site is as it is today. At every turn, the Sellafield workforce have been at the forefront of those political decisions, bearing the brunt of the consequences, for good or for ill, always acting in the national interests and always in the national service.

The closure of the Sellafield MOX plant in August 2011 was accepted by the Sellafield workforce because they had been promised—I use that word precisely—that it would be replaced by a new plant, and that neither the workforce nor the community would be left to accept job losses as well as a lack of solution on the plutonium stockpile, of which we are essentially the custodians. The workforce are waiting for that trust to be repaid, and they are waiting for the solutions they were promised.

The Government recently introduced a programme of workforce reform at Sellafield, and I tabled a series of questions about that to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Those questions have been replied to, but in time-honoured fashion, they have not been answered, which is why I have sought a meeting with the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) on securing this debate. We share a great enthusiasm, as he said, for the enormous potential of the UK’s nuclear expertise in decommissioning, reuse and new nuclear. He is a keen advocate for his area, which includes both Sellafield and the potential new nuclear plant at Moorside. I pay tribute to all the amazingly talented engineers who work so hard at Sellafield and on the new project. He is exactly right that one of the first things I did on taking up my post was go to Sellafield to see for myself the incredible engineering feats, the imagination, the innovation and the hard work. It is absolutely superb. I hope I can reassure him that the workforce reform is indeed designed for hazard reduction and greater efficiency and is in no way designed to undermine the efforts of those at Sellafield who are working so hard. I will certainly write to him again, as he asked, to set that out in greater detail.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss and debate the important issue of the UK’s plutonium inventory. The material is largely the result of the ongoing reprocessing at Sellafield since the 1950s. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, I went up to the National Nuclear Laboratory and was impressed to see what they are doing there and to hear that they are 25 years ahead of the rest of the world in sorting, identifying, reusing and dealing with the legacy of nuclear that dates back decades. That is so impressive and is a real UK strength.

Demonstrating that we can address our own and others’ nuclear legacies is key to ensuring that the industry retains the support of the public as we move ahead with our new nuclear programme. It is imperative that we do not make the mistakes of the past but that we learn from our own and others’ nuclear history as we deliver a new generation of low-carbon nuclear power. The UK led the way on developing the world’s civil community. The Government can help to restore the compact by introducing a clear, coherent, timetabled plan for plutonium disposition.

The need for the Government to take a long-term view on plutonium stockpiles is of the utmost urgency. Given Britain’s commitment to new nuclear and the process in train to identify a site for the long-term geological disposal of radioactive wastes, these essential, long-term decisions can no longer be put off. They are, in fact, part of a holistic national solution. By investing in and adhering to a strategic plan to utilise Britain’s plutonium stockpile as an asset, we will not only create an economically beneficial solution to a no doubt complex issue, but further integrate nuclear research, knowledge and development in west Cumbria, thus continuing to establish the west coast of Cumbria, and indeed our country, as a centre of global nuclear excellence.

I am in no doubt that the Minister, the Department, my community, the Sellafield workforce and I all want the same thing, but it is essential that we agree on the how as well as the what. The Minister knows that I am filled with appreciation for her work, and I look forward to her reply.

11.14 am

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) on securing this debate. We share a great enthusiasm, as he said, for the enormous potential of the UK’s nuclear expertise in decommissioning, reuse and new nuclear. He is a keen advocate for his area, which includes both Sellafield and the potential new nuclear plant at Moorside. I pay tribute to all the amazingly talented engineers who work so hard at Sellafield and on the new project. He is exactly right that one of the first things I did on taking up my post was go to Sellafield to see for myself the incredible engineering feats, the imagination, the innovation and the hard work. It is absolutely superb. I hope I can reassure him that the workforce reform is indeed designed for hazard reduction and greater efficiency and is in no way designed to undermine the efforts of those at Sellafield who are working so hard. I will certainly write to him again, as he asked, to set that out in greater detail.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss and debate the important issue of the UK’s plutonium inventory. The material is largely the result of the ongoing reprocessing at Sellafield since the 1950s. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, I went up to the National Nuclear Laboratory and was impressed to see what they are doing there and to hear that they are 25 years ahead of the rest of the world in sorting, identifying, reusing and dealing with the legacy of nuclear that dates back decades. That is so impressive and is a real UK strength.

Demonstrating that we can address our own and others’ nuclear legacies is key to ensuring that the industry retains the support of the public as we move ahead with our new nuclear programme. It is imperative that we do not make the mistakes of the past but that we learn from our own and others’ nuclear history as we deliver a new generation of low-carbon nuclear power. The UK led the way on developing the world’s civil
nuclear industry, and I expect us to continue leading the way on dealing with our nuclear legacy, too. For that reason, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that managing our civil plutonium inventory remains a Government priority.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, dealing with our nuclear legacy comes with significant and complex challenges. Close collaboration between the Government and industry is essential to achieving a solution. Over the past decade the Government, supported by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, have developed the policy and strategy framework for managing the UK’s inventory of separated civil plutonium. We are working closely with the NDA to ensure the safe and secure storage of the material at Sellafield and to plan, develop and implement a management solution for separated civil plutonium in the UK until the inventory has been reduced to zero and is put beyond reach. A key focus of that strategy is hazard reduction, which means addressing Sellafield’s legacy facilities. Putting the material beyond use will take many decades, so we therefore need to ensure that all nuclear materials are stored in modern facilities that are safe and secure. A huge amount of work is already being done on that.

Since consulting on the issue in 2011, work has been under way to help us better understand the disposition options available. The Government commissioned the NDA to report on the latest round of evidence to enable the UK to move confidently into the programme’s implementation phase. The NDAs report was delivered quite recently, in December 2015, and gives us a much better understanding of the technical issues relating to all aspects of the lifecycle, including a regulatory review of licensability, along with establishing the likely costs and schedules to implement each option. Those options include immobilisation by using a hot isostatic pressing technique, which involves converting the inventory into a ceramic waste form suitable for disposal in the geological disposal facility—the hon. Gentleman knows that that facility is in our plans. The immobilisation option is important because, regardless of the overall solution for plutonium disposition, a proportion of the plutonium will have to be disposed of as it will be unsuitable for use as a fuel.

The reuse options considered include MOX in light water reactors as proposed by Areva. MOX in a CANMOX reactor as proposed by Candu and use in a PRISM fast reactor as proposed by GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy. The report also highlighted where further work is required to enable an informed decision to be made.

The NDA has been quite clear with the Government that for each of the options, there is insufficient understanding as yet to move confidently into an implementation phase at this stage. Significant further work must be undertaken to understand the technologies being proposed. The different technologies have varying degrees of maturity, and quite a bit more work is required to enable the UK ultimately to select and subsequently implement a preferred option. We must be mindful of the experience of others, looking internationally to help find a solution for the UK.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we want to learn the lessons from the US, which faces significant challenges involving a multi-million-dollar overspend in its MOX programme. Understanding that will be crucial to considering the full range of reuse and immobilisation options. That is why a decision on how to proceed cannot and will not be taken quickly. It is about making the right decision at the right time, underpinned by the right evidence. It is important to note that any decision will take many decades to implement, which is why a decision on plutonium disposition should not be made in isolation. There are interdependencies across the new nuclear build programme, geological disposal and national security outcomes.

The Government take the issue very seriously. Provision has been made in the NDA's budget to continue making meaningful progress on this important and complex issue. The Government are working with the NDA to scope out the next phase of research and development required to progress the decision by de-risking technology options, giving Government the confidence to move forward to a final solution.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that although the decision cannot be rushed, all the options being considered will lead to more job creation in his area and significant investment. That will create big opportunities for local communities. As we develop our wider innovation programme, we are also considering ways to support that work through various research facilities. The Government remain open to any credible option for managing the inventory, but of course it must offer the best value for money to the taxpayer. Only when the Government are confident that our preferred option could be implemented safely and securely with an eye to cost—that it is affordable and deliverable and offers value for money—will we be in a position to proceed. The Government remain committed to working collaboratively to find a solution that will benefit all.

In conclusion, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Copeland for his continuing co-operation and his collegiate reaction to these long-standing issues. I am happy to continue working with him in this area.
West Coast Rail Franchise

2.30 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the West Coast rail franchise.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Brady, for what is my first Westminster Hall debate of this new Parliament.

I should mention that I am the chair of the all-party group on the west coast main line. The group takes a keen interest in the line; we have met the operator and the franchisees, and recently we visited Euston station itself. I also thank and pay tribute to the West Coast Rail 250 group for its support and assistance, and for being a source of information. It is the secretariat to the all-party group and it has been of much use to us.

The forthcoming franchise is extremely important for the west coast rail line. The line is, in my view, the most important inter-city line in the country. It connects the great cities of our country—namely London, Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham—and it links many smaller cities and major towns on the west coast of the country. Of course, I could not neglect to mention my own constituency, the city of Carlisle, which is a key railway city. Indeed, there are four railway lines that connect into Carlisle: one going to the west coast of Cumbria; one going to Newcastle; there is, of course, the famous Settle to Carlisle line; and of course there is the inter-city connection between Glasgow and London. So, the west coast line is one of the most significant and indeed vital transport links for the west of the country.

The line was originally built between the 1830s and the 1880s. It was not built as one line; it was a series of lines that ultimately got connected together. That period was the key time for investment in the line, but between 1955 and 1975 most of the line was electrified. In total, there are about 700 miles of track.

After world war two, as we all know, the railway system went into decline. There was a lack of investment, a lack of interest in the network and a decline in passenger numbers. That was true for many rail lines across the country; many lines were shut and so were a number of stations. Fortunately, the inter-city connections continued. Even though they may have had issues, they remained in use.

Then we started to see the revival of the railways in the 1990s, with the introduction of the franchise arrangements, which remain the arrangements today. On the west coast, about 17 stations are under the franchisee, although Network Rail continues to manage three of the key stations, namely, Euston, Manchester Piccadilly and Glasgow Central. On top of that, there are a number of other stations that are not part of the franchise. From an employment point of view, the west coast rail company—effectively, Virgin Trains—employed just over 3,000 staff in March 2015.

We have seen a dramatic increase in passenger journeys. In the 18 years since the start of the franchise system, the number of annual passenger journeys in Britain has risen from 845 million in 1997-98 to 1.65 billion in 2014-15, which is a faster rise than for any other major European rail system. In the past three years on the west coast line itself, annual passenger journeys have gone up from 30.4 million to 34.5 million, so that from the start of April 2014 to the end of March 2015 4.3 billion passenger miles were travelled. Indeed, passenger journeys have grown by around 20% between 2010 and 2015.

The majority of the demand for rail travel on the west coast line is for journeys to and from London. There are around 300 train services every day on the west coast line, with journeys to and from London accounting for 63% of those services. Typically, journeys on the line are long-distance journeys, with approximately 60% of them being over distances greater than 100 miles. Of the journeys made, around 66% are for leisure, 23% for business and 11% for commuting purposes; many of the commuter journeys are made with season tickets.

The London terminus at Euston, which is obviously essential to the west coast line, is the sixth busiest station in the country, and outside London the stations at Birmingham New Street, Manchester Piccadilly and Glasgow Central are three of the four busiest stations in the country.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I was extremely interested to learn about the number of journeys and of passengers using this important line up the spine of the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that by about 2024 it is expected that capacity on the west coast main line will be 100% and bursting at the seams? That is why it is so important that we move ahead with building High Speed 2, to provide some extra passenger capacity.

John Stevenson: My right hon. Friend hits the nail on the head with regard to the key issue with HS2, which is capacity. He is absolutely right that on many parts of the west coast line capacity is already becoming an issue, and that situation will continue as we approach the 2020s. Therefore it is vital that we invest in the rail network and HS2 is very much part of that.

Funnily enough, the line is not just about trains and stations; it is also about the track itself. In recent years, we have seen significant investment—of almost £10 billion—in the track on the west coast line. That investment has led to a huge improvement in capacity, reliability and punctuality. As a user of the line myself, I have certainly seen significant improvements in the punctuality of the service, and in the level and quality of customer services provided at both stations and on the trains themselves. However, quite clearly there are still many issues that remain to be dealt with, one of which many colleagues will understand—wi-fi. Overall, however, there have been big improvements since the start of the franchise system.

Also, we must not forget the benefit that there is to the taxpayer from the franchise system. Between 2008 and 2015, the overall payment to the Exchequer from the franchisee was roughly £650 million and over the entire franchise period nearly £1 billion has been paid to the Exchequer. As for passenger satisfaction, in autumn 2015 overall journey satisfaction with the existing west coast franchise was 91%, which was 4% higher than the average for the long-distance sector. Clearly that is good, but there is also room for improvement.

Indeed, the areas where the west coast franchise could improve were identified by the Transport Focus group in its report. The group highlighted the areas that
passengers were most concerned about: availability of seating at stations; car parking facilities; luggage space on trains; toilet facilities; and of course value for money in the price of the tickets. Overall, therefore, comparing where we are today with where we were in 1997, when the franchise scheme started, I would say that the west coast service is much improved, but there is still room for further improvement.

Also, it would be neglectful of me if I were not to mention the aborted attempt at the franchise renewal a few years ago. Without doubt, that was a considerable setback for the Department for Transport and it will undoubtedly have put back investment and development of the service. I appreciate that we now have an interim arrangement under a direct award, which expires in April 2018. Clearly, that has been the short-term solution.

I also acknowledge the contribution that Virgin West Coast makes. It has done an excellent job. Quite clearly, it will be in competition with other rail transport companies for the next franchise, but at least it has set a benchmark that we can build upon.

There have been improvements within the direct award scheme, with investment in stations, the provision of wi-fi at stations and one or two other things. However, the situation is not the same as it would be with a full franchise; there has not been the same level of necessary improvements or the same commitment, which are what we wish to see.

I do not want to go into the many reasons why the previous franchise did not happen: we need to look forward and not to the past. Suffice it to say that I hope the Government have learned from the experience, and so far my contacts with the Government have been positive.

The really important thing is where we are today and how we can ensure that we get the new franchise right. It needs to be right for passengers.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Does he agree that some of the reported proposals, including reports that there might be cuts in services to stations such as Birmingham International, would have a detrimental effect on the west midlands economy and Birmingham International airport?

John Stevenson: One of the reasons for having this debate was so that hon. Members could have the opportunity to highlight key issues for their own area. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has been able to do so and I am sure that the Minister will be listening keenly.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): My hon. Friend is very kind. Birmingham International airport is in my constituency. Is my hon. Friend aware that a reduction in service at Birmingham International train station would threaten that regional airport? It is a significant international airport, serving a region the same size as Denmark, and it already does not receive a service from London in time for passengers to catch the early morning flights.

John Stevenson: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. Indeed, we must not lose sight of the fact that there should be integration within our transport system, between the railways, the airports and the road and bus networks.

The important thing about the new franchise is that we get it right. It needs to be right for passengers, fair for the taxpayer, right for the industry and right for those who work in the industry—we must not overlook their contribution to the network. Therefore, the level and quality of service, investment in all aspects of service and ticket pricing are some of the key issues. I am sure that other Members will have their own issues, but I want to concentrate on four in particular.

First, there is the customer and service level. It is often the small things that matter, particularly to passengers and customers, and there is key evidence of issues that customers want the forthcoming franchise to address. These include car parking—the pricing, the number of spaces and the availability at key times. Another issue is luggage and storage on trains. Many people have commented that the storage is at the end of each carriage and they would prefer it to be closer to where they are sitting. They have also commented that there should be more space for luggage. Toilet facilities and wi-fi clearly need improvement. Wi-fi has improved at stations, but there is definitely an issue—I speak from personal experience—on the trains themselves, and customers are keen to see wi-fi improved.

Then we have congestion. Carlisle, I have to confess, is a quiet station compared with many others, but at Euston there is what many call the Euston sprint—people charging for the train, sometimes in an unedifying manner. There is clearly room for improvement on that in the franchise in the future. Customers’ views and opinions need to be heard, and there needs to be an appropriate conduit between the customer—the passenger—and the train companies and, indeed, on into Government. In my own experience, customer care has been positive overall, but customer service questionnaires demonstrate that there is still a lot of room for improvement.

Then we have ticket pricing. What is the Government’s overall aim? What balance do the Government want to see between the taxpayer and the passenger? What about the link between the retail prices index and the consumer prices index? What about competition? Those issues need to be addressed in the forthcoming franchise. I appreciate that revenue raising and the balance between the taxpayer and the passenger are important for the Government, but they are also important for the passenger and the taxpayer.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on leading the charge on this issue. The things he has listed are best addressed if there is proper competition in the franchise process. Does he agree with me and the National Audit Office that unless the Government get at least three or four participants in the bidding process, there will be a risk of inadequate competition? Does he also agree that, although Virgin has given an adequate service—in some ways, a good one—the Government must ensure that it does not have too big an incumbency advantage in the bidding process?
John Stevenson: My hon. Friend makes two valid points. There must be competition. We need to encourage many different businesses to come in and challenge Virgin for the franchise, to ensure that we get the best possible franchise for the taxpayer and the passenger.

We need transparency and simplification. The ticket-pricing system needs to be easier for the consumer—the passenger—to understand. I accept that there are technological changes going on, and it would be interesting to hear from the Minister how she wants to drive them forward. I am old-fashioned, and when I go on the train I have my tickets in my hand, while many people get out their mobile phone. Such advancements are positive, but I am interested in the emphasis that the Minister wishes to place on them in the new franchise.

The third issue is clearly Euston station itself. As I have mentioned, it is the sixth busiest station in the country, and to a significant number of passengers it is the only station that matters. We have HS2 ahead, and there will be a huge change at Euston with the substantial development works there. How will the Government ensure that the works are done in a timely fashion, and what will they do regarding the certain disturbance over a long period? There will be an impact on timetabling and a restriction on the innovation that train companies can bring about, and there must be a question over the punctuality that services will be able to attain during that time. There will be a reduced number of platforms, which will clearly affect the next franchise. The customer—passenger—experience will be a concern, as usage could be affected. There is a commitment for the timetable to continue as it is, but if we get to a stage when trains are not arriving on time, there will be a danger that passengers start to look elsewhere—to other ways of getting to and from London. I am, therefore, very interested to hear what the Minister has to say about the proposed Euston development.

Then we come to station investment. I have talked about Euston. Clearly investment there is a key issue for many, but we must not forget the smaller towns and cities up and down the west coast line—for example Preston, Milton Keynes and my own city of Carlisle. Will the Minister confirm that the stations—I think there are 17 in total—will come under the control of the franchisee rather than of Network Rail? Will she also confirm that any leases that are produced between Network Rail and the franchisee will allow the maximum amount of investment and a high degree of flexibility? Most important, will she confirm that there will be a mechanism for the payment of residual value in the event of a change at the end of a franchise? The all-party group is very concerned about that, because in the last proposed franchise we had confirmation that a residual value clause would be incorporated into the agreement, but that turned out not to be the case. We are, therefore, seeking reassurance that such a mechanism will be included in this franchise. It has been mentioned in the past that the northern franchise has an element of that mechanism, but our investigations and discussions have shown that the present clauses are inadequate and need to be beefed up in the new franchise.

I firmly believe that, with a residual value clause and encouragement by the Government to invest in stations, we can go beyond the passenger rail experience to opportunities for business, retail and other such things. If I may use my own constituency and railway station as a good example, Carlisle is a prime centre for investment and a real opportunity for an ambitious franchisee. However, we need the mechanisms to be in place.

In conclusion, the key issues include Euston, the impact of HS2 on the franchise and what the Government intend to do about it. Further reassurance is needed that investment in the west coast line will be maintained even though a lot of money will be spent on the HS2 line, and the Minister must continue to ensure that Network Rail considers opportunities to increase capacity on the west coast line in addition to the increased capacity from HS2. More specifically, we need to put the consumer—the passenger—at the centre of the franchise, and pricing and customer service are important aspects of that.

For me, one of the most important things is station investment. We must not lose sight of the fact that the smaller stations up and down the west coast are equally important and matter to many people in different ways. I ask the Minister to undertake to include a residual value clause in the forthcoming franchise agreement; otherwise it will be a huge missed opportunity.

I await with interest the Minister’s comments, and her assurances that the upcoming franchise will lead to improvements in those areas and in the service. We must ensure that the west coast main line continues to play its part, and indeed improve, as one of the most important pieces of infrastructure in our country.

2.49 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is probably the second time that I have taken part in a Westminster Hall debate that you have chaired, Mr Brady, although we have known each other for a considerable time.

I will not take too long, but there are one or two issues that concern Coventry and investment there. As part of the consultation, it was suggested that the three trains an hour running through Coventry could be reduced to about two an hour. That could affect people going to work, as lots of people go to work in Coventry and lots of people from Coventry work outside it. It is important to think about that, if we are to line things up with high-speed rail, which will bypass Coventry. My experience is that if anyone is going to invest in the city, one thing they will ask about is the transport system, as well as such things as executive housing, the education system and the skill base. Transport is part of the whole package, and that is why I express concerns about high-speed rail and its impact on Coventry. We have in other places debated the issue of compensation for those affected, but that is part of another debate.

The intention is to reduce journey times between Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, and no one would quarrel with that, but we have to look at the impact on other areas, and I wonder how that fits into the Government’s proposals. Next year, they will set up the west midlands combined authority. It has been said that the combined authority will be an engine for economic growth in the region, but what about the impact of high-speed rail? If there is a reduction in the frequency with which trains go through Coventry and areas like it, the west midlands will certainly not gain too much out of that.
It is interesting to note that journeys to and from Coventry have tripled over the past decade, from 2.35 million in 2004-05 to 6,252,888 in 2014-15. That is a considerable increase by any stretch of the imagination. As part of the franchise, we should also look at the fare structure. It could be argued anecdotally, as it were, that it is cheaper to fly than to travel by train in the midlands, and that should be looked at—and it is not just about off-peak prices.

Mrs Spelman: The hon. Gentleman is right to mention Coventry’s position in relation to the new high-speed rail, and how that works with changes to west coast main line usage. HS2 will not be open until 2026; surely it is important to ensure that the west coast main line has the maximum capability, given that it is already at capacity, before the new service opens, so that the region, and Coventry in particular, are not compromised.

Mr Cunningham: I totally agree with the right hon. Lady. I know that she, along with her colleagues, takes a considerable interest in the welfare and prosperity of the west midlands. Earlier she raised a point about Birmingham airport; we should take a good look at the impact that high-speed rail could have on Birmingham airport and passengers. This is not necessarily a criticism, but the organisation of that airport needs to be looked at, from the point of view of passenger comfort. Passengers flying into or out of the airport have a considerable distance to go when they get off or go to the aircraft. It is quite a long walk, to say the least. The airport should look at how it organises things on behalf of passengers, whether they are going through customs or just coming back from a journey. While we all support the airport, we have to make it more passenger-friendly.

I link that with what I have been saying about the situation in the west midlands. The airport is part of the prosperity of the west midlands. Coventry airport, if I remember correctly, used to benefit from freight from Birmingham airport. Those are some of my concerns relating to how Coventry sees itself. I do not want to be too parochial, because at the end of the day we have to act in the best interests of the region, but those concerns have to be expressed.

I ask one final question, which I hope the Minister will answer. What has happened with and to the NUCKLE project? I am sure that some MPs with constituencies near mine share that concern. That project is important to the prosperity of not only Coventry but Nuneaton, and it seems to have come to a standstill. The Minister may know more about that than I do. It is vital that the line is looked at, because people have been waiting for it for 10 years. I have been involved in a number of delegations over the past decade to try to get that project off the ground. That is all linked to what I have said about Coventry station and the west midlands.

2.55 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) not only on securing this important debate, but on his chairmanship of the all-party group. He raises the profile of the line, which he described as being of national importance. It is important to his constituents in providing access to Manchester, the west midlands and our capital city. My constituency is much closer to London than his, but the west coast main line is equally important to Rugby. Like him, I am a regular user of it.

Rugby has excellent communication links, not least road links. We are at the crossroads of the UK motorway system. That fact led to the media identifying “motorway man” in the 2010 general election. He is a sales engineer or a sales manager who needs good access to the motorway network to carry out his business around the country. We have great road networks, and that has benefited our logistics industry. We are at the centre of the golden triangle where logistics companies want to locate themselves.

Our communications by road are good, but our rail links are equally important, because they provide Rugby with access to the north-west and, importantly, London and the south-east. The 50-minute journey time from Rugby station to Euston is vital for our local economy. Those things make Rugby an attractive business location, particularly in relation to sites in London and the south-east. The cost of premises and the cost of employing staff are lower in Rugby, but many businesses need good access to the capital for meetings and for accessing professional bodies. Our 50-minute journey time means that it is often quicker to get to central London from Rugby than it is from many places with a London postcode. We have that resource—it is a great asset to Rugby—and we want to keep it.

Rugby is growing very fast. We are just about to start the development of 6,200 new homes on the former Rugby Radio site. Immediately adjacent we have commercial development on the Daventry international rail freight terminal, which will provide for additional consumers on the railway line. The future of the west coast main line is important to Rugby. It is also important that the Government get the handling of the franchise right, especially in the context of the completion of the London to Birmingham phase of HS2, which should be delivered in 2026.

One or two people have said to me that consultation has already started, but the contract period will not start until April 2018, almost two years away. They say, “Why are the Government consulting so early? Why are we talking about this franchise now?” Given the history of the franchising process on the line, it is important that the process is thoroughly checked. The point has been made to me that the very last thing we need is a repeat of what happened with the previous allocation of the franchise. The Minister will be at pains to provide assurances that that will not happen this time.

The consultation document is looking for the views of passengers, businesses, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships so that priorities for improvement can be identified and to inform what the Department for Transport should include within its tender document. One concern that has already been referred to in the context of Birmingham airport and Coventry is contained in paragraph 3.17 of the consultation document. It refers to peak times where levels of service might not reflect demand and—and this is the bit that those of us who have read the document are concerned about—it says: “there may be opportunities to adjust the level of service at stations which might enable wider benefits to be delivered elsewhere.”

What might that mean? The document goes on:
“For example reducing the number of stops required at intermediate stations”. That is a matter of concern for my constituents in Rugby and for those in Coventry.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman has touched on a vital point that I mentioned earlier. I am sure he will support and agree with me. Coventry, as he knows, is making a bid for the city of culture. It is not only vital that we get the traffic flow at the airport right, but equally important that we get the franchise right in relation to the frequency of trains because, as he knows, we can get a lot of tourism as a result, and Coventry has got a big tourist attraction.

Mark Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This is a matter of concern. In fact, the West Midlands Integrated Transported Authority, which represents the seven metropolitan authorities in the west midlands, has voiced concerns in respect of Wolverhampton, Coventry, Sandwell and Dudley. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) highlighted, the point has been picked up by the operator of Birmingham airport as a possible threat to the region’s aviation connectivity, leading in turn to a threat to the west midlands’ economic development and levels of employment.

The same concerns apply to Rugby. It is of course very easy to reduce journey times between major conurbations and reduce the numbers of people on the trains by having those trains ceasing to stop at intermediate stations. I am a regular rail user and I can see changes that can increase capacity. The first, which has substantially been done, is to increase the length of trains. We have 11-car Pendolino trains, but a substantial number of nine-car Voyager diesel trains remain running. Replacing those and getting them up to 11 cars is important.

Secondly, the conversion from first class to standard class has partly happened. This was spoken about several years ago, but when I go to Euston station to catch a train to Rugby, I regularly walk past four pretty empty first-class carriages to get into one of the five or seven standard-class carriages.

Thirdly, more effective use of pricing can be used so that trains in the middle of the day take some of the load. I regularly come down from Rugby on the 12.23 and I often sit in a carriage that I think holds about 80 passengers with no more than a dozen or so. So additional use of pricing can be made to spread the load.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said that he would not be too parochial, but I will be, if I may, because Rugby has a very active rail users group. I meet them regularly and I am grateful to them for their observations. They have made clear to me some of the things that they would like to see, and I know they will be attending various consultation events, one of which will take place at Rugby station on 23 June. It is very important for Rugby rail users that there is no diminution of services at Rugby, especially not as regards the excellent fast service to Euston to which I have referred.

For some time there have been concerns about a recent reduction in direct services to the north-west, which historically took the Trent Valley line. Many of those trains no longer stop at Rugby, which means that a Rugby passenger wishing to travel to the north-west has to change at either Coventry or Birmingham International. Given the importance of Rugby as a commercial centre, as I have mentioned, it will be increasingly important for us to have links to the northern powerhouse.

The consultation will refer to stations, and Rugby station is one of those included in the franchise. The substantial recent increase at Rugby is starting to put pressure on the facilities at Rugby station. We had a fantastic station upgrade, which was completed in around 2008. The upgrade of the west coast main line gave our station a transformed appearance and provided a much better gateway to Rugby. Previously, people arriving would have had to walk down a long dingy tunnel. Now we have a new ticket hall, new catering facilities and a multi-storey car park. However, our parking facilities have not kept pace with the growth in the line.

It is often not possible to find a space in the car park on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. It is less of a problem on a Monday or Friday when there are fewer commuters and people are more likely to be working at home or perhaps taking a day’s holiday. So we need additional parking facilities, although I would add that we might be able to make better use of the existing space if the indicator boards at Rugby station, which have been out of order for quite some time, were repaired. I have raised that with Virgin, and perhaps a note in Hansard might push that along and get it sorted so that people can draw up at one of the three car parks in Rugby and have confidence that there is a space for them.

We need additional car parking spaces, but we could also do with additional investment in the road network around Rugby station. There is a particular issue with congestion around peak times. People have been known to be late for a train as a consequence of the congestion around the station, which is very much caused by the single running on Mill Road, a road running underneath the station that is controlled by traffic lights. That really needs to be upgraded to two-way running. It is a real shame that the opportunity to improve that was missed when the railway line was realigned in the west coast main line upgrade. It certainly needs doing.

Partly as a consequence of the congestion around the station, there has been recent talk of a possible parkway station just outside Rugby on the Northampton loop of the west coast main line, which would be two or three miles away from Rugby. Frankly, I cannot see the point in Rugby having two stations two or three miles apart. I and I think most of my constituents would much rather see investment in the infrastructure around the station, giving better road access and the additional parking to which I have referred.

On the services that Rugby receives, there is a particular issue with Saturday evening services from Euston station. The last train to Rugby from Euston on a Saturday evening is at 21.23. That of course means it is not possible for my constituents to attend a performance at a theatre in London and catch the train home. They have to stay overnight or alternatively, as my wife regularly does, come down for a matinee, but people should be able to catch the last train back in the evening.

Of course, when people do take late train services, the trains are slowed down and take longer. The last train on a Saturday leaving Euston at 21.23 takes 1 hour and 21 minutes. The last two trains on a weekday are at...
We have heard quite a bit about HS2. I do not think it is possible to consider the future of the west coast main line without some reference to HS2. It is vital that even when investment starts to be made in HS2 money continues to be spent on the west coast main line. What we do not want is a Cinderella line that gets forgotten while the all-new sexy high-speed rail is developed.

In terms of general improvements, my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle has spoken about improvements needed at Euston station. I am very familiar with the Euston sprint. The concourse is small and people race to the train. Earlier notice of the platform allocated to a train would be helpful. I share my hon. Friend’s concerns about reductions in space available at Euston while the construction phase of the high-speed rail is undertaken.

Mrs Spelman: At the other end of the line the construction of the new parkway station at Birmingham International will be one of the earlier phases of HS2 construction so does my hon. Friend agree it is important that the Department for Transport looks at the compromised access at Birmingham International railway station throughout the construction work, which is scheduled to last at least five or six years and will involve major changes to the road infrastructure as well as the railways?

Mark Pawsey: Of course. People understand that development entails some disruption, but it is important that the disruption is not excessive and does not outweigh the advantages of what might be coming later on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle spoke about the need for better wi-fi and better mobile phone signals, which involves investment on the track. There is also a need for more flexibility between the tickets of the operators on the line. London Midland also operates on the line, and occasionally it is difficult to transfer a ticket between one operator and another. Occasionally, when people have bought a ticket from the existing operator, Virgin, and want to upgrade it, they cannot do so. They have to throw the old ticket away and buy a new one. It would seem to make sense if someone who wanted to change to a peak train could simply pay the difference, rather than having to buy a wholly new ticket.

An efficient west coast main line is vital to the economy in my constituency. We have been well served by the existing operator in recent years, but it is vital to make certain that the new franchise will enable my constituents to continue to enjoy a good service and good facilities on the line.

3.10 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on bringing forward this timely debate.
refurbished, and the turnaround time is incredible. I make a wee plea to the Government and any of the train companies that are listening to bear Wabtec in mind.

When it comes to reducing journey times to Scotland, it is imperative that rail upgrades north of Crewe should tie in with the planned upgrades for HS2. At present, the planned high-speed classic compatible trains will actually run slower when they are in the existing train network north of Crewe, because they are designed fundamentally for the high-speed infrastructure. Previously, Ministers have told me that that would be addressed in the next investment phase for Network Rail. Will the Minister confirm that the improvements north of Crewe, which should clearly benefit the hon. Member for Carlisle and his constituents, will be taken on board in the Network Rail investment phase? Without that investment, the current journey time of four and a half hours will be really difficult to get down to the predicted three hours and 40 minutes—the stated post-phase 2 journey time to Glasgow. Otherwise, it seems to be a matter of the timetable that clearly exercises other hon. Members; and I can understand why they are fighting for their constituents, to make sure they do not lose out on services this year.

I want to comment briefly on the recent ScotRail franchise, which has been awarded by the Scottish Government. I suggest that it contains some of their asks for the forthcoming west coast main line franchise. The franchise, which was awarded to Abellio, confirmed that the living wage will be payable to all staff and contractors. There were no compulsory redundancies, and pensions and travel rights were protected. There is free wi-fi in all trains—wi-fi has already been mentioned in the debate—and upgraded rolling stock. Also, Abellio relocated its headquarters to Scotland. I am not saying that that would be an ask, but, again, if the winner of the west coast franchise wants to relocate its headquarters to Scotland, it will be very welcome.

In answer to an oral question I asked in the Chamber, the Secretary of State advised me that the Scottish Government could learn good practice from the UK Government, but I beg to differ, given that the ScotRail Abellio franchise was awarded in October 2014, with the bidding process starting just after the previous west coast main line franchises. At that time, the Labour party called on the Scottish Government to halt the ScotRail franchise process, on the basis that some unspecified powers might come to Scotland after the Smith commission.

Rather than proceeding with a bid that allowed new investment, new ticketing, new jobs and a possible profit share, the Scottish Government were asked to do nothing but extend existing arrangements—which would have prevented that investment. For a franchise to work, there must be some form of security as to duration, and that is why it was important to go ahead with it. Under Labour’s plans, we would have been left in limbo until at least the year 2018, and more likely 2019. Actually, by then we will be halfway through the Abellio franchise, which is allowing continuing investment at the moment. Also, now that we have additional powers under the Scotland Act 2016 to allow a public sector bid, it is possible to plan for that process, for when the Abellio franchise comes to an end, which will be in 2022 or 2025.

To go back to the main thrust of the debate, the new west coast main line franchise must have Scotland at its heart, and accordingly it must have reduced journey times to Scotland. That means marrying the new franchise to the strategic rail investment programme. It also means involving the Scottish Government.

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): We have about 40 minutes for the three Front-Bench winding-up speeches, and perhaps a brief comment from the hon. Gentleman who moved the debate. I trust the Front-Bench spokesmen to co-operate with each other to ensure that that happens.

3.19 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I always try to co-operate with the Chair and make sure to keep to the point, Mr Brady.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on securing this important debate. It is always good to start these debates with points of agreement, and he made a number of good points. He said that this was a vital development for the west coast; I absolutely agree. He discussed the need to improve seating, toilets, luggage space and value for money for consumers and users, as well as parking and other facilities that people need to use the train network effectively. He rather skimmed over the franchise bid process—he went past it in his own version of the Euston sprint—but he can rest assured that I will cover that in a little more detail; not too much, but a wee bit. He mentioned what he described as the small things, although actually they are big things, as I think he knows; as he said, they are important to people. Unless we get the big things right—the developments at Euston station, which he referred to, and the franchise—those other things will be much more difficult to tackle.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) rightly discussed the need for a better passenger experience, the effect on Coventry and Birmingham and the need to ensure that the Government are taking into account the connections required. That must happen all along the line from Euston to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) rightly pointed out that the franchise must be handled right, and I will come to that point. He also discussed the need for new trains. As we have seen, the SNP Scottish Government’s franchise deal includes new trains and new stations across Scotland as part of the arrangement. There are lessons to be learned there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) also mentioned the franchise. He talked about the knock-on effects, which are very important, and he made the great point about the cost to the public being equivalent to the cost of putting in place the wi-fi that is currently missing from passengers’ journey experience. He spoke about the ability to put into practice innovations, such as audio-visual accessibility, that make a huge difference to the travelling public who may need assistance. I underline his call for the Minister to update us on the commitments made during the direct award; I hope that we will hear from her on that. It would be remiss of me not to underline the great work done by Wabtec in his constituency on refurbishing rolling stock.
The west coast line is important to Scotland. Five Scottish stations are affected—Lockerbie, Carstairs, Motherwell, Glasgow and Edinburgh—so it is important that the Scottish Government have a say in the franchise process. I was pleased to see the Minister nodding when that came up earlier—I hope we will get a commitment from her on that. Passengers must have a safe, fast, frequent, reliable and punctual service that connects Scotland to London and the intermediate locations that have been mentioned, with on-board facilities and fares that attract passengers to the rail network and retain them.

Indeed, the UK Government can take lessons from the SNP Scottish Government on how to conduct a franchise process while offering passengers a fair deal on ticket prices and fares. After the shambles of the 2012 franchise bidding process, the UK Government must ensure that the next franchise process has the public’s confidence and that it will be able to deliver value for money for passengers. The cancelled franchise process for the west coast main line brought the whole franchise bidding process into disrepute, leaving the public with no confidence in the Government to conduct major rail franchise bids. In fact, the Public Accounts Committee said in 2013 that “the Department did not apply basic processes properly.”

Crucially, the Committee also said:

“This is not the first time we have come across this situation.”

The Laidlaw inquiry found that there was a damning failure and that the public were left with a lack of confidence. That cannot be allowed to happen with this franchise.

The west coast main line serves five stations in Scotland, as I have said, and is one of the main routes that links passengers in Scotland with Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London. At the time of the cancelled process, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun mentioned earlier, the Scottish Government were going through their own franchise process for ScotRail, which had to be put on hold with absolutely no notice to Ministers in the Scottish Government. Keith Brown, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary, said:

“We had no advance notice of this decision being made. Obviously it does have implications for the line itself...what I would like to do is be involved in that discussion with the UK government to say what is best for rail users in Scotland.”

That is a fair request.

John Stevenson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair request to the UK Government; may I make a fair request to the Scottish Government? Carlisle station is a station for the Scots as much as for the English. If the opportunity arises for investment in the station from the Scottish Government, will he support that?

Drew Hendry: Absolutely. I hope the Minister will act on the hon. Gentleman’s promotion of Carlisle by committing to look into connecting the new Borders railway with Carlisle. Perhaps that is something we could investigate as well. It would benefit many more people.

As I said, at the time of the franchise process, there was no communication with the Scottish Government. On the basis of the Minister’s comments, I am hopeful that that will change in future years.

As for the passenger experience, people in the 21st century have a right to enjoy a train journey. There ought to be a focus on working with others to deliver improvements to stations and to the passenger experience. The points that the hon. Member for Carlisle made when he spoke about improving the passenger experience are all vital to ensuring that overcrowding is reduced, that ticketing is sorted out properly and that integrated journeys are increasingly facilitated across all the stations in England and across the border into Scotland as well.

The UK Government should ensure that the new franchisee makes fares affordable across the piece. The Scottish Government have already taken action to ensure that fares are affordable across the Scottish rail network, by ensuring that their new franchisee will continue to limit regulated peak fare increases to the level of the retail prices index. Regulated off-peak fares will also be limited to increases of 1% below RPI for the lifetime of a 10-year franchise. The Scottish Government are making the best of the system that the UK Government continue to persist with. The Conservative UK Government introduced railway franchising in the 1990s, and the legislation precludes any public sector organisation from bidding to operate a railway service. No such barrier applies to state-backed organisations from Europe or elsewhere. That is patently unfair, so I hope we can look at how we can adjust that.

The SNP tabled a new clause in the Scotland Bill that would have devolved rail services in Scotland, giving Scottish Ministers full powers and flexibility to decide who would run such services. However, like every other SNP amendment to the Scotland Bill, it was voted down by MPs. The new clause also sought to ensure that the provisions of the Railways Act 1993 allowed direct awards to be made, to the full extent possible under European law, for the operation of rail passenger services such as the ScotRail Caledonian Sleeper.

As a result of the franchise deal in Scotland, passengers and staff will enjoy an enhanced range of benefits, with advance fares between Scottish cities starting at £5, a commitment to pay at least the real living wage—the one applied in Scotland—to all staff and subcontractors, at least 100 apprenticeships and a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies.

David Mowat: I was waiting to see whether the hon. Gentleman would address an issue that I am interested in. One day HS2 or a high-speed line will go to Scotland. Do the Scottish Government have a position on whether they would prefer that line to go up the west or the east coast?

Drew Hendry: At the moment, the Scottish Government’s position is that we must be included in the discussions. The UK Government have brought forward no plans to ensure that we are connected by HS2. It is vital to us that the routes that connect Birmingham and the central belt in Scotland are electrified immediately or as quickly as possible. As for the high-speed line, it is very difficult for me to give the hon. Gentleman a basis for our policy without seeing UK Government Ministers’ plans, because we have to scrutinise them to decide what is best for Scotland.

Rail staff pensions and travel rights are protected under the Scottish franchise. Crucially—this has come up a number of times—to make sure that we are connected
and do business properly, there will be free wi-fi on all trains. That is often missing on journeys down here. There will be a new approach to cycling, with more than 3,500 parking spaces and bike hire at a number of stations. Eighty new trains are due to arrive at the start of December 2017, and there will be 23% more carriages across the network.

As I said earlier, the west coast main line affects Scotland. I mentioned the five stations. Passengers must have fast, frequent, reliable and punctual services connecting Scotland to London. The UK Government must commit to ensuring that the Scottish Government are much more involved in the future franchise.

3.30 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I thank the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) for securing this crucially important debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber—

Drew Hendry: Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey.

Andy McDonald: I beg your pardon. I am going to talk about HS2 in my speech—it has been touched on already—

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Briefly.

Andy McDonald: Very briefly.

May I also briefly pay tribute to Mr Neil Caulfield, who tragically passed away last week? He was a wonderful Clerk to the HS2 Committee. He was wonderfully helpful and professional, and we will miss him. I pay tribute to him and to all the Clerks who support us through this work.

The west coast main line is the backbone of Britain’s railways. It services great cities and towns in England, Wales and Scotland. The issues raised today are vital to many passengers, as more than 34 million journeys a year are made on the service and almost 7 billion passenger miles are travelled. As the hon. Member for Carlisle said, the west coast franchise, which is currently operated by Virgin, ends in April 2018, and the Department is running a competition to find an operator for the next franchise. Before looking to what the Government should seek from the operator of the next franchise, I would like to secure assurances from the Minister that there will be no repeat of the franchising fiasco of 2011-12. The Department conducted a competition and announced that FirstGroup had been awarded the franchise before having to cancel the competition and subsequently award it to Virgin at a not insignificant cost to the taxpayer. That caused a great deal of confusion. The railway industry needs to be able to have confidence in the mechanisms of contracting. We simply cannot have a recurrence of that debacle.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Euston station, which is considered to have particular problems. We have heard that it is often overcrowded and difficult to navigate. It is awkward to buy tickets, and there is a short time between announcement and departure. People speak of the unseemly scrum once the information appears on the screens. In its February 2016 report, “InterCity West Coast rail: what passengers want”, Transport Focus recite passengers describing the experience as “stressful and unpleasant”. The national rail passenger survey of west coast passengers in part reflects that, with a rating of 11 percentage points below average.

The good news for passengers at Euston is that it will be redesigned to become a modern, easy-to-navigate, integrated station. The bad news is that things will probably get worse before they get better. I am pleased that the Government have given assurances to Camden Council about the £2.25 billion redevelopment of Euston proposed by Labour, consequent on the passage of the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill. When the station is completed, passengers will experience less crowding and improved connectivity among rail, bus and taxi services. Routes for walking and cycling through the local area will be created. That will go some way to addressing passengers’ concerns, but it is often the case with major station improvements—we see this at the moment at London Bridge—that passengers are significantly disrupted and inconvenienced during the period in which the work is taking place. I would like some assurances from the Minister about those matters.

Sir Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary, is currently analysing HS2 to trim costs and gauge whether the £55 billion project can keep within budget. There have been rumours that the Government might entertain plans to alter the route of HS2 or their plans for an integrated Euston station, and instead have the high-speed trains run only to Old Oak Common. That would put a great deal of stress on Crossrail, which was not planned to include that extra capacity. I must admit that I find it strange that, after Report and Third Reading, and given the exhaustive and exhausting legislative process for HS2 to date, the Government are again having to re-assess it. Although close attention to and scrutiny of cost is absolutely vital, I am concerned that what appears to be a comprehensive review of key issues within HS2 runs the risk of undermining confidence in the Government’s capacity to progress the project as planned and agreed. Will the Minister clarify what Sir Jeremy is considering? If the plans for an integrated Euston station are still on track, what will be done to mitigate the impact on west coast services, given that the number of platforms available at Euston to the west coast service will reduce from 18 to 11? Once it is up and running, HS2 will provide extra capacity, relieve congestion on the line and improve passenger experiences. Those are some of the many benefits of HS2.

The hon. Member for Carlisle spoke about fares and ticketing, which are a common source of frustration for passengers, who too often feel they get poor value for money from train operating companies. One of the consequences of privatisation is that we were left with the most expensive and confusing ticketing structure in Europe. Many passengers struggle to understand fare structures and pricing; the difference in cost between tickets strikes people as illogical. The discrepancy between fares, especially if someone needs to travel at short notice—as might be the case for a family funeral—often leaves passengers feeling that the train operating companies have ripped them off.

Compared with the national average, west coast performs relatively well on value for money—however, that is against an exceedingly low baseline of just 48%. Frustrations over fare structure and pricing are common passenger complaints. There is more that the next franchise holder...
can do in that regard, including simplifying fare structures, making the purchasing experience less complex and more transparent, lessening the cost discrepancies between similar journeys, and allowing passengers to find the best tickets available for their journey.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** One of the reasons why the fare structure is complicated and expensive is that, over the years, successive central Governments have gradually reduced the subsidy for fares.

**Andy McDonald:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. There is always a balance between fares and subsidy, and Governments of every colour have to struggle with that. On that very point, there are certainly improvements to be made, but I fear that as long as the Government persist with an exclusively privatised rail network, the feeling that passengers are receiving poor value for money will persist, and understandably so. Virgin runs one of the better services in the country on the west coast, but it is a poor comparison with our recent experience of when the public sector was presented with the opportunity of running passenger services. We need only to compare Virgin’s receipt of £2.5 billion in direct subsidy, and the £500 million it paid out in dividends between 1997 and 2012, with the performance of Directly Operated Railways between 2009 and 2014, which ran on a much lower subsidy. Under public operation, the east coast returned the highest level of premium to the Government—over £1 billion—while achieving passenger satisfaction ratings that surpassed all other long-distance operators. The public are absolutely right when they say that rail should be in the public sector—they have good reason to do so.

Commuters and passengers desire free and decent wi-fi on trains; it is an important matter for them. We often get free wi-fi when we buy cup of coffee, but people who spend a fortune on a train ticket may have to rely on an unreliable wi-fi service. A good service is clearly beneficial for those people—both for leisure purposes and for conducting business as they travel. One hopes that attention will be paid to that.

The hon. Member for Carlisle spoke about the potential for a residual value mechanism, which would reward train companies for investing in things such as stations, where the return on their investment would go beyond the period of the franchise. I think the hon. Gentleman hoped that that would be a way to ensure better long-term thinking and investment, which is a reasonable point, but I caution against over-eagerness for the idea, because improving stations should not depend only on train companies deciding that there is an overwhelming case for them to make significant profits. Train operators do not have a great record of investing their own capital in stations, and increasing residual value mechanisms might make it harder for a national public operator or local authorities to improve facilities later.

The franchising system has failed to deliver clean, safe, accessible and properly staffed stations in too many areas, and tweaking the arrangements is not the best or most cost-effective way of making services better for passengers. I trust that the Minister will deal with the issues and concerns mentioned and, with that, I bring my remarks to a close.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Clare Perry):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on securing the debate and on presenting a factual and detailed set of arguments. I also commend him on the work he has done in chairing the west coast main line all-party group, ably supported by West Coast Rail 250.

As my hon. Friend knows, because he welcomed me there, I have visited Carlisle station several times. It is more cathedral than railway station, and one of the most astonishing architectural gems I have seen on the network—I speak without hyperbole. His plans to improve the car parking, access and links are incredibly good. The station even has a putting green, which is an amazing thing to see, as well as many other good services, so it is a wonderful place. I take on board the point about Borders railway, and am interested in looking into it.

I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions. We heard the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) talk about the importance of midlands services and local connectivity; he is a great advocate of the NUCKLE scheme, as I am. I was pleased to put the spade in the ground for and open the Bermuda Park station—a critical part of the scheme. We await further details from Network Rail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) talked about the vital connectivity of his city and what that does for the local economy. I will add my voice to his in writing to the company about the announcement boards; people have a right to know when their trains are going, and from which platform.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) will be pleased to know that Stagecoach, one of the companies operating the franchise, is a proud Scottish company, headquartered in Perth. His points about the cross-border relevance of the franchise were absolutely spot-on. In fact, my most recent visit to Carlisle was to look at first hand at the Lamington viaduct, where, during the storms, there was a serious wash-out that flooded large parts of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle. That was a serious engineering challenge, but Network Rail rose magnificently to the occasion and restored the link. It got the lines operating again, restoring not only the inter-city and cross-border services, but the vital commuter services between Carlisle, Lockerbie and other parts of the region.

I reassure the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who speaks for the Scottish National party on transport matters, and everyone else present that the Department has absolutely learned lessons on the franchising process. Clearly, there was a problem, and there were serious questions to be answered. We strongly believe—as did the previous Labour Government for 13 years—that franchising is the way to deliver improvements on the railways. I have had the pleasure of letting the east coast franchise, the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises and, most recently, the Greater Anglia franchise, which is about to be announced. In those franchises, hon. Members can see the absolute, laser-like focus on passenger-effectiveness and quality of service. Furthermore, in the case of the east coast franchise, the service is returning more money to taxpayers than ever happened under Directly Operated Railways.
Drew Hendry: On the ability of companies to bid for a franchise, the Minister says that the Department has learned lessons; does she agree that there is a place for public sector bids, and will she look at allowing Scotland to receive them?

Claire Perry: I am agnostic on such things, but I can see no benefit in that. I do not know who in my Department the hon. Gentleman thinks would do a better job of running the west coast railway than those who do so now. I remind him that before privatisation, 14 trains a day ran between London and Manchester; 47 brand-new trains now run, with fantastic on-board services, of which we have all availed ourselves. I cannot see why he is so obsessed with the idea of civil servants running companies. The west coast case is a good example of how the private sector has invested.

Before I move on to the bulk of my speech, I want to associate myself with the comments of the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), on the tragic loss of the Clerk to the HS2 Committee. It was an absolute tragedy, and we would all want to pass on our condolences to his family, and to put on record what a wonderful job he and that Committee did in very difficult circumstances.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle said, the west coast franchise has been a real success story; for example, we have seen a big increase in passenger numbers, a big improvement in passenger satisfaction, and capacity increase by more than 2,000 seats a day. The franchise is also leading the way with automatic delay repay, so people who buy a ticket on the west coast trains website and find that their train has been delayed do not have to do anything: they automatically get a refund if the train is delayed by more than 30 minutes. That is an excellent piece of passenger-facing innovation. The franchise has also put free wi-fi into 17 stations—I will talk about wi-fi on trains in a moment—and several other obligations have been delivered, or are in the process of being delivered. To reassure Members who asked about this, the company is replacing self-service machines, improving concourse and ticket-retailing facilities, upgrading waiting rooms and loos in many stations, and putting in about 350 new cycle racks. About £20 million is being spent along the route.

David Mowat: The Minister mentioned the automatic repayment system for delays, which is a good thing at one level, but the risk is that it might cause defensive timetabling. Companies have no incentive to take that extra few minutes off the journey time. Will she give us some assurance that that is not happening?

Claire Perry: Yes, I absolutely will. When any service that is this busy tries to stretch out timetables to avoid paying compensation, it simply creates more disruption, given how complicated the routes are. The company has no incentive to monkey with the timetable in order to avoid its compensation payment obligations. Furthermore, the company, in common with all train operating companies, receives money from Network Rail in the case of a Network Rail cause of failure, so again, properly, that money should be paid out to customers.

The improvement in the conversion of rolling stock has been mentioned. The company has been taking out first-class seating to include more standard-class seats, which is important. Those services can be very crowded, particularly in the shoulders—the times around the peaks.

David Mowat: I thank the Minister for giving way again. Will she give an assurance that, if it were possible for whichever company wins the franchise to take five minutes off the journey time to Warrington, for example, there would be no defensive timetabling, penalties, or other disincentives to stop that? That is important to making progress.

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend’s point about avoiding defensive timetabling is absolutely right. I will come on to talk about how everyone can make their important proposals for the new franchise. We want the franchise due to start in 2018 to put the customers on the route absolutely at the heart of the service, continuing some of the innovation and progress that has been delivered. We know that we need more capacity on the route, better value for money, improved punctuality—it is improving, but it is not good enough—and better management of disruption. By the way, those are things we want, and are contracting for, right across the country.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Occasionally—I do not want to exaggerate—a hold-up between Birmingham and Euston seems to stop the whole line. I do not understand that, and we should have a better method of dealing with hold-ups. If there is an accident on the line involving an individual, there should be another way to proceed without necessarily creating hold-ups. Also, while I am on my feet, I congratulate the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on securing the debate—it was remiss of me not to do that earlier.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman illustrates a point that has been made well. Part of the reason why we need HS2 so badly is that capacity is so tight on the route. If there is a hold-up, there are few places that can take the additional services. On any tight route, whether on the west coast or in other parts of the country, disruption spreads quickly—the disruption simply cannot be absorbed, because the timetabling is so tight.

The public consultation has been launched. It sets out the Government’s vision for this franchise, how they can continue to support investment in vital cities right across the UK and build on current levels of customer satisfaction, and how the operator can do more to provide better information and train services.

A very legitimate question that is asked in the consultation is causing alarm and has been raised several times. It is right to ask people, communities and local authorities what sorts of trade-offs they want. Do they want faster journey times? Do they want more connectivity? We in Horseferry Road could sit and design timetables that look perfect on paper, but unless they deliver what is required on the ground—a train service that works for those who use it and maximises the economic potential of transport, which are things that have to be pulled through locally—we will not be doing a service to the communities that we serve. Questions such as, “What would a reduced service look like?” are genuinely questions; there is no vision or master plan. We want as many people as possible to help answer these questions, and those trade-offs are vital.
The consultation has started and is on gov.uk. We regard the Scottish and indeed Welsh Governments as vital partners in that; the service of course links very much to the north Wales service as well.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the Minister for being generous and allowing me to come back in. I take at face value her commitment to working with the Scottish Government. Will she look at the improvements made to smart ticketing through CalMac, the popular public sector winning bidder for the ferry franchise?

Claire Perry: I am always happy to look at things that happen on ferries, because I represent one of the most landlocked constituencies in Britain, so it is always novel to do so. I will come on to smart ticketing, which the hon. Gentleman knows is a particular passion of mine.

Alan Brown: I thank the Minister for giving way, especially as she was moving on to another point. I asked earlier about the commitment on journey times in the existing franchise, which was supposed to look at improving journey times in Scotland. That is clearly a massive issue, and I remind her to give us an update on that.

[Claire Perry in the Chair]

Claire Perry: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

Absolutely, and looking at how existing commitments to journey time improvements can be met is part of the current programme.

I wanted to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle that during the public consultation, we will go out and talk to as many people as possible. We will hold a meeting at Carlisle station tomorrow from 3.30 pm until 5 o’clock. Perhaps he will encourage his constituents to come along and see some of the proposals and have a conversation with officials.

I will deal briefly with fares and on-board service. Although this franchise has some of the most reasonable fares in the country, particularly for tickets bought in advance, it also has some expensive walk-up fares. The most important thing is that we have capped fares at inflation for the duration of this Parliament, at a cost to the public purse of £750 million, which will save the average season ticket holder around £425 over the duration of this Parliament, at a cost to the public purse of £750 million, which will save the average season ticket holder around £425 over the Parliament. That is absolutely right. However, we will ask the next franchise holder how fare structures could be met. I have been keen for bidders to propose options that allow people who work part-time or multi-buy discount tickets. We have perhaps two or three days a week—to buy more cost-effective tickets or multi-buy discount tickets. We have specifically asked for that in franchise competitions, and we plan to do so in this one as well.

Wi-fi has come up several times. I was delighted to be the Minister to announce that all trains, with the exception of those that are being phased out, will have free on-board wi-fi by the end of 2018, and this franchise will be no exception. It already has a good wi-fi service in certain classes, but it is not free on all services, and it absolutely should be. I take on board the comments that my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle made about improved luggage and seating arrangements, which is another thing to feed in.

Mark Pawsey: I understand that wi-fi requires line-side investment. Will that take place at the same time?

Claire Perry: That is an important question. We can have as-good-as-we-can-get connections right now, but there are troughs and blind spots, and we are working with industry, on a TOC-by-TOC basis, to improve those connections, so there are no not spots along train routes.

HS2 will clearly have a major impact on this line. It will add much-needed capacity and will have a very positive impact for customers who are looking to travel quickly between cities. It is of course a vital programme. We will look to appoint franchisees, both in this competition and in the west midlands, that can work with the HS2 operators in the run-up to HS2 opening, and we want the competitions to procure franchisees that can work with HS2 and Network Rail during the construction works. I have to say that the lessons learned from London Bridge are scarred on my ministerial portfolio.

Andy McDonald: Where?

Claire Perry: They are well concealed. No one correctly estimated quite how tough it is to do major improvement works on a very crowded and highly operational railway. Lessons have absolutely been learned, and will be applied in the works at Waterloo this summer on the south west franchise, where we are bound and determined not to make mistakes. The prize will of course be a wonderful new station, I hope with a beautiful arch somehow reinstated, and many more services. That will be a prize worth having, but we are absolutely bound and determined to avoid the disruption that we saw at London Bridge.

I slightly disagree with the view of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough that residual value mechanisms are not really relevant, because if a public company or public authority wants to invest in something, it wants to ensure that it will get a return from it on behalf of taxpayers. That is only right and proper. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle is right that that has been a barrier to investment in franchising. We have developed a residual value mechanism in the Department, and it has been used in the latest competitions. I accept that it is not quite what he is looking for, and I am always happy to meet him and have that discussion, but we want to use that mechanism in the upcoming west coast franchise because we want to ensure that the stations along the route and other assets, such as smart ticketing, are supported.

I want to mention smart ticketing before I conclude. It is a passion of mine to get rid of the tangerine tickets, which look like something out of the 1970s, and move to something that far better suits what customers are using today: mobile technology. People will have seen that we have put those requirements into franchising, and we will do so in this case. The adoption of smart ticketing is moving very quickly in this country.

Andy McDonald: I do not think that the Minister has mentioned Sir Jeremy Heywood’s review of the potential use of Euston and Old Oak Common.
Claire Perry: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, as that is not in my portfolio, I did not feel that it was appropriate to comment on that, but I will happily have my colleague write to him.

This is another opportunity for a big step change in the services that are provided for customers by whoever the new incumbent is. We believe in the railway as a way to drive investment across the country, but fundamentally it has to work for the customers using it. It is not a tram set; it is a way of getting people to and from their workplaces and families. I assure hon. Members who have taken the time to be here today that that will be front and centre of the next franchise competition.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): John Stevenson, do you have any further comments?

3.58 pm

John Stevenson: Thank you, Ms Dorries, for the opportunity to say a few additional things. I appreciate the contributions of all hon. Members on what is an important issue for many people up and down the west coast. The issue affects businesses, individuals, tourists, our major conurbations and of course the smaller cities and towns right up the west coast of our country. The next franchise is a real opportunity for the industry, users and the taxpayer. The Minister kindly touched upon the key issues that will be incorporated into the franchise. My all-party group will certainly take up residual value with her, which is an ongoing issue for us. Passenger issues and what happens at Euston are also critical, but I like to think that the future of the west coast rail line is positive.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered the West Coast rail franchise.

Library Services: Thornton-Cleveleys

[Ms Nadine Dorries in the Chair]

4 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered library services in Thornton-Cleveleys.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries—a first for me, I think, but a pleasure none the less. Thinking about the issue of libraries in my constituency, it is hard to start without resorting to clichés, but of course clichés always serve a wider truth, so when I say that libraries change people’s lives, it is because they certainly do. I remember my involvement with my local library in Weaverham in Cheshire. It opened a whole new world to me. It may have been a small, prefabricated building in a small village in the middle of Cheshire, but it was my gateway to a wider world. I looked up to the librarians who staffed it. They were not just there to shelve books or move them around; they were trained professionals, and when considering all the different options we have for how libraries are provided, we should not overlook that fact. They are trained and they are talented. It is not just a matter of moving books around.

Libraries are not just book repositories, either. They are there for far more than that. As a friend of Thornton and Cleveleys library wrote to me just the other day: “The nurseries in both areas utilise the provision, parents and their children, the young people that use the library for their Wargaming group, children’s trailblazers group, poetry meets, flower arranging, craft and chat, Shakespeare and literature workshops, scrabble groups, IT club with support from a tech coach, knit and natter”.

The list is endless; it goes on and on, and that is in just two small libraries in Thornton and Cleveleys. In the Minister’s excellent White Paper on the arts—the first proper one since the 1960s—he rightly emphasised that culture should be accessible to everybody. It should not be a matter of how much someone can afford or how close they happen to live to the capital; culture should be available for everybody, including those who live in coastal areas such as mine. So the Minister can imagine my intense frustration and the local anger that has been generated by Lancashire County Council’s proposals to slash the number of libraries across the county to just 37, with a further seven self-service locations. That is down from 73.

In particular, two of those libraries are close to my heart because they are in my patch: the library in Cleveleys, which has a very popular children’s centre as part of the building, and the library in Thornton, which lies just a few yards outside my constituency boundary. My constituency covers part of the car park but not the library itself, and although my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) is a Minister and so cannot participate in this debate, I know that he none the less joins me in expressing the sentiments I choose to express today.

Of course, it is not just local MPs who are frustrated by this; it is all of our constituents, too. Let me quote from Nicky Frankland, who wrote on my Facebook page earlier this week:
[Paul Maynard]

“I home educate my daughter of 5 who has Asperger syndrome, the library is a vital part of our lives or should I say her life. It gives us the references we need along with the means to have a friendly and calm place to go which we struggle finding elsewhere. Having said that I have used Thornton library with all my children since they were a few weeks old. It amazes me the extent of activities available and how important it is to have a library in the community for all ages. I can’t understand why a decision would be made to get rid of such an important service.”

That is very true. I was out in the torrential pouring rain last Sunday at Thornton-Cleveleys gala, yet there were still dozens of people wandering around trying to get signatures for the petition to keep those libraries open, such is the local passion for retaining those vital services.

The council’s rationale is essentially to save money—a point I will touch on later—and that people will still be able to travel to Fleetwood or Poulton to utilise the library services retained there. There is a hidden irony in that, because the recent wholesale withdrawal of subsidised bus services means that getting to Fleetwood or Poulton is now almost an impossibility for many of my most elderly constituents because there are fewer buses. Many have expressed their frustration to me that they fear they will become prisoners in their own homes.

It is not just older residents, either. I have received a letter from Emily Rogers, Calise Goffin, Tegan Hood and Oliver Preston from Northfold primary school’s school council telling me that:

“It has come to our attention that many of our local libraries, including Cleveleys, are under threat of being shut down. We have close links with this library as many of our pupils take part in the Lancashire Reading Trail. We enjoy it when the librarian, Brenda, comes into school to talk to us and give out prizes. Many of us enjoy taking part in events and activities at the library during our school holidays, and we would greatly miss this if it was no longer there”.

More than 300 of the school’s friends, pupils and their parents have signed a petition desperately asking for the library to be kept open.

Clearly, there is a political angle to this debate. I have no doubt that on social media right now someone will be tweeting that it is all my fault, because the nasty Conservative Government are cutting budgets somewhere. That will be appearing on Facebook in response to this debate as well. It is such a serious accusation that it is worth taking head on. I do not deny that all councils up and down the country face challenges over their budgets. They will choose to meet that challenge in differing ways. Some will do a better job than others at making those spending reductions, but one thing I am quite clear about is that every single council, whichever party happens to be controlling it, needs to be held to account for how it chooses to make spending reductions.

I do not want to make today’s debate about which party happens to be controlling a particular council. It is about how they choose to make those decisions, the factors they weigh in that balance and the extent to which they put the needs of the people they represent at the forefront of their minds. Councils need to take responsibility for their decisions, and of late we have seen some spectacularly bad decisions by Lancashire County Council, including mismanaged contracts that have wasted millions of pounds. The Conservative group on the county council discovered an unknown £15 million the county council never knew it had. That would have been enough, with £1 million to spare, to allow all the libraries across the county to be saved, but the council chose not to use it to that end. It wasted £7 million by not going ahead with a new fleet management service, for example.

The list could be endless, and it would be otiose to continue to read examples out, but it makes the point that Lancashire has not been well managed financially for a number of years under the people who currently run the council. It is the people of Lancashire who are paying the price for those mistakes and that poor governance. Because the council has not done a good job, we all have a price to pay, including my constituents. I recognise that that political debate does not save a single library or change a single mindset in county hall, because there are political blinkers on and this has become a political debate. What frustrates me is the unwillingness of the county council to sit down with borough councils in the county to discuss differing ways to deliver library services. In Wyre borough, which covers both Thornton and Cleveleys, they are trying to come up with innovative solutions that would enable the county to save the money that it knows it needs to save, as well as retaining all of Wyre’s libraries.

It frustrates me that the county council will not sit down and discuss those ideas, not least because they are ideas that have been implemented by other councils around the country that are run by the same party that controls the county council. It is clearly not a party political issue at all, because other Labour councils have been equally innovative, and I would like to see Lancashire be as innovative. Wyre would like to see all the councils in Wyre essentially become community interest companies. That would release savings that could be used to maintain all seven libraries, rather than having to shut three of them. Of course there will always be devil in the detail, but surely all sides can at the very least sit down and hold that discussion while the consultation process is under way.

In York, which is one of the main models that Wyre is drawing on and is a Labour-controlled council, they have an industrial and provident society called Explore, which is one-third owned by the staff and two-thirds by local people. Local people pay a notional £1 toward their membership—which is actually not even collected by Explore—that allows them and the staff to have a say in the delivery of library services. That is just one of the many examples up and down the country of councils that have tried to take a more creative approach to delivering library services that has not been dependent upon wholesale closure.

I know that Arts Council England has a library development fund. I would be grateful if the Minister outlined what support it might be able to give to the county council, Wyre borough and the community taskforce—the Friends of Thornton and Cleveleys Libraries—who are looking at alternative models of provision. In the same way, what help can the Government’s libraries taskforce give to those seeking to develop and change the model of provision in the county?

More fundamentally, will the Minister reflect on the use to which we can put the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964? My fear is that what Lancashire is planning to do places it in breach of the provisions of that Act. I know that under the last Labour Government, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who
was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport at the time, chose to refer Wirral Council for a public inquiry because he believed that it was in breach of the Act. It had failed to carry out a proper assessment of need and had relied too much on a property-based assessment. I fear that Lancashire is treading an identical path, not least in its attempts to focus provision on the most deprived areas. I do not dispute for a second that deprived areas require a greater proportion of public resources, but under the 1964 Act library services are meant to be a universal service. Access to them should not be dependent upon levels of deprivation. If that is the scheme that the county council is seeking to adopt to assess who deserves to have a library service in Lancashire, I fear that it may be in breach of the 1964 Act.

I attended the public inquiry in Wirral back in 2009. It was a very interesting two-day experience and the lady who conducted it, Sue Charteris, did an excellent job of distilling, down to the bare essentials, what the Act required councils to do, how to justify what was a comprehensive service and what that meant in practical terms for the residents of Wirral. If Lancashire presses ahead with its current halving of the number of libraries, I urge the Minister to seriously consider whether to refer Lancashire for a public inquiry to assess whether it is doing the right thing by the 1964 Act.

I do not argue that savings should not be made, nor do I think that the Government should step in and somehow make up the difference to ensure that Lancashire can keep its libraries open, but I wonder why libraries always seem to be such a soft target for councils of all persuasions that are making rapid spending reductions. I would argue that Lancashire in particular has failed in its duties to provide a comprehensive and fair library service for all our residents. The Minister has a chance to influence Lancashire’s decision making during the consultation period. I urge him to make it clear that what it is currently proposing is wholly unacceptable and that it is in on the wrong path—that it risks sharing the fate of Wirral, which was forced to go back to the drawing board.

In summary, I hope the Minister has clearly heard the views of my constituents as I have expressed them today. Those views will be replicated not just in my part of Lancashire, but across the county as a whole. I hope he can respond to my specific queries and emphasise to Lancashire, but across the county as a whole. I hope those views will be replicated not just in my part of Lancashire, but across the county as a whole. I hope he can respond to my specific queries and emphasise to Lancashire that it is on the wrong track and ask them to think again please.

4.13 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am grateful for this opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), and to appear in front of you, Ms Dorries, the Chair of this important debate. You are an extremely distinguished and best-selling author, and I gather that “The Angels of Lovely Lane”, the latest novel in the award-winning series that you have produced, is about to be—or has just been—published. It is certainly available to pre-order on Amazon. I just wanted to get that on the record because, obviously, libraries are about books—but, as my hon. Friend pointed out in his very eloquent speech, libraries are about a lot more as well. I congratulate him on securing this debate and on putting the case for libraries so strongly. Although he is obviously here to defend the libraries in his constituency and local area, a lot of what he said stands for libraries all over England as well.

I am the libraries Minister responsible for England—it is important to note that libraries are a devolved matter as far as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are concerned. I am lucky enough to have been the libraries Minister for some six years, and indeed to have been the shadow spokesman for the four years before that, so I am pretty familiar with most of the issues and I remember the Wirral inquiry well. Indeed, it was me who called on the then Secretary of State to call that inquiry. I asked him to call it because at the time—I agree with my hon. Friend—there had been no proper investigation of the library service. Wirral Council had effectively taken a survey of its buildings and decided which it should close, but it had not actually taken a survey of its library service and how that could be most effectively delivered.

Of course it is perfectly appropriate for councils to look hard at their library services. It is perfectly appropriate for them, in difficult economic circumstances, to look hard at all the services that they deliver to see whether they could be delivered more efficiently. In fact, across the country there are many examples of library services that are being innovative. For example in Suffolk, where library services have become an industrial and provident society, libraries are remaining open, they are more innovative, their opening hours are longer and they are more popular. The head of the library service in Devon, Ciara Eastell, who has recently retired as the head of the Society of Chief Librarians and has done a fantastic job in that post, recently presided over the move by Devon libraries into a mutual organisation.

Libraries have a bright future and I will always take the opportunity to talk about the success of the library service. Too often, as my hon. Friend pointed out, libraries seem to be at the back of the queue for many local authorities. Also, paradoxically, many of the people who claim to have libraries at their hearts and to see them as important spend their entire time doing down the library service and claiming that it is on the point of collapse and in crisis. Indeed, when I asked the then Secretary of State to call his inquiry into the Wirral library service, I made the point—as I have ever since—that at no point as the Opposition spokesman did I ever accuse the library service as a whole of being in crisis. I was quite happy to call out particularly egregious examples of local authority behaviour but I did not believe then, and I do not believe now, that the library service is in crisis. It is having to modernise.

We take library closures as an indication of the health of the library service and I bat figures between myself, library campaigners and, I am afraid, the BBC, which has not been as accurate as it could have been about the number of library closures. It is always difficult to have an accurate figure. That might sound surprising; most people would look at a library and say that they know what a library looks like, but people can have different interpretations of the definition of a library. As far as we are aware in the Department, just over 100 libraries have closed their doors and some 200 libraries are open but managed by the local community and volunteers. There are still 3,000 libraries in England that can count as part of the statutory service. Some
£700 million is spent a year for libraries to provide the great service that they do to my constituents, my hon. Friend’s constituents and others.

My hon. Friend was quite right to point out his concerns about what is happening in Lancashire. As he also pointed out by mentioning the £15 million that Lancashire had discovered, councils are not all-seeing and all-dancing, and it is possible for them to make different decisions. However, it is also important to remind ourselves that libraries are funded by councils and run by councils. Central Government have never run the library service and have never funded the library service, but they do have the backstop of the statutory duty.

I want to look briefly at what is happening in Lancashire. I am afraid it has seen a decline in the number of visits. I gather that visits have fallen by a fifth, and the number of active book borrowers by around a quarter. I also understand that the two libraries in my hon. Friend’s constituency have experienced a significant decline over the same period—in visits by about a third, and in active borrowers by just over a quarter.

The council has undertaken two consultations this year on the future of the library service. The first was undertaken in January. The council consulted on possible budget savings for the next five years, and one of the options included a rather dramatic proposal to reduce the number of libraries from 74 to 34. The 40 that were due to come out of the council service would either be closed or run by local communities. Just as an indication of how popular and important to the local community libraries are, I point out that that consultation drew more than 10,000 responses. The council then considered the responses and is now undertaking a further 12-week consultation. That consultation is under way, and, as I understand it, is due to end in mid-August. The proposals have changed slightly. Instead of only 34 libraries, the council now proposes 44 libraries: 37 fully staffed and resourced and an additional seven that would not be staffed but would have all the facilities of a council library, including self-service counters and the opportunity to reserve and return books. There would also be six mobile library vehicles, a home library service and the virtual library service.

The council is aware that there is interest from the community in taking on the responsibility for buildings or taking over the running of the parts of the service that the county council will not maintain, and it has invited expressions of interest. I understand that no final decision will be made on any of the proposals until the council’s cabinet has had the opportunity fully to consider and evaluate all the information gathered.

Paul Maynard: Does the Minister agree that it is vital that Lancashire talks to borough councils such as Wyre about its plans for the libraries if it is, as it says, open to new ideas?

Mr Vaizey: I certainly agree with that. If the county council were not engaging properly with borough councils, I would find that extremely surprising and it would cause me significant concern. It is very important that county councils get out of their silos and talk to the local borough councils. Indeed, one of my hobby-horses is that councils should talk to their neighbouring councils, so the county council should talk to other councils outside Lancashire as well. There is a way councils can keep libraries open while reducing the back-office costs, the administrative costs, of libraries, and that is by sharing services. In fact, in west London, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham in effect merged the administration of their library service. That not only saved them £1 million a year in administration costs, but enabled them to open a library. The Conservative authority Windsor is also opening libraries because it runs its service so efficiently. It is possible to open libraries even in a difficult economic climate.

I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that it is difficult for me to intervene while the consultation is still going on. There is some debate about my capacity or rather my willingness to intervene. In fact, this is the first Administration that has routinely looked at every single proposal from every council to close libraries. My officials investigate every proposal before them and test it against the 1964 Act, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and the duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service before deciding whether to intervene. Again, it may sound paradoxical, but sometimes councils may decide to close a library in order to run a more efficient service.

The first case that I had as the libraries Minister was Brent. On a political level, that was an open goal: it was a Labour council proposing to close six of its 12 libraries. However, when that was looked at in some detail by my officials, it was clear that the council should have been thinking about the future of its libraries some five or 10 years ago, but obviously the political hot potato that is a library prevented that council from making decisions that actually might have ended up meaning that it ran a better, more efficient library service, able to provide better services to more people, with more opening hours. Those are the kinds of decision that we have to weigh up, and we have to respect as well the role that local councils play in running a local service, but that does not mean that my hon. Friend is not perfectly entitled, and rightly so, to put the alternative case and to put it as forcefully as he has done in this place today.

In the minutes left to me, I want to say a few words about the national picture. I have made it clear that although Ministers do not run libraries and we do not fund libraries from a central Government fund, we have the backstop of the statutory library service. We have gone a lot further than that, however. Early on after the 2010 general election, we moved responsibility for libraries to the Arts Council, to a bigger organisation, joining up libraries with cultural provision, which was long overdue. The Arts Council had a £6 million fund to support culture in libraries, which has been very effective. Just before the 2015 election, we set up the leadership for libraries taskforce. At national level, that brings together key stakeholders—for example, the Local Government Association, the Society of Chief Librarians and my Department—and they work very hard to spread libraries’ best practice.

My hon. Friend asked what help Lancashire’s library service could get, should it choose to seek it, from central Government. One thing it could do is engage with the leadership for libraries taskforce. We have
consulted on a draft vision, called “Libraries Deliver”, and we intend to publish the final document quite shortly. That will contain examples of best practice and of what innovation different library authorities can bring to bear in order to provide a more effective library service.

We have also been more practical still. For example, we spent some £2 million or £3 million ensuring that every library in England had wi-fi. It may surprise hon. Members to know that in a digital age—if one is looking for reasons to visit a library, surely one reason is the opportunity to access wi-fi and therefore do one’s homework or do some research on one’s tablet—more than 1,000 libraries in England did not have wi-fi. Now, thanks to us, they do.

We have published two best practice toolkits for libraries. We have brought co-ordination and focus to promote National Libraries Day—the one day in the year, in February, when we can talk about how important libraries are. We have invested in the enterprising libraries programme with the British Library. That allows key city libraries to work as hubs for entrepreneurs, updating the value that libraries bring to their communities.

On every level, we have tried to promote innovation in libraries; and the Society of Chief Librarians, for example, has promoted the value of books and reading not just in and of itself and for literature, but of course for health and wellbeing and a variety of other aspects. In an age when the summer reading challenge, for example, reaches more children than ever before, we see the library service evolving.

I for one think that the library service has an exciting future. I hear my hon. Friend perfectly legitimate and well-put concerns about the future of Lancashire libraries. I join him in urging Lancashire County Council, during this consultation, to think imaginatively, to look at new models of delivery that have been implemented elsewhere, to listen carefully to what he has said about the more efficient use of existing resources, to understand the passion and enthusiasm that the local people feel for their library service and to engage with the leadership of what innovation different library authorities can bring to bear in order to provide a more effective library service.

We have also been more practical still. For example, we spent some £2 million or £3 million ensuring that every library in England had wi-fi. It may surprise hon. Members to know that in a digital age—if one is looking for reasons to visit a library, surely one reason is the opportunity to access wi-fi and therefore do one’s homework or do some research on one’s tablet—more than 1,000 libraries in England did not have wi-fi. Now, thanks to us, they do.

We have published two best practice toolkits for libraries. We have brought co-ordination and focus to promote National Libraries Day—the one day in the year, in February, when we can talk about how important libraries are. We have invested in the enterprising libraries programme with the British Library. That allows key city libraries to work as hubs for entrepreneurs, updating the value that libraries bring to their communities.

On every level, we have tried to promote innovation in libraries; and the Society of Chief Librarians, for example, has promoted the value of books and reading not just in and of itself and for literature, but of course for health and wellbeing and a variety of other aspects. In an age when the summer reading challenge, for example, reaches more children than ever before, we see the library service evolving.

I for one think that the library service has an exciting future. I hear my hon. Friend perfectly legitimate and well-put concerns about the future of Lancashire libraries. I join him in urging Lancashire County Council, during this consultation, to think imaginatively, to look at new models of delivery that have been implemented elsewhere, to listen carefully to what he has said about the more efficient use of existing resources, to understand the passion and enthusiasm that the local people feel for their library service and to engage with the leadership of what opportunities there might be to learn from best practice elsewhere. As with every proposal to close libraries, we will keep this proposal under review, and if appropriate, we will act.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Mr Maynard, would you like to come back quickly with any further comments?

Paul Maynard: No thank you, Ms Dorries.

Question put and agreed to.
Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. An irony in this whole debate is that central Government are seeking to dictate to local government on the forms of governance. Genuine devolution should involve a two-way conversation.

I note that the view of the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), is similar to mine. In February, he replied to a written question:

“It is for local areas to propose governance structures that are right for them”.

At that stage, it seemed that there was no prescription that a mayor was necessary. It is possible to agree devolution without an elected mayor, as Cornwall Council has demonstrated. However, that option seems to have been taken off the table, and we are left with what appears to be a unilateral insistence that a mayor must be accepted as a precursor to any deal in which powers are devolved. There also appears to be an insistence that the deals be hurriedly put in place to meet a purely political timetable, so that elections can be held in May 2017. That goes against the views of experts such as Lord Kerslake, the chair of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, who stated that public engagement should take place during “the process of coming to the deal”, and then, “having done the deal”. The Communities and Local Government Committee also criticised the negotiation process, saying that it lacks rigour, and that “there are no clear, measurable objectives for devolution, the timetable is rushed and efforts are not being made to inject openness or transparency into the deal negotiations.”

There is no doubt but that a huge amount of pressure is being put on council leaders to sign up to the deals, and to comply with the rushed timetables being forced on them. Leaders of areas that have in recent years undergone severe budget cuts that threaten front-line services and the most vulnerable residents are effectively being told, “We can give you the tools that you need to revive your areas, but only on certain conditions.” That kind of approach is undemocratic. It lacks openness, transparency, any consultation, and measurable objectives, and is being done in a rushed way that risks leaving areas with poorly constructed deals that are adopted without the application of any local scrutiny.

I do, however, give the Government credit for asking areas which powers they would like to be devolved, but that huge opportunity is being undermined because Ministers will not allow local areas to negotiate on an even footing to a sensible timetable, or to agree deals in an open way—and, most importantly, a way that genuinely involves the public. The Communities and Local Government Committee report states:

“For devolution to take root and fulfil its aims, it needs to involve and engage the people it is designed to benefit.”

I will focus on the need for discussion and consultation with the public, as there is a huge range of examples of major local changes being made with the consent of the electorate. For example, to trigger a community governance review on whether to set up a new town or parish council, local residents need to give their local authority a petition containing the signatures of at least 7.5% of the local population. If a local authority wants to increase council tax by more than 2%, it must hold a referendum. To put that in context, if the council where I live proposed an increase in council tax of about £30, there would need to be a referendum—but apparently no referendum is needed on whether to put responsibility for hundreds of millions of pounds into the hands of one person.

For a neighbourhood plan to be adopted, a referendum must be held. When new powers were devolved to Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and London, referendums were held and the people provided a mandate. Previously, whenever an elected mayor was proposed in a local area, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), a referendum was required. Indeed, regulations under the Local Government Act 2000 require councils to hold a referendum on the establishment of a directly elected mayor if at least 10% of local government electors in the area petition the authority to do so. In matters of local governance, the consent of the public has usually been sought before any significant change has been made. That was, indeed, recognised by the Conservative party in its 2010 manifesto.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): This is an important debate. I recently visited a school and met loads of sixth-formers. I asked them whether they could name their council leader or county council leader. In each case, not one person could. An elected mayor would certainly bring about a visibility, transparency and accountability. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that that is healthy?

Justin Madders: We will have to see about the visibility of mayors in some places. The problem we have in Cheshire and Warrington is that it is such a large area. I do not see how a mayor could really get around and be visible in such a large community.

John Stevenson: The hon. Gentleman mentions that his is a large geographical area. London is a large geographical area, but virtually everybody in the country knows who the Mayor is. Would that not be good for the hon. Gentleman’s area?

Justin Madders: The hon. Gentleman has conflated his point with what I am saying, which is that non-city regions are different from cities in their nature. Of course, cities have a focal point and are much more condensed. It is just not comparing like with like.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): The hon. Gentleman says that Cheshire is too big to have a mayor. It takes an hour to drive from Cheshire East to Cheshire West, and it takes about an hour and a half to get from Warrington down to the south of Manchester. His argument does not stand up to those of us who live, and were born and bred, in Cheshire. A mayor would be able to get around Cheshire easily. Also, if you ask anybody from Greater Manchester, “Do you come from Greater Manchester?”, they would not say yes. They would say they come from Bolton, Oldham or Bury—from the great towns and cities of Greater Manchester—so I would say to you that people might say they come from Cheshire but, if pushed, they will say that they come from Warrington, Macclesfield or Congleton.
Justin Madders: If the hon. Gentleman is so confident of his arguments, he will agree that it is important to test the strength of them by holding a referendum on whether the people of Cheshire and Warrington want an elected mayor.

I return to my comments on the Conservative manifesto, which pledged to create 12 newly elected mayors, subject to confirmatory referendums. Although I agree with the experts that an elected mayor is not an appropriate form of governance for a non-metropolitan area, I will support the people of Cheshire and Warrington if they say that they want an elected mayor, but a new level of governance should not be imposed on them without their agreement.

Since I secured this debate, the devolution deal in Cheshire and Warrington appears to have been put on hold, which gives us an opportunity for greater scrutiny of the process. I have questions that I hope the Minister can respond to in his reply. Should not the most appropriate governance structure for an area be decided by its people and their representatives, rather than in Whitehall? Will he agree to a referendum to gauge support for the proposal? If no desire to move to a mayoral model can be found locally, will he still consider devolving powers, if an alternative proposal for strong and accountable local governance is found? If not, why not? If powers can be devolved to Cornwall without a mayor being a prerequisite of any agreement, why not to Cheshire and Warrington, or indeed any other county? Is there any flexibility in the timetable, particularly in the light of recent events? Finally, will he commit to working with me and any other interested parties to find a way to deliver a devolution of powers with which everyone can agree?

Devolution has the potential to have a truly transformative impact on communities, allowing them to cast off the shackles of Westminster and rebalance our nation’s economy, but the Government risk sacrificing all that in many areas through their insistence that they know better than local people what is best for them. Devolution will hopefully allow local communities to create new jobs, unlock sites for development and improve transport infrastructure. Who does not want to see that? I warmly welcome the opportunities that a devolution deal could bring to my area, but I have heard nothing that convinces me that we need a mayor to deliver them.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Justin Madders: I am just about to finish, sorry. I genuinely hope that a real opportunity to improve our area is not lost because of Government insincerity on the governance arrangements. If their position is that there will be no investment if there is no mayor, I will not forgive such a petulant approach, and I doubt the public will, either. It does not need to be that way, so will the Minister confirm that he will listen to the Select Committee, the Institute for Public Policy Research and, most importantly, the people we are here to represent by agreeing with me that a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach goes against the grain of what devolution should be about?

Several hon. Members rose—

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. On the maths, we reckon there are six minutes per person, allowing for the wind-ups; I ask Members to bear that in mind.

4.42 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on securing this debate. It is better that we discuss the issues in this way than on “North West Tonight”. He started by saying that this debate was not about devolution, but it is about devolution, as well as about accountability for devolution. It appears from his remarks that he is in favour of devolution, which I am pleased to hear.

It is worth remembering the problem that the Government are trying to solve with this process. Secretaries of State already have all these powers, and the Government are going through this process because we live in a very centralised country—the power of Whitehall is unique. We see that in the gross value added performance of the regions versus London, with the difference between London and the north-west reaching its peak in 2009. Cheshire and Warrington has a local enterprise partnership and a strategic plan, and it is a relatively affluent part of the country, but its relative affluence has decreased over the past 20 years. All of us who represent the area should be concerned about that and should be considering ways to remedy it.

The fact of the matter is that our civil service is London-centric. Even now, London has higher public spending per head than any other region, including, amazingly, Scotland. That is revenue spend; on capital spend, we have seen IPPR reports stating that more is spent per capita in London than in the north-east and parts of the north-west by orders of magnitude. This measure is an honest attempt to fix that. If we proceed on the basis that we all want that, we can start to work on how we achieve it.

We have had two decades of failed regional policy, whether we are talking about the regional development agencies or whatever. The last Parliament started the devolution process with regional growth funds, the LEPs, city deals and growth deals. Some Labour Members opposed the process more or less at every stage—it is interesting that the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) apparently still opposes the Manchester mayoralty. The Government therefore had to engage with local leaders such as Howard Bernstein in Manchester. In 2014, he said that there had been more progress on the devolution agenda in the previous two years than in the preceding 20, which is a good thing. It is good that we are continuing to try to make progress on that.

Devolution is asymmetric, and everywhere is a little different; it is complicated, but that is probably right. As we proceed with implementing the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, there will be more devolution. A clear principle of the Act is that the devolution has to be asked for. I am not here to support Government policy particularly, but the devolution has to be asked for. There is no question of doing something without consent, as we have just seen in Cheshire and Warrington—a mayor will not happen in 2017 because the local council has said that it does not want one.
[David Mowat]

So be it. The council is accountable, and it needs to take responsibility for its decision, but to say that a mayor is being imposed is a little rich; it really is not true. The phrase “At the heart of devolution is democracy” has been used. That is right, and it seems a bit harsh to take the Government to task for wanting to have an election, but there we are.

We are going ahead with devolution in East Anglia, Liverpool, Manchester and various other places. The areas that are being devolved—skills, transport, health, housing and planning—are things on which local people want local representatives to have a say. It is absurd that decisions on, say, skills and the sorts of things that businesses in Manchester need are made by people in Whitehall, rather than Manchester. Exactly that principle applies to Cheshire.

It is true that accountability is a sticking point, because even in Manchester and Liverpool there has been an issue with elected mayors. I mentioned “North West Tonight” at the start of my speech; I saw Joe Anderson, the Mayor of Liverpool, on it. He was arguing with a Labour party colleague who was against elected mayors and he said, “Why should Secretaries of State devolve large chunks of their powers to committees of local authority leaders who might meet every so often?” Joe Anderson put that well. There has to be accountability for the aspects of power being devolved from Secretaries of State. None of this makes any difference to the powers of a local authority—there is no upwards devolution, or upward movements of power to the Mayor—but there is accountability. Apart from anything else, the National Audit Office will not let the Government devolve this stuff, or will give the Government a hard time, if there is not clear accountability for that responsibility.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The National Audit Office does not make laws; the Government do. The Government can legislate for what they want to do.

David Mowat: That is correct. The Government can and should do what they want. My point is that we are talking about transferring power over hundreds of millions of pounds from Secretaries of State, and it is reasonable that the Government and the National Audit Office, as part of the process of government, should take an interest in ensuring that there is clarity about accountability.

Accountability works both ways. Just as the Government are right to impose or request accountability, those who decide that they do not want these powers, or who do not wish to ask for them, are also accountable. Warrington Borough Council, my own council, has voted down the proposal, which is completely its right. The council has an elected mandate, and the Government will not impose the measure, because it must be asked for. All I will say is that those people involved are also accountable to their constituents and to their region, with all that goes with that. If they have missed an opportunity, they are accountable for that, too.

4.49 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on securing this debate and on how he has put the case against a one-size-fits-all form of devolution, which is what we are arguing about. I do not believe that what the Government are offering us constitutes real devolution. Real devolution would give powers to identifiable local communities, whether or not they wished to have a mayoral system, and would allow them to work with other local authorities as they wished. That is not what was proposed for Cheshire and Warrington. Instead, we were told that we must have a mayoral model and a Cheshire and Warrington local authority.

Much of my constituency—certainly on my side of the river—was not in Cheshire for a very long time; it was in Lancashire, and many people there still think of themselves as proud Lancastrians. They have little community of interest with some of the market towns of Cheshire, and much more in common with the nearby post-industrial towns across the border in Merseyside or Greater Manchester, yet we are told there is the only kind of authority open to us. No one has asked the people of Warrington whether that is what they want. They would be consulted only after a deal had been agreed. No one has asked them whether they want an elected mayor; I suspect that they certainly do not want one covering Cheshire and Warrington, because that is not sufficient local democracy.

I am profoundly depressed by the idea that power is better in the hands of one man—it usually is a man—than of many people. That is a depressing view of democracy, in my understanding of it. Although it might work in urban areas, it does not work in an area such as Cheshire and Warrington. It is of no benefit to my constituents to be run from Congleton or Macclesfield rather than London. Although a mayor would begin with only a few powers, they would be bound to gather more as time went on. Mission creep is built into the model.

David Rutley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: No. I am sorry; I do not have time.

I also want to comment on the deal that the Government are offering us if we have an elected mayor. Much of the deal is about things that are going to happen anyway, much of it retains powers for the Secretary of State and some of it diverts money away from Warrington to other parts of Cheshire. To take transport as an example, we are told that we would get a Warrington rail hub linking High Speed 2 and High Speed 3 or the west coast main line. That is great, but first of all, we do not even have a route for HS2.

Graham Evans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: No. I have said that I will not give way, owing to a lack of time. The hon. Gentleman must forgive me.

We do not have an HS2 route yet. HS3, which in my view would benefit the north much more, is still a distant dream, and does anyone really believe that no rail hub would be needed to link the two lines, whether or not we have a combined authority and a mayor? We are told that we will get free passage over the Mersey bridges instead of paying tolls, but we were promised that in the general election. Will the Government go back on that if we do not have a combined authority?
Then there are the areas where the Secretary of State retains powers, such as the housing programme. The combined authority would have flexibility over only 15% of the housing programme, which could—the word is “could”—include some rented property. When high-value properties are sold, a proportion of the sale will be given to the combined authority, but the proportion is decided by the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State must approve the housing programme.

None of that gives Warrington the powers it needs to build the kinds of homes that our communities need. Yes, we need starter homes for young couples, but we are also in great need of social rented housing. I suspect that all of us have seen people crying in our surgeries because they cannot get houses. Keeping power with the Secretary of State is not devolution. We are told that, under the employment and housing programme, 50% of the uplift on Homes and Communities Agency land—that is, new town land—will be ring-fenced for Warrington, but 50% of it will go to the combined authority. That is a transfer, to the rest of Cheshire, of money that should remain in my local authority. I do not see that as a good deal.

We are told that the combined authority can keep 100% of the growth in business rates over target, but who sets the target? The Government do. That is the first problem: there may be no growth at all. The second problem is that as business rates increase, grant will be lost. There is no extra money. The third problem is where that growth will come from. It will come from places such as Warrington, Ellesmere Port and Chester, not from the largely agricultural communities around the rest of Cheshire. In other words, it is another proposal to transfer money from poorer communities to better-off communities, and it is a con. It is a Tory proposal to ensure that the Labour-voting areas of Chester have permanent Tory Government. That is what this is all about. It is not about devolution to communities. That is a transfer, to the rest of Cheshire, of money that should remain in my local authority. I do not see that as a good deal.

Yes, that is right. That is why my council has rejected it, and rightly so.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Mr Graham Evans, although you committed a dreadful crime in this room a short while ago by using the word “you”, I am sure you will not use it again.

4.56 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. To follow on from the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), I see a mayor as building consensus, bringing people together and working together to create and distribute wealth, but as long as there are politicians such as yourself, that might be an issue. I have heard a lot said in the last 45 minutes—

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Mr Evans, last warning.

Graham Evans: Sorry, Ms Dorries. I have heard an awful lot said, but what this is really about is a Labour party that does not like the idea of a Conservative mayor. There is a Labour Mayor in Greater Manchester, and there will be a Labour Mayor in Greater Liverpool, and the thought of having a Conservative mayor is clearly what this is really all about. However, whether it is a Conservative mayor—or a Labour mayor—I would like to hope that she or he would work together towards consensus, for the betterment of all the people of Cheshire and Warrington. That is the whole point of being a mayor: when they are elected to office, they represent all the people, irrespective of political allegiance.

I speak as a Cestrian, Cheshire-born and bred. When I was growing up in the 1970s, when we were the sick man of Europe, I had three options for industries in which I could get a job. The first was the textile industry in Macclesfield, where my hon. Friend—[Interruption.]

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Ms Jones, I tolerated your chuntering all the way up until it was time for you to speak. Please desist now.

Graham Evans: Thank you, Ms Dorries. I am far enough away that I cannot hear any chuntering, but to return to my point, when I was growing up, we had three options for employment. The textile industry was huge in the ’70s, and even up to the ’80s. There was also the aerospace industry, at a place called Woodford, which made the nuclear deterrent and employed thousands of people. There was also something called the pharmaceutical industry. At the time it was ICI; now it is AstraZeneca. I worked in two of those industries: the textile industry and the aerospace industry at British Aerospace. Those two industries have gone.

We had a wake-up call a few years ago in Cheshire with the pharmaceutical industry at Alderley Park, when AstraZeneca decided to move to Cambridge. That was a very big shock for us as politicians, because who was to blame? It was not the leader of Cheshire East or Cheshire West, or indeed Warrington or Greater Manchester, but collectively it was a failure. AstraZeneca’s chief executive, who happened to be French, came from California, turned up in Cheshire and decided to move that industry away from Alderley Park.

If we had a mayor, he or she would be held responsible for ensuring that our economy in Cheshire worked with Greater Manchester, Greater Liverpool, the Mersey Dee Alliance in north Wales and the midlands powerhouse that we are developing. A mayor for Cheshire is exactly the sort of thing that we need. He or she would need the ability to work with colleagues in Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside, north Wales and the midlands, but that would be part of the role: ensuring that our economy in Cheshire was on the top line.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) ably made the point, as he always does, about our growth. Relatively speaking, Cheshire and Warrington is a very prosperous place, but in the last two decades it has gone backwards compared with London and the south-east. We are a London and south-east-centric country, but we have also fallen behind in comparison with like-for-like regions in countries such as Germany. We have to do things differently in Cheshire to make sure that we keep up with the best.

I believe the role of mayor would be perfect for somebody to bat for Cheshire and Warrington on a national basis, making sure we get that inward investment, but also internationally. We can look at what the Mayor has done for London. London is a global city and Mayors of all political colours have done a fantastic job in representing the people of London and Greater London.
To go back to my original point, I believe the role is important, because it is about consensus and about us all working together to get inward investment. I also have a vested interest, as many of us here do. I have three young children. Why would they need to move to London and the south-east, as so many young people do? They can go to great universities in Cheshire and Warrington, and they can afford to live in Cheshire and Warrington, but they can only do all that if they have the jobs—the good-quality, well-paid careers—that we all want to see.

The north-south divide is growing. What happened at Alderley Park is just one example of that, but there are others. Somebody who could represent Cheshire and Warrington, such as a mayor, would be tasked with dealing with that and when it came to election time, they would be accountable for the growth, or otherwise, within the local economy. As it stands now, everybody goes running for cover—the leader of Warrington, and the leaders of Cheshire East and Cheshire West: “It’s not me”—and disappears. This process brings accountability for the people of Cheshire, irrespective of their political beliefs.

In closing, let me say that I believe this debate is not really about the arguments that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked about. What it is really about is Labour party dogma. Labour cannot stand the thought of having a Conservative mayor, but Labour Members thought the same thing about police and crime commissioners. They did not agree with PCCs—they were all against the idea originally—but we live in a democracy and we now have a Labour PCC. There is no guarantee that there would be a Conservative mayor. There may well be a Conservative mayor, but there could also possibly be a Labour mayor, and we would expect them, irrespective of party allegiance, to represent everybody in Cheshire and Warrington and to bat for the community for the future—our future, but more importantly the future of our children and grandchildren.

5.2 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and my next-door neighbour on securing this debate. It is a great pleasure to follow him; it is almost as great a pleasure as it is to be here. It is a privilege to represent the county of my youth, if not of my birth.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston said earlier, in his view, which is also my view, Cheshire does not lend itself to a mayoralty. Different parts of the county look at things from different angles and differently from how neighbouring areas look at them. My other next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), talked about the success of the Mersey Dee Alliance. The fact is that so much of the growth in Cheshire, which is in west Cheshire, is predicated on that expanding and growing partnership, which has been so successful. I remind hon. Members that the MDA is very much based on a group of leaders of local councils on a committee, and yet it is working. The process of bringing those authorities together across the border is working, despite the fact that there is a committee and a group.

I am informed that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government told some of our local council leaders that he was not going to devolve powers to a committee, which is a bit rich coming from a man who sits on the principal Committee of the country, which is the Cabinet. Obviously, he has no faith in the Committee system or indeed in Cabinet Government.

When the Minister responds to the debate, I would like him to say why the Government consider that it is appropriate to impose what is essentially a one-size-fits-all policy when that is the opposite of what they stated they were trying to achieve. If he is really concerned about growth in our area, and I am sure he is, as indeed are hon. Members from all parties, perhaps he will get Ministers in other Departments to pay attention to some of the levers of growth, such as improving and upgrading the M56 in my area and in the area of the hon. Member for Weaver Vale, or improving the railway lines and the other forms of transport; for example, improving and electrifying the railway line through Crewe to Chester and north Wales. There are plenty of ways we can indeed drive economic growth.

Cheshire is where I grew up. It is not actually where I was born, for the reason that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North spoke about—when I was born in Warrington general hospital, I believe that it was in Lancashire, so I cannot claim to be purely Cheshire-born. However, I am certainly Cheshire-bred and Cheshire is the place that is very much in my heart. It is a privilege to represent the county of my youth, if not of my birth.

Cheshire is diverse geographically. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston said, the town centres do not necessarily look into each other, and in this instance a mayorality is wrong. I am pleased that the mayorality system seems to have been put on the backburner, which has given hon. Members and other members of the community an opportunity to have a debate about what is the best form of governance. It simply cannot be right that only one form is offered. If we are really keen to drive forward devolution in non-metropolitan areas, the Government really need to have a more open mind and listen to what else is on offer.

5.6 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries.

I thank all the hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon—the contributions have been very thought-provoking—and I thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for securing this
important debate. It is important that he said that mayoralty was not suitable for all areas. He gave the example of Cornwall, which is not being forced to have a mayor. The cities in Scotland that have been offered city deals, with funding contributions from the UK Government, have not been asked to have a mayor either. It is not within the civic tradition of Scotland to have a mayor. Quite often, we will have a civic head in a Lord Provost and a political head in the leader of the council, but we have not been asked at any point to have a mayor as part of this process.

A very interesting report was brought out just yesterday by the Scottish Cities Alliance, called “Empowering City Government”. It contains significant discussions about what more the seven cities in Scotland might get from the powers coming to the Scottish Government as part of the devolution process, and about what more they might ask for. Mayors are not one of the many asks in that report. So this issue is not only being discussed in England.

It was also very interesting that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston referred to the Communities and Local Government Committee report and mentioned consultation, because when the Committee, of which I am a member, held a public session in Manchester about the city deal there, members of the public, trade union representatives and a range of interested people expressed a huge amount of concern especially about health devolution. The people there did not quite understand what was being offered to them, how it would benefit them or what the full implications might be. What exactly it will mean is still being teased out. I share the concern that the hon. Gentleman expressed about the lack of transparency about the process, what is being offered and where the public fit in the whole scheme of things.

It has been said that perhaps not everybody can name their council leader. I can assure the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) that the council leader in Glasgow, who is a Labour council leader, is well known. The janitors in the city are currently out on strike and they are wearing face masks with the council leader’s face on them, so he is well ken’d and well known, although that is not perhaps working out the best way for him.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned how centralised the UK is, which is true—London is the great sucking machine that takes all the spending and all the jobs. It is very interesting that he made a comparison with Scotland, because we know anyway that we are subsidising London and have been for many years. The civil service is also in London—the hon. Gentleman mentioned that too—and the Government are intensifying the situation, with the HMRC closures, and other Departments locating back to London.

David Mowat: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alison Thewliss: There is not a great deal of time, and I want to let other Members speak.

David Mowat: I thank the hon. Lady. For the avoidance of doubt, if my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) were in Scotland they would both receive massively more money per head than they do through the Barnett formula. The notion that Scotland subsidises London is bizarre.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman might find it bizarre, but people in Scotland do not. The Aberdeen region city deal was £550 per head, whereas the figure for Manchester was £2,130 and for Bristol £1,207, so Scotland is losing out compared with city deals in the rest of the UK.

The point about democracy and the chaotic structures that are being created has been well made. The now many layers of local government in England increase the lack of democracy in many cases, and powers have been transferred away from and above local people and local government to a layer that is further away from them. I understand that the Public Accounts Committee has challenged the effectiveness of the devolution deals so far.

The hon. Member for Warrington North argued against the one-size-fits-all approach, and I absolutely concur with her. She mentioned the notion that power devolved is power retained, with local authorities perhaps not getting all the things they expected and hoped for, and that certainly seems to be the case with some of the deals—more things have been asked for than have been allowed. The question whether it will be a Labour or a Tory mayor is interesting to observe from my position, because when local government reform was taking place in Scotland in the late ’90s, there seemed to be a bit of a sense that some areas had been pocked in favour of Labour or Tory councils-to-be. There are still issues there, with Glasgow not doing as well as its wealthy neighbours and people from round about using the services there. There remain issues about who pays for the services.

The hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) blamed many people for the loss of industries in his constituency, but he did not blame central Government, which I find curious. Responsibility is important; a mayor should have responsibility and accountability, but the buck must stop with central Government and the job policies that they create. They must ensure that the conditions are correct. In Scotland we have also seen the loss of heavy industries, but we are now in a position to make a bit of a difference. The shiny example is the saving of the Ferguson shipyard in Inverclyde, which had been run down over many years. The Scottish Government put in investment and found a buyer, and the shipyard is now thriving and taking on apprentices.

Graham Evans: It is not a case of blaming people. We live in a global economy and a global world, and regions and areas must take that into account. The point I am making is that we know that in the next 10, 15, 20 or 30 years industries will see changes. They will be global changes, and the whole point of devolution is that it gives us the power to foresee such changes and make changes to our local economy, infrastructure, education and skills so that we are best placed to attract inward investment from across the world, or wherever.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman is right that there is a global economy, but the powers that are being devolved to local authorities are not enough to do what he says. In the interesting report that I mentioned, the
Scottish Cities Alliance calls for more powers for local authorities in Scotland over immigration policy because there are areas that are not thriving as well as they could be and not attracting the skills that they could. The limited devolution powers do not go far enough.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) made some interesting remarks, and I ask him to reflect on this quote from the Chancellor. He said:

“I will not impose this model on anyone. But nor will I settle for less.”

Those two statements together do not make sense. He either wants it or he does not.

Finally, I want to put it on the record that the Scottish National party supports attempts to bring about local democracy, but we do not think that this measure is the radical devolution that is required. We are concerned that changing the formation of existing powers could create a chaotic structure. More thought needs to be given to the proposals.

5.14 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for doing a sterling job in opening this important debate and for highlighting the very real concerns that exist not just in his area but, as the Minister well knows, right across the country in relation to the Government’s imposition of a mayor as part of devolution bids and deals.

The Chancellor—it is the Treasury not the Department for Communities and Local Government that is leading on the deals—has made it clear from day one that an elected mayor is a prerequisite condition for the devolution of major powers. It is the price that he has demanded for giving more control to local areas. Although individual areas were promised bespoke deals by the Government, there has been little room for manoeuvre.

The whole point of devolution, as the Minister knows, was to move away from over-centralised governance, to open up that dialogue between central and local government on what works best for each area. Yet, from the outset the discussions have been delivered in a top-down fashion, with the Government holding council leaders to ransom, threatening them with no deal if they do not yield to the Chancellor’s will. It is little wonder, then, that the Cheshire and Warrington devolution deal, and also the north-east, East Anglia, greater Lincolnshire and west of England deals, have all stalled, citing concerns regarding the Government’s imposition of a mayor.

It is not just council leaders and their councillors, however, who are expressing concerns. The Communities and Local Government Committee and a recent National Audit Office report have given weight to the legitimate criticisms that are coming up time and time again. The criticisms are about the insistence on an elected mayor, about local geography, transparency and accountability and, more importantly, about the deals being totally void of public consultation. The principle of elected mayors as a means of providing visible leadership and accountability is one thing, but imposing them is a totally different matter. Local areas should be free to decide whether an elected mayor is the right model of governance for them.

Similarly, the way in which the boundaries have been carved up in the geography of the devolution deals has bewildered many local people. Boroughs that have an affinity with other boroughs because of shared issues and identities have been passed over for devolution deals, while areas that have completely different issues, aims and objectives have all been lumped together.

I know that the Minister is not daft, so he must understand that what works for one area does not always work for the other.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Division.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: If the devolution agenda is to move forward and be successful, there is an urgent need for some flexibility to allow local areas to adapt governance models to suit their own geographical and political circumstances.

It is also true that elected Mayors in two-tier areas are in danger of creating five layers of local governance. Add to that the undemocratically elected local enterprise partnerships, and we have a complex, overly bureaucratic, costly system of representation that will render the public absolutely dizzy figuring out where to go for which service and who is accountable when things go wrong.

I want the Minister to come clean. The truth is that the Chancellor has his own political master plan, an agenda that has nothing to do with bringing power and decision making closer to people but a desperate and devious plan to neutralise Labour-held councils, to position himself as the creator of a so-called northern powerhouse, and to strike alliances with Labour mayors or try to massage the geography of the deals to increase the chances of a Tory mayor presiding over what were once predominately Labour areas.

Devolution for this Government is local government reorganisation through the back door and delegation of blame for their own cuts to the combined authorities. I hope that the Minister will provide some clarity in his response, and if there is only one question that he feels able to answer, can it be this: why, despite the myriad dissenting voices of the public, trade unions, councillors, experts, Select Committees and people in this place—even in his own party—is there a rushed insistence on mayors?

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): It is, of course, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on securing this debate, on what is undoubtedly an important and topical matter of concern and interest to Members across the House, as we can see from the contributions that have been made today.

I also thank the shadow Minister for the best compliment she has yet paid me, in suggesting that I am not daft. I will ignore the sedentary chuntering from the Benches behind her, which was perhaps audible for the record.
Indeed, not daft would be an understatement, were it true that I was able to choreograph the grand conspiracy that some of those who have contributed to this debate seem to believe is being perpetrated and were it true that I am such a Machiavellian political operator that I have taken the Tees Valley, the north-east, Greater Manchester and Greater Liverpool, to name but a few, and contrived to draw up devolution deals that will deliver Conservative mayors for those areas. I am delighted that some Members have such confidence in the political nous of those who lead my party that we may be able to achieve that, but I suggest that it is not the case.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I do not want to upset the Minister, but we were talking about the Chancellor, not him.

James Wharton: I consider my bubble burst, but it was worth a try to take what compliments might be on offer when the opportunity was there. They have eluded my grasp on this occasion. Devolution is an important matter. It is transformational and of constitutional significance for how we run our country. It is important for driving future economic growth and recognises that it is those living in the communities affected by the decisions made by Government at whatever level who are best placed to understand how those decisions should be made and the things that can be done to grow the economies we represent in our different constituencies and different parts of the United Kingdom.

Helen Jones: I am grateful that the Minister says it should be people in communities who decide these things. Can he explain why Birmingham had a referendum, voted against having an elected mayor and is getting one anyway?

James Wharton: I will explain the difference between the sort of mayors we have had before and the approach the Government are taking to devolution at this time, as well as why that is the right approach. Looking at the history of mayors, we have all known and experienced civic mayors. That important role recognises the contribution that local councillors have often made in representing their local authority. We saw a transition to local authority mayors pioneered under the previous Labour Government. That saw powers taken from local authorities and focused in that executive person. Indeed, the example that the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) gave was of powers coming from a local authority into that executive person, who would then use them in theory for the good of that area, with their democratic accountability and mandate.

The sort of mayors we are talking about with devolution hold powers coming down from central Government that are currently held by Ministers and exercised by civil servants. We want to give those powers to people who are closer to the communities affected by their exercise. We want to transfer those powers down. Where there is a significant transfer of Executive control and decision-making with those powers, we also want to ensure sharp accountability delivered by an elected person with the mandate to ensure that the work that needs to be done can be delivered, but who will be accountable to the electors of the area over which they are the mayor.

That area is not chosen by central Government. The process of devolution for any area is a deal, and that is a two-way process, but we ask areas to come forward and tell us the geography on which they think a devolution deal should be delivered. Rather than Government dictating centrally what the geography might be, we allow local communities, represented by their elected local authority leaders, to look at the geography of the economy in which they operate and tell us what they think is the right geography.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: The Minister will recall that we spoke in a recent debate on devolution in East Anglia. The issue there was that the Government were not allowing those areas to decide the geography. How does he explain the point he just made in the light of that?

James Wharton: It is very clear. The Government do not have the power in statute to force any area to accept a devolution deal. It happens by agreement, working with local authority leadership. If an area is not happy with what is proposed, whether that is the geography, the powers or the mechanism of governance, the Government have no power to compel them to make that deal or to go down that route of devolution at that time. What is so welcome is that so many areas have done that and have recognised the opportunities to choose their own geographies.

Members have spoken about the overlapping and different-layered identities of our constituents. I represent Stockton South in Teesside, which is also within the larger Tees valley. My constituency is half in the old north riding of Yorkshire and half in County Durham for ceremonial purposes. People identify in different ways in my constituency. I of course understand that in any area or geography of any scale or size there will be differences of identity. The point of devolution is to identify the economic opportunities, and we have approached that from the bottom up. We have let those communities come forward, put their proposal on the table and persuade Government why it is the right thing. We do not accept everything that is brought forward. We work with them to test and understand why they want to make that deal, but that is the right approach, because it will give a geography that will last and stand the test of time.

We take the same approach with the powers that we are conferring with devolution. We allow areas to come to us with their bid, and we make a deal with them about the powers they want. There is not some centrally held list. There is not a restricted and narrowly defined number of things that an area can have. They can ask for whatever they want; it is a deal with Government. We have to agree, and we work with them on those areas in which we can find agreement, and hopefully we reach a deal in the interests of that geography and those communities, identifying the powers that will help drive forward the economy in that area.

Helen Jones: The Minister is being generous in giving way once more. Warrington would be subject to four different tiers of local government under the current proposed deal: an elected mayor; a combined authority; a council and parish councils. From what he is saying, can I deduce that if Warrington came to him with a proposal for more powers to the local authority, he would consider it?
James Wharton: We will always have discussions with any local authority, but it is very unlikely that we would be able to make a deal with Warrington alone. The idea of devolution is to bring together areas in sensible economic geographies to deliver extended and accelerated growth through additional powers currently held and exercised by Government. The powers are not being created out of thin air. It is not a matter of an extra layer; the powers are already being exercised by Ministers like me sat in Whitehall Departments and by civil servants who are not elected by the people affected by those decisions. We are giving those areas a chance to hold those powers nearer to the people affected by how they are used. We are giving them the chance to elect the people who make those decisions.

We cannot compel any area to have a metro mayor or the new devolved structures that so many areas have signed up to, but we have been clear that where areas want ambitious devolution deals and a wide-ranging package of powers to drive real change for their communities and to grow their economies, we expect a mayor to be part of that, because of the accountability, drive and mandate that comes with that position. The Government have made no secret of that, but I reiterate that we do not have the power to compel any area to be part of that process. It is very important that so many areas have welcomed what we are doing, engaged with us and entered into deals. We continue to talk about where deals might go next and what they might do for the future.

Members from all parts of the House have spoken about the specific Cheshire and Warrington proposals. I hope that area will be part of the process and will grasp with both hands the opportunity the Government present to do something exciting, to drive forward its economy, to bring power closer to local people and to recognise the incredible potential of that area and the people who live within it, which the businesses operating there can deliver on. It is an exciting time, and I hope that the politics and the conspiracy theories, some of which we have seen brought to the Chamber today, will not prevent those communities from benefiting from a significant transfer of powers that have been centralised over decades and political generations out to the people who will be affected by their exercise. That is welcome. In principle, it is welcomed across the political divide, and we have heard comments to that effect today. I hope agreement can be delivered so that the people in those communities can benefit from what we are setting out to do.

5.28 pm

Justin Madders: I think we have had an excellent debate. Most Members have generally supported the concept of devolution. We have talked a lot about accountability and working together, and I hope we are able to do that. The Minister says that no form of governance is imposed on any area, but in the next sentence he says, “We are not going to impose anything, but you have to do it on certain conditions.” That is the fundamental dishonesty at the heart of the process, and it is not genuine devolution.

I echo the words of the shadow Minister: we need some flexibility in this. We need to listen to local communities and understand what they want and need. We need to work together to try to deliver genuine devolution. I have not heard anything that has convinced me that an elected mayor is the right solution for my area, but I am absolutely convinced that if there are powers available, we should do our utmost to grab them as quickly as we can.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered elected mayors outside city regions.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Wednesday 15 June 2016

[MRS MADELINE MOON in the Chair]

Developing Countries: Jobs and Livelihoods

9.30 am

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I beg to move.

That this House has considered jobs and livelihoods in developing countries.

I draw attention to my entries in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

“A good job can change a person’s life, and the right jobs can transform entire societies. Governments need to move jobs to center stage to promote prosperity and fight poverty”.

Those are the words of Dr Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank, in his introduction to the 2013 World Development Report. In 2014, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said:

“Growth reduces poverty through jobs…raising incomes for individuals through the dignity of work and providing tax receipts for governments to fund basic public services like health and education.”

On the other hand, the lack of jobs and the opportunity to earn a living fuels discontent and unrest and drives economic migration. We are seeing the consequences right now, which is yet another reason why working in partnership around the world is both the right thing to do and very much in our national interest.

In sustainable development goal 8, UN member Governments commit that by 2030 they will achieve “full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”.

Just last year the International Development Committee published a report on jobs and livelihoods. One of its recommendations was that jobs and livelihoods were “such an important issue” that its successor Committee in this Parliament should take it up “to assess what progress has been made.”

I am sure that that will happen in the coming years, but I wanted to ensure that the matter was raised in the House. I am delighted to see so many colleagues present.

Other members of the International Development Committee would have been here, but the timing of the debate clashes with a meeting of its Sub-Committee on the Independent Commission for Aid Impact.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend feel that the Prime Minister’s initiative to make a number of MPs, such as myself, trade envoys will contribute to the work he is describing, given the wide role we have been given? How much does he think the prosperity fund will play a role in helping to develop local industries and situations to enable the creation of new jobs?

Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is doing fine work as a trade envoy for Nigeria, which is vital, because British investment around the world will help to create jobs. The prosperity fund will provide opportunities for people to develop that work. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

The 2013 World Development Report estimated that, globally, 200 million disproportionately young people are unemployed, with a further 620 million young people neither working nor looking for work. Due to age profile and population growth, the report estimates that a further 600 million jobs will need to be found in the next 15 years just to keep employment rates constant. Personally, I would put that figure even higher, at closer to 1 billion.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He is discussing the figures and alluded to the fact that we would like to go further. Does he agree that it is almost a pipe-dream that the sustainable development goal that appears to indicate the elimination of poverty and unemployment, particularly in developing countries, will be achieved by 2030? We really need radically to reassess what we are doing to achieve that goal.

Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. One reason why I called for this debate is because not nearly enough work is going on around the world. The UK is taking a lead, but he is absolutely right that much more needs to be done here and around the world.

In many countries, much of the work is subsistence agriculture and low-income self-employment—that is true for something like 50% of the 3 billion people working worldwide. Making ends meet is extremely difficult. I have to admit that all the figures I have cited are imprecise and sometimes speculative, which is a problem. We do not have accurate data, but I hope we will see more in future. It is about not only data but action, but action depends on good data.

The World Development Report found that: first, there are too few productive waged jobs in modern, formal sectors; secondly, most people are engaged in very low-productivity, seasonal or subsistence work in both rural and urban areas; thirdly, there are large gaps in job opportunities for women, youth and marginalised groups; fourthly, much work is in poor conditions, or is unsafe or risky, including in formal employment; and fifthly, many labour market-related institutions are ineffective, including skills institutions.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I apologise that I cannot stay for the whole debate, but I am going to an event in the House of Lords to mark Small Charity Week and speak about the importance of small charities in international development. Does he agree that many small and grassroots organisations have an important role to play in equipping people in developing countries with precisely the kinds of skills he is talking about, which they need in order to move into productive employment?

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I will give an example of that later in my speech, but he is absolutely right. I made a similar point in Monday’s debate in this Chamber on foreign aid expenditure.

What can be done? I shall give several possible solutions. First, let us work with what we have. I shall start with agriculture, because it is at the heart of the economies of most developing countries. It provides most of the
work and a considerable share of GDP, Government income and exports. It also provides the basis for local manufacturing. Even in developed economies such as ours, food and drink production is the largest manufacturing sector. Why should that not be the case in developing countries?

Although all countries will of course wish to diversify into other sectors and reduce reliance on agriculture, that is not the same as neglecting agriculture. That mistake has been made far too often in the past, both by Governments and by their aid-funded advisers. I am glad to say that things have changed over the past three decades. Countries such as India and Vietnam, and more recently Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia—to name but a few of many—have given much more prominence to agriculture and increased their support of it. The same is true of development agencies, especially the Department for International Development. I welcome that.

Working with what we have in agriculture also means working with the smallholder farmers who are its backbone. When I started to work with smallholder farmers nearly 30 years ago, the view of many was that they were on the way out, and that the future of agriculture was large-scale farming. In fact, they are more important than ever, providing food security even in conflict zones. For example, in the 1970s Angola produced a similar amount of coffee to Uganda, but Angola’s coffee was almost all produced on large estates, while Uganda’s was produced by smallholders. Both countries went through long periods of turbulence. Today, Uganda’s coffee production is the same as it was back then, if not more, but Angola’s coffee production has almost disappeared. Smallholder farmers are incredibly resilient.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He has vast experience of developing countries. Does he agree that there needs to be an emphasis on educating young people so that there are links with the business community? He will know that every year in the House there are campaigns to get children in developing countries into education. That would help them on the pathway to jobs, no matter how little.

Jeremy Lefroy: I agree entirely. I shall address that issue in a moment, because it is vital.

I have a couple of other examples of sectors in which we can work with what we have. Hospitality is important in every developing country. It is about not only international tourism, but looking after people in one’s own country and wider region. Hilton estimates that, if there is proper investment around the world, the hospitality sector alone could create an additional 70 million jobs over the next decade. Apart from agriculture and agricultural processing, construction is very likely to create and properly train local people in their work. That is increasingly happening, but it needs to be extended to the most senior levels of the contract, not just the grassroots workers. Skills are best transferred in the heat of building a major road, bridge, airport or railway line.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman also recognise the importance of urban planning, in particular for the foundations it lays for economic development? We need to do more on that.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman also recognise the importance of urban planning, in particular for the foundations it lays for economic development? We need to do more on that.
Jeremy Lefroy: That is a very interesting point. I agree. We see the consequences of poor urban planning in many parts of the world. In that context and the general context of construction, I would like to ask the Minister whether all the infrastructure and construction projects that DFID supports now have clauses that require the training and development of local skills, rather than just bringing in professionals and others from outside.

Thirdly, we must act locally and regionally, not just from the capital city. People working at the grassroots are the best at creating large numbers of jobs, so Governments and aid organisations need to concentrate their work there, not just in capitals or large cities. The Bangladesh-based international development agency BRAC is effective at doing that, as I saw in Babati in Tanzania—a small town south of Arusha, which the International Development Committee visited in 2014. Charities such as Hand in Hand, set up by the Swedish entrepreneur Percy Barnevik, also work outside the main cities and capitals.

In Nigeria, which the International Development Committee visited in March, DFID has an office in Kano. I think it is the only major aid organisation based in Kano, which gives it the advantage of having a greater appreciation of the situation on the ground. I would encourage the same elsewhere. I would like to see DFID staff based in regional towns and cities, not just capitals. Given modern communication technology, we do not need expensive infrastructure to do that, and I think many would welcome the chance to do their work outside the bubble of a congested, expensive capital city.

Regional trade is vital. DFID has some excellent programmes—in particular, TradeMark East Africa, which, like many things I am going to talk about, is worth an entire debate itself. I will not say more about it at this stage, other than that I believe it has done some excellent work in breaking down trade barriers across the region.

Fourthly, we need to embrace job creation in public services, which are sometimes forgotten. Building public services, such as health and education, provides huge job opportunities. The NHS is the UK’s largest employer by far. At the moment, in Tanzania there is one doctor for every 25,000 people, whereas in the UK it is something like one for every 350. If Tanzania increased its number of doctors to one for every 2,000 people, that would create more than 20,000 highly skilled roles in that country alone, and probably more than 100,000 in total in the health sector. I am very glad to hear that this month Tanzania is considering increasing its health spending substantially in its budget. If that happens, there will be greater employment in the health sector. The same applies to education.

Of course, there is an argument that that depends on increasing Government revenue. That is absolutely true, but it also depends on choices about how Government revenue is spent. It is a virtuous circle: greater access to healthcare and education helps people’s productivity, and hence increases the income that generates taxes. I do not have an estimate of how many additional jobs will be created in developing countries if staffing and education reached just one quarter of developed countries’ levels, but it would be in the millions globally, and almost all would be filled by the young people who need them most.

Fifthly, we need to be inclusive. We need to ensure that the work covers everybody, and women and girls must be at the heart of it. Policies that exclude people are not only wrong, but bad for jobs and livelihoods, and hence economic growth.

Sixthly, there must be access to the right kind of finance, without which we cannot create jobs and livelihoods. Again, a separate debate is required on that issue, so I will limit myself to two examples. Small and growing businesses, which will create the most jobs and need finance, tend to be seen as risky. Commercial banks are increasingly risk averse in developing countries, as they are in developed countries, as they implement capital adequacy rules designed, understandably, to protect depositors. Loans come with high security requirements, so finance will increasingly need to come in forms that are not so restrictive. The providers will need to be willing to take on risk—that applies as much to the UK as to developing countries. The last thing we should do is discourage entrepreneurs by promising them destitution if things go wrong, which is pretty much what commercial banks in developing countries do: they take everything away if the loan goes bad.

The Economist recently published an article with examples of that kind of finance, including GroFin and Equity for Tanzania. I have to declare an interest: I helped to found Equity for Tanzania, and I am director of its charitable parent organisation in the UK. It leases equipment to the growing businesses in Tanzania, and takes as security only the equipment itself. It has the specific aim of job creation. Returning to the point that the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) made, it was supported by a small grant from DFID about 12 years ago and developed into a much larger organisation.

The second example is CDC—formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation—which invests in larger business. It has the specific aim, set up by the previous Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), to create jobs and livelihoods, and to work in the most needy countries. I welcome that.

Finally—this also relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North—we need education and training. A strong and diverse economy built from the grassroots also needs a vibrant education and training system that teaches not simply the essential building blocks—mathematics, sciences and languages—but the skills that people need to work for themselves or run a small enterprise. When the International Development Committee visited Sierra Leone in 2014, President Koroma stressed to us his desire to see more vocational training. In Nepal in 2015 we saw a vocational training scheme run by the Swiss and supported by DFID. There is a tendency to see traditional vocational training models as ineffective, having high capital and running costs and being inaccessible to young people. I believe we need models that are more akin to our apprenticeship schemes, and that are based on working alongside skilled businessmen and women. People should receive financial support for doing so, together with some central training. That is cheaper and more effective.
I also suggest there is a need to embed business and self-employment training within school curricula. Most students will end up working for themselves, or in small enterprises, and they will be better prepared if the training starts in school—again, the same applies in the UK. We do not have enough of that in our school curricula. It would also raise the status of business and self-employment as something a student wishes to do, rather than as a last resort if they cannot go to university or obtain a government or salaried job of some kind. Excellent work on that is done by Youth Business International, part of the Prince’s Trust network, and Peace Child International.

I will now look briefly at DFID’s work, first at its economic strategic development framework, which has five pillars: improving international rules for shared prosperity; supporting the enabling environment for private sector growth; catalysing capital flows and trade in frontier markets; engaging with businesses to help their investments contribute to development; and ensuring that growth is inclusive and benefits girls and women. I have already touched on many of those subjects, so DFID is already covering a lot of the ground. The DFID framework, however, excludes the role of public services in economic development, especially job creation. When the framework is next revised, I ask the Minister to include that in it; it is important.

The second area in which DFID is doing a lot of work is its youth agenda, “Putting young people at the heart of development”, published only in April this year. It focuses on two transitions, between childhood and puberty, or adolescence, and between education and productive work, going from dependence to independence. The April publication has been followed up with a couple of internal papers on youth and jobs, and youth and entrepreneurship. DFID is apparently preparing for a consultation on the issues later this year. That is good, and I welcome it, but we need not only consultations and papers, but action. DFID has the opportunity to lead such work internationally.

Finally, there is the World Bank, which I began with. I declare an interest, as I chair the international Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & International Monetary Fund. In 2014 the bank launched its Solutions for Youth Employment initiative and an umbrella trust fund for jobs, which is supported by DFID. Will the Minister tell us about any progress on that? Are we simply discussing a lot of nice platitudes, welcome though they are, and even policies, or are we talking about real action to create, or support the creation of, those jobs and livelihoods, which are so urgently needed?

In conclusion, I welcome what is being done at the moment. As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said, we must go a lot further and a lot faster. I want to see every DFID bilateral programme (Mr Campbell) said, we must go a lot further and a lot faster. I want to see every DFID bilateral programme
and their families for days and months, rather than simply giving them a meal. However, there is no point in giving a starving child a fishing net; wisdom lies in providing the child with a meal and the family with the ability to find future meals. That underlies the title of the debate, which is about promoting jobs and livelihoods in the developing nations that we support.

In March 2015, the International Development Committee published a report on jobs and livelihoods that said:

"Jobs and livelihoods is such an important issue we recommend that our successor Committee takes it up in the next Parliament to assess what progress has been made."

It was clear in the previous Parliament and this one that the Committee knows that jobs are the only way to make a lasting difference to the lives of people throughout the world. The questions that arise are: have we been successful in our aim? Have we achieved those goals? Are we moving in the right direction?

Mr Gregory Campbell: I agree with my hon. Friend, but does he agree that the sustainable development target of eliminating unemployment and poverty over the next two Parliaments in the United Kingdom stands in stark contrast to escalating youth unemployment in developed nations? The eurozone has 40% youth unemployment. Without a radical and fundamental change, how on earth will we ever see anything remotely close to reducing unemployment and poverty in developing countries, let alone eliminating them?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is most wise, as always. He sets the scene. There are many difficulties at home and abroad. All we can do in the debate is to set the scene and the goals, and contribute, we hope, to a strategy for a way forward. That is what we are trying to do. In 2014, the UK provided £752 million in bilateral aid directly related to jobs, businesses and the economy. Some £358 million was for particular production sectors, such as agriculture and forestry, and £394 million was for economic infrastructure and services, such as transport and storage, or banking and financial services. Together, that accounted for 11% of bilateral aid from the UK.

David Simpson: My hon. Friend has mentioned substantial amounts of money. Does he agree that it is essential for that money to be targeted on the people who need it? So often, we have seen corruption in a lot of the countries, with the money being siphoned off and going to the black market or whatever, and not getting to the people who need it.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is right. Monday’s debate in Westminster Hall, to which the Minister replied, clearly hinted at such things. We all outlined examples where aid had not been focused on the sector that it should have been. My hon. Friend is right to highlight that point, as we did on Monday.

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact published a report on DFID’s private sector development work in May 2014, giving it an overall amber-red rating. It found that "The impact of individual programmes is positive...and DFID has demonstrated its ability to assist the poor through a range of interventions". However, it also found that "It has not turned these ambitions into clear guidance for the development of coherent, realistic, well-balanced and joined-up country-level portfolios."

The hon. Member for Stafford is therefore right that that is what we should try to focus on.

How much of the money actually achieved its aim? Not much, it would seem. Have we made progress and moved from the amber-red zone? My fear is that we have not. Before her children came along, my parliamentary aide used to go to Africa every year in the summer to carry out mission and humanitarian aid work, and she told me of the horrific corruption in many countries that prevented aid from getting to where it was needed; my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) mentioned that, too. The same goes for containers of agricultural equipment that we in Northern Ireland sent overseas; the containers reach their destination with some things having been taken out of them. In fact, those who pack the containers have learned to pack the essential stuff in the back, in the hope of it reaching its destination. The Elim church missionaries in Newtownards in my constituency of Strangford do fantastic work in in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Swaziland in Africa, as do many other churches across the whole of Northern Ireland, and indeed the United Kingdom.

Stories of corruption make it clear to me that we have to divert funding through bodies that we see making a difference, rather than being swallowed up in paperwork and translation. One of the best ways of achieving that goal is to use those who are already on the ground, and to divert funding through bodies that we see making a difference, whether that is Oxfam, Christian Aid or mission bodies with permanent staff on the ground.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) spoke about charitable work. I know of one church in my constituency that, instead of giving Christmas presents, promoted the gift of a cow or a goat to Africa, so that individuals could breed the cows and in the meantime sell milk, or use it to live on. That is a practical way of doing things that changes lives in a small way. It may be a small change for the Government, but the change made in villages throughout Malawi and Zimbabwe was in no way small. Can we learn a lesson from missionaries who have been on the field for 20 years, and who know the systems and how to work in them to achieve results? I believe so.

There is a desperate need for jobs and livelihoods in these countries, and there is an onus on us, as a country that allocates a great deal of funding, to ensure that that is achieved, and that funding is not caught up, or whittled away in the process of getting to the man on the street. I look forward to hearing from DFID. I apologise to the Minister and the shadow Minister for the fact that I will not be here for their speeches, as I have a Select Committee to go to at 10.10 am. I believe that we can effect change with the much-needed funding that this generous nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland gives each and every year, and I encourage other countries to do the same.
Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. What a great opening my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) gave to the debate on this incredibly important subject. As I had only two minutes to speak the other day, I was unable to congratulate the Minister on his knighthood—congratulations!

The UK has made significant contributions to improving the livelihoods of the poorest on the planet, and it is in our interests to help developing states strengthen further, economically and politically, if we are to avert the rise in emigration to the UK from developing countries. The UN states that we will need to create 30 million new jobs every year to keep up with the growth in the global working-age population. The enormity of that challenge is not something that the developing world can—or even should—shoulder by itself.

Our commitment to overseas business development should not be seen as just another programme aimed at helping the poor. It helps everyone, including the countries giving the aid. We are a trading nation, and as such we must always be on the look-out for new markets and new partners to work with. That includes those countries where we have to help develop and foster the conditions necessary for business to flourish.

It is in our national interest to encourage the growth of developing countries by unlocking the enormous potential of the private sectors in those countries. By encouraging business growth, we are turning those who receive state aid into key trading partners. Investment in developing countries brings them into our markets, as we now see across Asia and Africa. For example, our programme to support Rwandan agriculture has transformed the industry from a subsistence-based activity into one that is commercially oriented. With help from DFID, the Rwandan Government have collected greater tax revenues, which has meant that Rwanda’s dependency on foreign aid has declined. The Rwandan Government’s spending on education and healthcare programmes has trebled as a result of the revenues they have collected. Bilateral trade in goods between the UK and Rwanda exceeded £10 million in 2012, and UK exports to Rwanda totalled £7 million. The top exports included power-generating machinery, medicinal and pharmaceutical products, and general industrial machinery.

It is vital that we get the world’s young into work for their own dignity and personal development as well as their economic future. In so many places in the world, we see the consequences of young people feeling that they have no future because of conflict or migration, but where people have the opportunity to support themselves and their families, we see greater stability. That in turn encourages greater business development and attracts more investment.

The UK can be proud of its involvement in the millennium development goals, which significantly improve the livelihoods of billions of people. In particular, the UK’s action on development goal 8 has meant that between 2000 and 2014, bilateral aid to the least developed countries fell by 16% in real terms, while 79% of imports from developing countries entered developed countries duty-free.

Globally, the population covered by 2G grew from 58% in 2001 to 95% in 2015, and anyone who has travelled in developing countries can see that even the poorest individual now has a mobile phone. Internet use has grown from 6% of the world’s population in 2010 to more than 40% in 2015, and 3.2 billion people are now linked to the content and applications that we can access here in the UK.

Those achievements in internet provision, coupled with the ready availability of technology, mean that people are seeing the quality of life in the developed world, so it should come as no surprise that the UK is a popular destination for those who have the skills and qualifications to get themselves here. Technology has vastly improved all our lives, and the opportunities for developing countries are even greater. Developing countries and businesses based there have leapfrogged obsolete technologies, which has allowed them to take advantage of the same level of technology that we enjoy. That has also placed on us a need to accelerate our programmes and ensure that as the expectations of those who live in developing countries rise, so do the opportunities available to them.

A lack of sustainable jobs, and livelihoods that fall below expectations, threaten to undermine our progress on the wider goals of tackling poverty. Unless we address that problem, we will continue to drain away the most educated individuals from the communities that need them most. As of April last year, about 80,000 doctors registered in the UK had obtained their primary medical qualification outside the UK. Many of them qualified in India, Pakistan, South Africa and Nigeria. In effect, developing countries are paying to train doctors for our health service. We have a high demand for doctors, but taking them from the world’s developing countries is counterproductive and not sustainable. Our foreign aid and investment in business development will not see real results unless we create an environment in which aspirational people see their future in their own communities.

A UN report highlighted that 780 million people in the world are earning less than $2 a day, which is the UN development goals’ definition of absolute poverty. We know that society as a whole benefits when more people are contributing towards their country’s growth, but employment must be worth while and rewarding. That is why it was so important that the UN reaffirmed its commitment to the principles of the global development goals in 2015. We will continue to build on what we have achieved.

We have committed to ensuring that everyone can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives by 2030 through the creation of sustainable jobs and by sharing the benefits of technology. Our business development spending must continue to be directed towards developing countries, helping them to build their economies and develop themselves. Continuing with that programme contributes significantly to our wider goals of eradicating poverty and conflict. It is essential that we make that one of our major focuses for the next 15 years and beyond.
works in international development and it is a privilege to serve on the International Development Committee alongside him. I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate. I have a great interest in the subject; I am a member of the Select Committee on International Development, and have a local interest as the Department for International Development in Scotland is based in East Kilbride, in my constituency. We need to recognise the importance of making sure that there are sustainable, inclusive jobs across the world; we must place that at the heart of the UK’s development agenda. I am particularly proud of my party’s work on that. The Scottish Government have a firm commitment to advance Scotland’s place in the world as a responsible nation. They have a £9 million international development fund and a £6 million climate justice fund, which supports 11 projects in places that include Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Goal 8 of the sustainable development goals is about jobs and livelihoods. That key objective is required to be achieved by 2030. There is, as we have heard, much work to be done to realise that aim, and progress must be regularly monitored, and measured effectively through improved data collection and the development of disaggregated data. We need to ensure that the disproportionate unemployment rate for young people is tackled. About 600 million new jobs must be created just to keep things constant. Unemployment affects women and disabled people disproportionately. The target includes full and productive employment for all and equal pay for work of equal value, ensuring that no one is left behind. An example to consider is work that has been funded in Malawi, including projects focused on job development and economic growth. This month I met Malawian farmers who had developed a fair trade enterprise that enabled many people in their community to develop sustainable businesses. Their venture supported others besides their own families, and enabled many children to attend school. I would like DFID in future to fund initiatives of that type and think about developing them.

The Global Concerns Trust has run several projects that have helped adults with disabilities to receive vocational training. In one project, 106 adults have been given training in carpentry or tailoring, and the trust has given 57 people the tools they need to start their own business. Our development portfolio should ensure that no one is left behind. Another project has given 62 people with disabilities vocational training, as well as training in business skills and prevention of HIV/AIDS, so that they can help others in their community. That has helped people to earn a living, with a more than fivefold increase in income on average for those trained. Those achievements may seem small in scale, but they have a huge impact. They allow people the opportunity to develop and grow, and to create businesses and become economic contributors. They are then not reliant on government project work or aid for sustainability.

It is important for developing countries to have sustainable economies for growth—but that is not the only reason. There are also enormous psychological benefits to being employed and economically active. It gives dignity and fulfilment. We often feel that there is no future for them or their families. Jobs meet important psychosocial needs, and work is central to individual identity and social status, whereas conversely there is a strong association between worklessness and poor health, including poor mental health, and poverty. Working towards full employment in developing countries helps to create a foundation of growing prosperity, inclusion and social cohesion.

DFID works on private sector development, but there is much work to be done in that realm. We need to engage private enterprise to ensure that the millions become the trillions that we need to leverage our sustainable development goals and make progress. We need a focus on entrepreneurship and allowing people to develop their own skills and attributes, including technological skills, which are so important to economic development. We also need effective measures to eradicate forced labour, slavery and human trafficking. We need to work at many levels.

It is necessary to develop clear guidance to ensure that future assistance is clearly structured to create coherent opportunities. It is a fundamental issue and it is of the utmost importance that we get it right and continually assess our progress. We need the UK Government to report on progress in an open, accessible and participatory way, supporting the active engagement of all, including children and marginalised groups. As I have mentioned, a key issue is that we require better datasets, which should be disaggregated across countries. I am hopeful that technology will be able to transform people’s lives—particularly women’s lives—across the world. Tools and equipment reduce drudgery and increase the amount of quality time that can be spent with family and on education. I would like a fair trade symbol to be developed, if possible, to show in particular women’s contribution to the production cycle, where women lead and develop businesses in the developing world. I should be grateful if the Minister commented on whether that is a helpful idea.

Jobs and livelihoods are crucial for all. The sustainable development goals mean that we must make progress at home as well as in developing countries. More focus is required on enabling, and less on scapegoating of the workless. That will give a motivation for change. I look forward to working constructively in the International Development Committee on this issue, as well as at home in my constituency, developing jobs and livelihoods for all.

10.15 am

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It would be remiss of me not to congratulate the Minister on his elevation to a knighthood. I am sure that as a former Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty’s Household, who is traditionally held hostage in Buckingham Palace before the state opening, he had plenty of opportunity to lobby the right people, and his lobbying has come to fruition.

It would be remiss of me, too, not to pay tribute to you, Mrs Moon. Through your membership of the Select Committee on Defence you have become an expert in foreign affairs, international development and safety and security around the world, and I pay tribute to you for all that you have done in that field. You are now a leading light in this Parliament on those issues.

I want also to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), whose speech taught us all a lesson. I have been a Member of Parliament for six
Developing Countries: Jobs and Livelihoods

15 JUNE 2016

[Chris Evans]

years. So often in this place Members stand up, and we hear them read out a speech; but with his speech today the hon. Gentleman proved that he cares—and cares passionately. Throughout our debate we have seen something that we should remember in the midst of the referendum—many people try to divide us into in and out camps, but the one thing that unites us is that we are human. People in developing countries may live in places whose names we cannot pronounce, and that we do not understand; but if we care about poverty it does not matter whether it is in Blackwood or Newbridge in my constituency, Stafford or Mozambique. We all have a duty as human beings to care about those who are impoverished and who are suffering, around the world. The hon. Gentleman’s speech, and other speeches today, have expressed that.

There are many things we sometimes take for granted in the UK, which is one of the most developed countries in the world. We have fantastic infrastructure, such as our extensive network of motorways, which stretches across the country. We have the resources to put into projects such as HS2, to make a drastic improvement to rail links between the north and south. We do not have to rely on international aid for our business. Instead, we attract considerable foreign direct investment. Indeed, in 2014 the UK attracted foreign investment in a record 887 projects, which created more than 31,000 jobs in this country. Investors know that money invested in the UK is safe and will generate returns, in the main.

We are the lucky ones. For much of the rest of the world, specifically developing countries, the infrastructure and stability that we take for granted are simply not there. We have a responsibility to contribute towards the economic development of less developed countries, so those who live there become a market for us to trade with. More customers can never be a bad thing. Our assistance to developing countries in their efforts to industrialise, and to create business and thereby employment, is a moral duty. It will help to raise millions out of extreme poverty.

The United Kingdom has a long history of supporting international development. I may be partisan, but I am proud that the Department for International Development was founded by a Labour Government in the 1960s, under Jennie Lee, the widow of Aneurin Bevan. I welcome the commitment to more than double international development funding to £1.8 billion in 2015-16. We must ensure that that money is spent in the most effective way, providing the most value for money not only for our own citizens but for those we are trying to help. However, efforts so far have not been effective enough. The problem cannot be solved simply by throwing more and more money at it. We have seen over and over again that that does not work.

Although it is true to say that private enterprise contributes around 90% of jobs in developing countries, international aid must involve considerable planning and a joined-up approach in public institutions that takes a holistic view of a country. We must ask the question: what do they need, aside from money and finance, to do the business they need and to bring the jobs they need?

Businesses in developed countries rely on stability. It is simply not possible to do good business where there is war, conflict, crime and, above all, corruption. If we throw money at businesses in insecure countries, can we truly expect them to do well and ultimately provide jobs? It stands to reason that businesses will not prosper if they have to pay tributes or bribes to corrupt local politicians, or if corrupt businesspeople pocket aid money rather than invest it in their business. The president of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, said in 2013 that “corruption is public enemy number one”.

In describing the effects of corruption, he said:

“Every dollar that a corrupt official or a corrupt business person puts in their pocket is a dollar stolen from a pregnant woman who needs health care; or from a girl or a boy who deserves an education; or from communities that need water, roads, and schools. Every dollar is critical if we are to reach our goals to end extreme poverty by 2030 and to boost shared prosperity.”

John Howell: The point the hon. Gentleman makes about corruption is a very good one. Is he aware that the country I look after for the Government—Nigeria—has a President who has come to power to try to cure the corruption problem there and is doing a very good job on it? We are trying to help that through a number of projects, including a very exciting one: the judicial college will help to train judges to be able to deal with that sort of situation.

Chris Evans: I am aware of the fantastic work in Nigeria and of the election of the President, who has got to the core of the problem. As we have seen in the past in places such as Rwanda, when corruption hits, it muddies the waters for fantastic projects such as those the hon. Gentleman mentions. It also gives rise to the idea that we should cut back on international aid and affects the efforts we are making.

Our strategy for international development clearly needs to focus on supporting the security infrastructure in developing countries and ensuring they have robust legal systems that can root out corruption. Security is fundamental to stability—I do not have to tell you that, Mrs Moon, since you are a long-serving member of the Defence Committee. Without stability, it is impossible for businesses to not only thrive but, in many cases, to survive.

The joined-up approach must also ensure that aid is given to education services and health services and invested in the infrastructure and logistics capability, which facilitate trade and economic growth in developing countries. A key reason for the rapid development of industrialised and highly developed economies is the heavy emphasis on education. A good, open and inclusive education system not only gives workers the basic skills they need to become a productive member of their local economy, but allows those with the ability to develop the skills to innovate and solve their own problems by developing their human capital.

Another key point is that the aid we provide should allow developing countries to help themselves, which we know they want, as nobody truly wants to rely on charitable aid. We all know the proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” In this case, that is very apt.

If we do not focus our aid on the fundamental things without which business cannot flourish—security, law and order, education, healthcare and infrastructure—we run the risk of continuing the cycle of extreme poverty.
and unemployment. If crime pays more than work or education, it is no surprise that many young men in developing countries turn towards it. That is yet more evidence that developing economies need balanced and simultaneous improvement, investment and aid across the board. It simply will not do to build an extensive road network if corruption is rife, just as it will not do to tackle corruption without investing in infrastructure.

Some say that charity starts at home and that we should cut away aid to developing countries. To me, that is a narrow-minded view. If we support economies in developing countries, we open up new markets where we can sell our products. Surely that is a win-win situation, as we will bring millions of people out of extreme poverty—the goal we all strive towards—and create more export and business opportunities for British companies, creating more jobs at home. We have a moral duty when it comes to international development. I am pleased to see that everyone who has spoken in this debate, from all parties, shares that goal.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. I need to go to the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10.30 am.

10.25 am

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am grateful to you, Mrs Moon, for giving me the opportunity to speak. I will keep my remarks brief. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who has over a number of years shown great passion, commitment and dedication to international development, and brings a huge experience and knowledge to this place. I have known him for a number of years. We have been to Rwanda, Burundi and Sierra Leone for Project Umubano, and I can vouch for his commitment to international development and in particular to entrepreneurship, livelihoods and jobs. This is a timely debate, following the debate in this Chamber earlier this week about the 0.7% target and the report on the implementation of the SDGs from the International Development Select Committee, of which I am a member.

I will keep my remarks to one simple fact: if we truly are committed to the 0.7% target, which I believe we are, and to the sustainable development goals, the way to move beyond aid and to move countries away from a dependency on humanitarian aid, with which I fundamentally agree, is through encouraging sustainable development and economic development. That means giving people a life chance, whether it is in our country or abroad. As the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) said, if we teach a man a fish, he will feed several people. We must give people an education, which they need if they are to get on in life, just as they need to be able to earn incomes to look after themselves and their families.

DFID has a very good reputation for supporting many business projects. I have seen some of them, in particular in Nigeria. We need to keep our focus on enterprise and entrepreneurship. We need to keep women involved in this agenda as well, and above all, we need to recognise the value that business and enterprise can bring.

10.27 am

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing this debate. It is not the first of his debates in which I have spoken in this place, and I am sure it will not be the last. I am delighted to contribute today.

As Members have said, goal 8 of the 2015 UN sustainable development goals makes promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all a key objective for the world to achieve by 2030. Sustainable economic growth will require societies to create the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs that stimulate the economy while not harming the environment. Job opportunities and decent working conditions are also required for the whole working-age population. An adequate supply of jobs is the foundation of sustained and growing prosperity, inclusion and social cohesion. Where jobs are scarce or where livelihoods leave households in poverty, there is less growth, less security and less human and economic development.

In the current turbulent economic environment, job creation is one of the most pressing global development priorities. The aim to support employment and livelihoods with rising incomes, dignity and respect is a development goal that the Scottish National party would like to see at the heart of the UK’s development agenda. Jobs connect people to their society and the economy. Access to safe, productive and fairly remunerated work is a key vehicle for battling poverty.

As has been mentioned, the World Development Report 2013 found that:

“Worldwide, 200 million people, a disproportionate share of them youth, are unemployed and actively looking for work. An estimated 620 million youth, the majority of them women, are neither working nor looking for work. Just to keep employment rates constant, around 600 million new jobs will have to be created over a 15-year period.”

It also highlighted that the problem in many developing countries was that, although unemployment rates could be low, only a minority of workers were wage earners. More than 3 billion people are working worldwide, but almost half of them are farmers or self-employed. Most of the poor work long hours, but simply cannot make ends meet.

The SNP is committed to advancing Scotland’s place in the world as a responsible nation by building mutually beneficial links with other countries, as outlined in the Scottish Government’s international framework. Since 2007, the Scottish Government have doubled the international development fund to £9 million per annum and launched the climate justice fund, bringing the total spend on international development work since 2007 to over £86 million. The SNP has also highlighted Scotland’s commitment to the sustainable development goals.

Work funded by the Scottish Government has included projects focusing on job development and economic growth in Malawi. For over a decade, they have supported the Scotland Malawi Partnership and its sister organisation, the Malawi Scotland Partnership, which is based in Malawi. Through the two organisations, more than 94,000 Scots and 198,000 Malawians work in partnership together, and more than 300,000 Scots and 2 million Malawians benefit from those activities every year. The
main focus of the Scotland Malawi Partnership is to work in dignified partnership with local people or Ubale, as they say in Chichewa. Scotland is playing an active and important role in helping to support jobs and livelihoods in Malawi by building markets for Malawian products.

Kilombero rice is a high-quality aromatic rice which the Malawi Government believe is an important export crop. For smallholder farmers it is an effective cash crop, which is popular among the urban population. The challenge is to assist more farmers to turn their smallholdings into effective, market-orientated, small businesses, which together can dramatically improve the livelihoods of people in northern Malawi.

JTS—Just Trading Scotland—is a Scottish fair trade importer. KASFA—Kaporo Smallholder Farmers Association—is a farmers’ association in northern Malawi. They have been working together, with support from the Scottish Government’s international development fund, to improve livelihoods and to strengthen communities. Since 2009, JTS has been working to establish a market for Kilombero rice, selling through civic society groups in Scotland: schools, churches and fair trade groups. This in turn has encouraged fine food distributor, Cotswold Fayre, and larger retailers like the Co-op to stock the product.

Howard Msukwa and Kenneth Mwakasungula, who are both rice farmers, visited Scotland last month to promote the launch of the rice in Co-operative food stores across Scotland and to tell people about the project’s success. The benefits of the scheme have been recognised by local rice farmers in Malawi. I had the pleasure of hearing both gentlemen speak at the Scotland Malawi Partnership road trip in Aberdeen.

Over the last five years, membership of the farming association in Malawi has grown from 2,500 to 6,700. Northern Malawi now has an effective farmers’ organisation that can deliver training and cost-effective farm inputs, and plays a vital role in community development. More farmers can send their children to secondary school and the first students are finding places in universities and colleges.

The key to success has been to link farm development work with establishing markets, which offers farmers an assured income. This encourages them to invest time and money to transform their farms. With altitude, climate and weather conditions ideal for cultivating coffee, Mzuzu coffee is another crop with a fast-growing reputation from one of the best coffee-growing regions in the world. In the 2014-15 Malawi “taste of harvest coffee” competition, Mzuzu took the top five positions. Interestingly, the first coffee plant in Malawi was introduced in the 1870s by John Buchanan from Scotland—it originated in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, so there is a strong historical link.

The recently completed project by Scottish Government-funded TraCSS—Trading with Climate Smart Supply—aimed to stimulate sustainable economic growth in Malawi through development of agricultural value chains in a climate-smart and pro-poor way. The objective was to improve the competitiveness of tea, coffee and pigeon pea value chains in an inclusive way to deliver improved smallholder incomes and to reduce natural resource degradation. One of the outcomes of the project was the distribution and implementation of the “Handbook for Sustainable Coffee Production in Malawi” through the Coffee Association of Malawi—CAMAL.

I am coming to the end of my time. The work of the Scottish Government and the Scotland Malawi Partnership demonstrates how Government aid and civic society can work to create markets for developing countries that will support jobs and livelihoods in the developing world.

10.35 am

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I follow other hon. Members in congratulating the Minister on his recent knighthood and elevation. In months to come, we may disagree on many things, but we can agree that there is no question of his commitment and passion to his current role and public service.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing and introducing this important debate. He has a long-standing commitment and expertise in this area. Indeed, he was present when this important matter was last considered by the Select Committee on International Development. He made some important points in his excellent speech today and emphasised the importance of supporting industries such as construction and agriculture. He also made an important point about young people and putting more emphasis on education and training.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber made passionate and important contributions about ending extreme poverty, at the heart of which is corruption. It is real and must be addressed. It is a major roadblock to economic development around the world.

Hon. Members referred to another important point: the SDG and whether it is over ambitious. I think it is time we were ambitious and aspirational. Unemployment around the world may not be eradicated by 2030, but we can have that vision and I ask the Minister to ensure we thoroughly mark the SDG8 indicators.

Regardless of who someone is and regardless of where they live in the world, a good job can change their life. Decent opportunities and decent wages provide families with shelter, food and security. That not only provides direct benefits for the earner, but their wage gets passed around the community and benefits others.

We know this and it presents obvious reasons for helping to create jobs in developing countries. However, around half of the world’s population still lives on roughly $2 a day and the World Bank’s World Development Report 2013 estimated that 200 million people around the world were unemployed and looking for work.

Evidence shows that 600 million new jobs that are needed globally for a growing population and particularly in developing countries, so it is clear that much more needs to be done.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Should we not recognise that, even when people seem to be outside extreme poverty according to statistics and are earning more money, many are in newly urbanised centres in the developing world? Their income may be above the indicators, but that does not take account of the fact that they are paying crippling rents to live in shanty-town conditions, even though their working environment may
be quite modern, and they pay huge costs for water. They may have a livelihood, but their living conditions may not be good.

Imran Hussain: The hon. Gentleman makes a pertinent and timely intervention. He is absolutely right: there is strong evidence to suggest that, for many people, employment does not mean they are not living in poverty or even extreme poverty in some cases. The other issue with regard to urban areas, which I raised in an intervention, is urban planning. That is another barrier and we need to give it a lot more thought.

Certain aspects of DFID’s overall record can be commended. For instance, it provided £752 million of bilateral aid directly related to jobs, business and the economy in 2014. However, the figure fluctuated throughout the time of the last Government before the strategic framework for economic development set aside £1.8 billion, so I would be grateful if the Minister gave an assurance that that spending will be maintained following the bilateral aid review. Can he also indicate when we will have the findings of the bilateral aid review or report?

There are also specific areas where I will give credit where credit is due. DFID is regarded as an expert on mid-level private sector development programmes, and I hope it learns from the success in that area and applies it to others. The International Development Committee, whose Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), is here today, noted that DFID also has excellent examples of work in areas such as public financial management that it should build on.

Nevertheless, I seek clarification from the Minister on a number of areas. First, on SDG 8, can he assure me that the indicators will be thorough when we get them? With regard to private sector development, we welcome work that facilitates the development of sustainable and secure jobs in developing countries, and we recognise that the majority of jobs will be created in the private sector. Indeed, the private sector provides some 90% of jobs in developing countries, according to various reports.

That is not to say that we are supportive of all measures. I have a particular concern about the expertise of staff in DFID working on private sector development—the Independent Commission for Aid Impact found in its May 2014 report that there were gaps in knowledge and experience. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister told me whether progress has been made in addressing the concerns raised by the commission. How many full-time staff in DFID are working on private sector development? How many, if any, are externally contracted staff brought in to advise on private sector development projects? How many staff working on private sector development come from backgrounds of working in the private sector and working on businesses in developing countries? Does DFID make training and mentoring opportunities available to staff working on private sector development, so that they can build their expertise? I appreciate that the Minister may not have all the answers to hand, but I would appreciate a response, even if it is a written one, at some stage.

The final issue I want to raise is working conditions. We cannot overlook the potential influence that DFID has in helping to reform labour practices and working conditions in developing countries, so I would like assurances from the Minister that any aid or assistance provided by DFID or other Departments to foreign states or businesses is provided only with assurances that they abide by working standards.

10.43 am

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Sir Desmond Swayne): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), and I thank him for his kind words. He referred to my passion, but it is clear that his passion equals, if not exceeds, mine, as does that of the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I sometimes imagine that we disagree less than we think, but what is clear is that we all share the same objective and the same passion.

Today we have debated a very important, game-changing report. Since that report, we have been pushed in a direction that we were very keen to head in in the first place. We have created a new directorate for economic development by combining five separate departments. We have created a new youth and education department to focus on the transition from school to work, and to drive that focus through all the bilateral relationships and all our programmes. We have implemented a new growth diagnostic. This is the focus that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) demanded there be in every bilateral relationship and every programme. The diagnostic informs every team of the barriers to growth in the countries in which they are working, so that they can devise programmes with the greatest impact on growth. My hon. Friend referred to the new agricultural strategy; it is, as he demanded, focused on smallholder agriculture. We will shortly publish—after we have disposed of that business on 23 June—our new economic development strategy.

The delivery of this agenda is vital to all the global sustainable development goals across the entire piece, and not just to the most obvious ones—1, 8 and 9. We will not see a reduction in world poverty of the order that we want unless we get a great increase in inclusive growth. In the past, we have had growth that has not generated inclusivity or sufficient jobs. It is vital that we get inclusive growth, because as we have heard so often this morning, we need 600 million new jobs in the next decade; otherwise, we will have a growing army of underemployed, frustrated and increasingly angry young people. As we have heard again this morning, lack of economic opportunity, a job and a livelihood is the principal driver of migration. That has been going on for decades. Millions of people have dropped everything that they have known and moved from their homes to the unknown in pursuit of economic activity. We are beginning to notice it as we see that tide of humanity coming up from south-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, that driver has existed for decades, and we have to address it by providing those jobs.

I accept that not any job will do. It is no good having jobs that enslave. That is why we are still concentrating our programmes on work and freedom. There is what we are doing with the International Labour Organisation in Bangladesh, and there is the ethical trading initiative and the responsible, accountable and transparent enterprise initiative. Those are vital, but in the end it all comes down to jobs. The Government have an important role in that regard. My hon. Friend referred to the importance of public services. Yes, public services are important;
there are important jobs and roles in public services. It is precisely for that reason that we take—and manage—the very considerable risks of working through Government-provided services in places such as Nepal, where our healthcare programme is channelled through Government provision, although it is a corrupt environment.

I share the passion of the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) for tackling corruption. He is absolutely right, and that is why our programme on governance under SDG 16 is so important to our economic development programme. It is precisely for that reason that we held the anti-corruption summit and, the day before, the summit to engage with civil society on how it deals with that. As I say, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: where elites hijack the lucrative parts of the economy and wreck it, that impoverishes everyone. When a person gets an important job in the Government or the civil service because they are someone’s cousin, rather than capable of carrying out that function, that leads to complete inefficiency.

Over and over again, we find Governments getting in the way of the creation of jobs, through unwillingness or lack of capacity to raise revenue to invest in the necessary infrastructure; a lack of regulation, or over-regulation; or a lack of contract law or any other law, or of the rule of law. All those things drive away investment.

The real engine of job creation is private sector-led investment. One of the principal barriers to that investment thriving is the lack of necessary infrastructure. A reduction in productivity of some 40% throughout Africa and Asia is accounted for by the lack of necessary infrastructure, and it is estimated that Africa suffers a vital reduction of 2.1% in its annual growth rate as a consequence of the lack of necessary infrastructure.

Some 1 billion people have no access to electricity, and 1.3 billion live nowhere near a road. We must address those infrastructure problems. There is an annual deficit of some $3 trillion a year, in terms of the infrastructure that we need to invest in. Most of that must be provided by Governments. Grant aid will remain important for filling about half of that infrastructure gap, but all investors will need to increase their ability to invest massively if we are to do that. That is why we are working with the World Bank and the regional development banks.

We are working on projects on hydroelectricity in Nepal and power sector reform and roads in Nigeria. We have launched Energy Africa, working in 14 sub-Saharan African countries to address the needs of 600 million people who are without electricity. Although we only launched the campaign last year, we have proved the root; we kick-started the campaign with the work that we did with M-KOPA, which has put in place some 300,000 solar panels that serve 1 million people. It has also used highly innovative methods, so that power can be paid for using pay-as-you-go mobile phones.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Where we have been relatively slow in moving to meet the infrastructure needs of Africa, the Chinese have moved relatively rapidly. Does he agree that that is not entirely unproblematic, because the Chinese do not share our commitment to human rights?

Sir Desmond Swayne: The quality of our investment and the fact that we do not tie our aid certainly make our aid of a higher standard. I accept the hon. Lady’s challenge: we need to raise our game, and that is why we use the Private Investment Development Group to leverage more investment. Through an investment of $1.2 billion, we have secured $20 billion from the private sector and $9 billion from international financial organisations to provide early equity, long-term debt and guarantees to meet vital infrastructure needs. Equally, we use CDC, our development capital arm, to blaze a trail and show other investors that there are profitable opportunities even in the most difficult markets. We recapitalised with some £730 million last year, and we are driving that into the infrastructure sector. CDC has backed some 40,000 GWh of production as a consequence of the move into the power market.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): On the point about opportunities, does the Minister agree that we need policy coherence between the climate change goals and economic development policies?

Sir Desmond Swayne: My hon. Friend is right. Climate-smart development must be integral to everything we do. It has to be a part of it. It is not a box to be ticked; it must be designed into the programme from the start.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) mentioned the prosperity fund in his intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford. I take a slightly different view of the prosperity fund. We are spending all this taxpayers’ money creating opportunities and opening markets, and my breath is taken away when other countries simply move in and take the opportunities that have been created by that investment.

The prosperity fund’s primary objective must be to reduce poverty. However, it is right that that fund should make British companies alive to the opportunities available to them. We will not tie our aid.

As an aside, I point out that 80% of our procurement is with British companies simply because they are the most competitive we can find, but my hon. Friend the Member for Henley drew attention to an important point in the piece. This is, of course, an enormous agenda. It is a whole trade facilitation agenda, and my hon. Friend mentioned the importance of trade envoys. We spend about £1 billion a year on trade facilitation and improving the ability of the least developed countries to enter our markets and to trade effectively. Trade dwarfs aid. It is a vital part of the agenda. The hon. Member for Bradford East raised the vital issue of urban planning. It is precisely for the reasons that he gave that we launched the new programme for economic development in cities, and that will be driven forward with a will.

The whole piece, including TradeMark East Africa and the trade facilitation agenda, is part of the drive for economic development that is at the centre of everything that we do regarding the provision of jobs. I come back to a point that has been made several times this morning: it is all about jobs. We need 600 million high-quality new jobs that will not impoverish and enslave people. That is what we have to deliver. I defer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford to sum up the debate.
Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to everybody here for their valuable contributions. We have touched on a huge range of subjects that are vital to consider in relation to jobs and development. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about the need to tackle unemployment everywhere, and the importance of small projects. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned the important work that the Scottish Government do through their development fund, and how critical it is to work with young people. The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans), in a powerful and passionate speech, spoke about the business environment, the importance of tackling corruption, stability and direct investment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) spoke about many issues, and particularly the importance of the digital economy in the developing world. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) mentioned the importance of education. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson) spoke about the vital nature of partnership working and the work that the Scottish Government have done in partnership with Malawi on Kilombero rice and, indeed, Mzuzu coffee, which I have had the pleasure of tasting. The hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) spoke powerfully about the need to be ambitious and aspirational, and touched on city planning.

The Minister spoke about DFID’s work, which I commend. He indicated that DFID is moving powerfully in the directions in which I would like to see it go. He spoke about infrastructure and Energy Africa, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) instituted last year, and about how that is already making progress.

Above all, there is a passionate desire here to work for inclusive, job-rich growth in developing countries, because that is important for the people in those countries, and because it allows them to stay where they are and not put pressure on our country. It is in their interests and ours.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).
the necessary plug-in points, and so on, especially in the centre of cities, is important to increasing air quality in those hotspots.

**Glyn Davies:** My hon. Friend is certainly right, but it goes much further than that. We are seeing a whole new industry develop. The motor industry is a big part of the British economy, and it will completely change over the next 20 years. My interest in the climate change targets led me to accept an invitation to go to the BMW training centre at Reading. It was an eye-opener in several different ways, and not just my drive in an i8, which I would recommend to anyone. It is a bit like being in a rocket—it is an amazing experience. The visit helped me to understand what is happening, particularly on the development and training of technicians.

The second eye-opener was on the safety of working on electric cars. I had not realised that the batteries in electric cars are 600 V. Any mistake results in death or very serious injury. That is the reality, so training is crucial. Anyone who works on an electric car without experience and training puts themselves in great danger. We have a lot of work to do to ensure that people are properly trained. Of course, the main distributors already ensure that they have people who can work on such cars, but it will not be long before electric cars enter the second-hand car market and are taken to local garages and to people who do a bit of second-hand car repair. We have to avoid the sorts of accidents that will seriously damage the industry. Developing and discovering technicians is becoming increasingly difficult. The Institute of the Motor Industry tells me that its surveys show that more than 80% of small independent garages have huge difficulty recruiting technicians. Will the Minister comment on how we can increase the numbers, and the skills, of technicians available to work in this emerging industry across Britain?

**Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument about technicians and the way that technology is moving. I am delighted that York was awarded “Go Ultra Low” city status for its work on installing electric charging points to move the electric car industry forwards. He is right about infrastructure, but does he agree that electric cars will not solve the whole problem and that we have to consider hydrogen, too? Does he agree that Germany and Japan are moving their hydrogen technology forward at a rapid pace? Is that not something that the UK should follow? We need to train technicians in hydrogen technology, as well as on the electrical side of things.

**Glyn Davies:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We do not know exactly what the future holds. We should use the term “ultra-low emission vehicles,” rather than “electric vehicles,” because hydrogen fuel cell technology may well develop quicker. Things change incredibly quickly. It is only five years since the companies starting producing electric cars. In another five years, who knows? Hydrogen fuel cells might be the future, but that technology requires massive infrastructure investment, too. Unless people can charge their car at a reasonable distance from home, the industry will not take off. That is one of the issues the Government face. There has to be an element of assessment of what the future will be, but having said that, we must be prepared for technology and invention taking us down a road that we had not wholly anticipated taking.

There are three points that I wish to raise with the Government; I am keen to hear the Minister’s response to them. First, I am not a natural regulator, or a person who would naturally support new licensing regimes; I would probably support the opposite approach. However, this is a massive industry. The IMI claims that by 2030 there will be a commercial and social benefit of £51 billion. I do not know how accurate that figure is, but clearly there will be a huge commercial benefit from what is going to happen. There is potential for a huge export business. All those things will happen, but we must have the safety and the technicians. Developing that side of the industry is important. It is not just about having the ability to manufacture cars; we also need the technicians to support that industry, and at the moment we just do not have them. We have to develop a system to deal with the safety aspects, and probably to help the development of a professionalism in working with these low-emission vehicles.

The Government might have to consider providing financial support, and they will certainly have to introduce a licensing system, because one death in an electric vehicle would clearly be massively tragic for the individual concerned and their family, and also tragic for the entire industry. A report of a death from an electric car on the front page of the Daily Mail would inflict a massive blow on an industry that I think will be hugely important to the future economy of our country.

The second issue is whether the Government should financially support a training industry. Again, I am not a natural supporter of Government intervention, through finance, in commercial markets, but the Government already support the development of the electric car industry. We offer grant support for the purchase of new vehicles, to reduce their price and to develop the industry, so I do not see any reason why we ought not to consider supporting the training infrastructure that is absolutely vital if the industry is to develop successfully. That is another issue that I would quite like to hear the Minister comment on.

The third issue is about the IMI. I have been very grateful for its advice and support; it makes a very strong argument on this issue, and that has informed some of the things that I have said this morning. I hope that the Minister would consider meeting the IMI to talk through the points that it makes very powerfully and persuasively. In my view, such a meeting would be very helpful, and I hope that the Minister is willing to agree to it.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): My hon. Friend is giving the Minister some good points to consider; I have a further point that he might wish to consider about this industry. In most EU countries, electric cars increase carbon emissions because of our current generating profile. As was rightly said, the fifth carbon budget is under consideration. Do we not need to be aware that this technology, at least for the next decade, will potentially increase carbon emissions in the UK and most parts of Europe?

**Glyn Davies:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. That is a comment I have heard before. However, we are developing a completely new technology. The aim is
lower emissions. We are trying to reach a decarbonisation target. Unless we achieve the aim of decarbonisation, this industry will not deliver what we want. However, I think that in the longer run, this is the route that we will go down. Practically, this is what is going to happen, and we need to take commercial advantage of this opportunity.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): My hon. Friend has secured an excellent debate, and he is being a very useful advocate for electric cars. However, does he agree that the great advantage of electric cars, as part of the electrification of both transport and heat, is that they present a fantastic storage opportunity within the grid, which may help us to achieve our decarbonisation targets, rather than making them more difficult to achieve?

Glyn Davies: Again, that is a hugely helpful contribution to the debate. I am on the Environment and Climate Change Committee with my hon. Friend, and we know how important the development of storage is for the future. Electric cars are potentially one of the major means of storage. If their use develops quickly, as I expect it to, they will be a major contributor right across the board to our meeting our decarbonisation targets.

I do not disagree with the Minister; I hope that he can respond to the questions that I have put to him. This debate is the start of a major discussion about the development of a new industry, and I look forward to hearing his response to it. In closing, may I say how grateful I am to those hon. Friends who have intervened? They have made very good points that I probably should have included in my speech.

11.16 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) on securing the debate. I am being a petrol-head, or rather a diesel and steam-head. Nevertheless, I understand that although it is important that we preserve our historic vehicle heritage, we should also look to a more sustainable future. I assure the House that the Government are committed to positioning the United Kingdom as a world leader in electric vehicle uptake and manufacture.

Under the Climate Change Act 2008, the UK became the first country to introduce a legally binding target on climate change—an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Transport needs to play a leading role, both to meet this important national target and to address air quality issues in the UK.

In the transport sector, emissions are dominated by those from road vehicles. We have therefore set ourselves the aim of nearly every car and van on our roads being a zero-emissions vehicle by 2050. That will require all new cars and vans on sale to be zero-emissions by around 2040. I understand that this is a bold and ambitious target, which is why we have in place one of the most comprehensive support packages in the world, and at the last spending review we committed over £600 million to help grow the UK market for these vehicles.

Neil Parish: I congratulate the Government on the money they are spending in this sector. However, in the particular hot-spots within cities, where there is actually a court case for Britain to reduce its emissions by 2025, there is a need to act much more quickly, particularly in those inner-city areas where we have problems with nitric oxide.

Mr Goodwill: Thankfully it is not nitrous oxide, which would be a laughing matter. Nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide are major pollutants. Of course, now that we know more about what is happening in diesel engines after the Volkswagen scandal came to light, the Government are working on that issue. Indeed, I am working with my fellow European Ministers, particularly those in Germany, to address that problem. Sustainable vehicles such as electric and hydrogen cars, which produce no tailpipe emissions, will certainly play a very important part in the transport sector.

It is interesting to note that although the record on car emissions has been disappointing, trucks have been operating pretty much as they should, mainly due to the fact that the monitoring equipment, which previously was too big to get in the boot of a car, is now able to be put on the back of a lorry. So the truck and bus sectors have actually been very good.

Since 2011, more than 70,000 claims have been made for plug-in car and van grants. At least £400 million has been committed to this scheme. With the grant guaranteed until at least March 2018, tens of thousands more motorists will be helped to make the switch to a cleaner vehicle.

Electric vehicle sales are now growing rapidly. Registrations reached a record high in 2015, as 28,188 new electric vehicles arrived on UK roads. More electric vehicles were registered in the UK in 2015 than in the previous four years combined. I am very proud of that progress. Electric vehicles have the potential to unlock innovation and create new advanced industries that spur job growth and enhance economic prosperity.

The low emission vehicle industry already supports more than 18,000 UK jobs and is a key pillar in our ambition for a low-carbon, high-tech, high-skills economy. The UK is already attracting global investment. Nissan’s LEAF, which is built in Sunderland, makes up 20% of electric vehicle sales across Europe. Geely has pledged £300 million to make plug-in hybrid taxis and vans at a new plant under construction in Coventry, creating 1,000 jobs. Ford’s Dunton technical centre in Essex is one of only two global hubs for the development of its electric powertrains.

Support for electric vehicle charging infrastructure has also facilitated the growth of home-grown and ambitious small and medium-sized enterprises. For example, in 2015 Chargemaster, a company that designs and manufactures its products in Milton Keynes, launched its new UltraCharger, which is already being sold in the UK and abroad.

The electric vehicle market is already a success story for the UK, but we need to maintain momentum if we are to meet our ambitious goals. We recognise the need to develop manufacturing and servicing skills to support the growing ultra-low emission vehicle market. The Government have set out an industry-led approach to skills training and apprenticeships. The new Institute
for Apprenticeships’ programmes are already emerging, for example at Gateshead College’s skills academy and at Nissan in Sunderland. I understand the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire made: as cars get older and move down the vehicle food chain, so to speak, there will be more call for servicing at local garages. It is important that they have the skills to service the vehicles safely and so ensure that we do not have any nasty accidents.

In terms of air quality, the Office for Low Emission Vehicles’ “Go Ultra Low” city scheme is dedicated to supporting cities across the UK to deliver transformational change. Some £40 million has been awarded to eight cities delivering more infrastructure, including lane access, additional planning requirements and a host of other measures. Those exemplar cities will be key in demonstrating ways of addressing air quality issues. The Government-backed self-regulatory body for the motor industry is committed to maintaining high standards covering new technologies, warranties, car service and repair. The garage finder helps locate businesses committed to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute’s approved code of practice. I hope the progress we made through the block exemption on data for the servicing of conventional garages. It is important that they have the skills to service these new kinds of vehicles.

Thanks to Government leadership and growing private sector and local authority engagement, the UK now has more than 11,000 public charge points, including more than 850 rapid charge points. That is the largest network in Europe. There are also more than 60,000 domestic charge points. The latest statistics suggest that the average distance to the nearest charge point is just over 4 miles in Great Britain, although I admit that my constituency is a little bit of a charge point desert, and I hope that will be addressed. There are a number of such locations; the constituency of the Secretary of State for Transport is another that does not have a large number of charge points, and we need to address that in parallel with the tourist industry.

James Heappey: In advance of the Energy and Climate Change Committee’s hearing about electric cars last week, I did some work to look at the roll-out of petrol pumps for petrol engines a century ago. It was clear that the car came first and the petrol network thereafter. Incentivising the uptake of electric cars must surely be the priority, rather than incentivising the roll-out of charging points. Will the Minister comment on how the Department for Transport and the Treasury intend to compensate for the loss of petrol pump tax revenues as a result of an increased uptake of electric cars?

Mr Goodwill: I suspect that that question should be put to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but falling duty levels from petrol and diesel because we have embraced this new technology would be a very good problem to have. Dare I say it, but I am sure the Chancellor or future Chancellors will come up with other, more devious ways of collecting tax from everyday people. As someone who owns a car constructed in 1900, I am well aware of the problems—particularly in the UK, as we were so slow to embrace the gasoline engine car—that people had refuelling their cars. They are not unlike the problems that people are having in charging their electric vehicles.

The electric vehicle only really makes sense on a slow overnight charge, when we have surplus electricity in the grid. Although fast charging is there to address issues of range, there is not really a prospect of thousands and thousands of cars up and down the country fast-charging at service stations. Electric cars make sense in terms of overnight charging at home.

A point was made earlier about sustainable electricity. We talk about zero tailpipe emissions, but that electricity has to be generated somewhere. Germany has sustainable delivery, but given its decision to abandon its nuclear programme and rely more on fossil fuels, the way that hydrogen and electricity are generated is a problem when it comes to better electric and hydrogen vehicles. Norway, with its large amounts of hydroelectricity, is well able to take that up.

Another point raised in an intervention was about electric cars as a means of storage. I was recently at a conference in Germany, where that issue was raised with Tesla. One of the issues is the number of cycles that a car’s battery may have to undergo if it is used as a means of storing electricity to be released into the grid. Some of the manufacturers are concerned that the battery life of their vehicles—it is very good, and better than many expected—could be compromised by large numbers of charge cycles being used in that way. An alternative is that when cars are scrapped the old batteries could be put into banks and used for emergency power supplies in hospitals or to augment the grid.

David Mowat: I was listening carefully to what the Minister said about the potential for increased carbon emissions due to this technology, notwithstanding the storage point, which I accept. He said that there were 28,000 electric cars in the UK. Does his Department make any attempt to measure the incremental increase in carbon emissions that that has caused, given our current generating profile and our likely profile in the short term? Is that number measured at all? I know that is an issue for the Energy and Climate Change Committee.

Mr Goodwill: The calculation certainly needs to be done as we roll out these vehicles. I expect that the Department of Energy and Climate Change is making those predictions. It depends, as my hon. Friend said, not only on the proportion of sustainable vehicles in the fleet, but on how that electricity is generated, particularly off-peak and overnight. Nuclear energy—the Government are determined to press forward in building a new fleet of stations—is ideally suited to overnight charging using off-peak electricity.

Throughout this Parliament, charging infrastructure will also be delivered through dedicated schemes for cleaner buses and taxis. As part of the £40-million “Go Ultra Low” city scheme, millions of pounds of funding will contribute to infrastructure deployment across eight cities in the UK. Those projects are focused on the most advanced technology for fast, reliable, smart and easily accessible charging for every driver. Highways England, which the Government have more control over than cities, has £15 million of funding to ensure that there is a charge point every 20 miles across 95% of the strategic road network, with rapid charging where possible.

Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles also have an important role in decarbonising road transport. I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire had to
say about driving the BMW vehicle. I drove the Honda vehicle, and it was no different from driving any other car, which is probably a problem solved. It was a pleasure, and I did not know that it did not have a normal engine under the bonnet. We are supporting infrastructure provision in line with the current state of market development. The Government provided £5 million of funding to help develop 12 publicly accessible hydrogen refuelling stations to support the roll-out of hydrogen vehicles. All 12 are being commissioned during the course of this year and will provide a significant first step towards an initial hydrogen refuelling network.

Just last month, a refuelling station in Teddington in London was officially opened by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). The network of stations will support vehicle manufacturers that are introducing their first models of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. Indeed, our support for hydrogen for transport has helped secure the UK’s status as one of only a handful of global launch markets for hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

There is much more that I could have said about our ambitions to press forward with this new technology. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate on an important subject. I underline the Government’s commitment to ensuring that these sustainable new technologies are rolled out in the UK.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Further Education Colleges: Greater Manchester

[Joan Ryan in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I beg to move, that this House has considered further education colleges and skills in Greater Manchester.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. May I beg your indulgence and that of other Members? As this debate is about Greater Manchester, we should pause for just a second to reflect that today is the 20th anniversary of the devastating IRA bomb in our city. I remember exactly where I was that day: I was loading my bike on to a car in Northenden, five miles away, and I still heard and felt the blast. I was one of the first civilians to be allowed through the cordon by the security services that week to see the impact at first hand. There were 200 people injured and £1 billion-worth of damage, and 1,000 business properties were wrecked. I pay tribute to the then Prime Minister, John Major, who stood side by side with the Labour authority at the time and—it is worth putting on the record—with the European Union, which pumped tens of millions of pounds into the regeneration of our great city, which started its great renaissance back then.

Greater Manchester is a city region of 2.7 million people and the fastest-growing metropolitan economy outside Greater London. The GM economy has great assets in health and life sciences, finance and professional services, as well as the creative and digital sectors, but there are considerable challenges with employment inequality and regeneration, about which there is wide consensus between stakeholders. Greater Manchester is at the forefront of moves to devolve central Government powers in England, which reflects the strong governance in its combined authority. Although it faces some challenges, the college sector in Greater Manchester also has considerable strengths. There are 21 colleges in the Greater Manchester region: 10 further education colleges and 11 sixth-form colleges.

I want to preface my remarks today by talking about skills in Greater Manchester, productivity and the link between productivity and pay. Finally, I shall discuss in detail the current area review, which is ongoing and hopes to report back in June. In GM, the education, skills and work system is currently characterised by the fact that 40% of children who enter school are not school-ready. Some 47% of young people in GM are leaving school without English and Maths GCSEs. We have a long-standing issue with low skill levels in our working-age population. Qualifications are an imperfect proxy for skill: nevertheless, Greater Manchester has enduring skills gaps at both the bottom and the top end of the skills spectrum. In GM, 33% of the 16 to 64-year-old resident population had at least a level 4 qualification in 2015, compared with 37% across the UK.

However, it is important to remember that there are larger differences within the GM districts than between GM and the rest of the country. For example, 48.4% of Trafford residents hold a level 4 qualification or above, compared with 25% in Rochdale—my hon. Friend the
Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) is here today—where there is huge inequality in educational attainment. Last year, 10% of 16 to 64-year-old GM residents did not have any qualifications at all, compared with 8.8% across the UK. In part, skills difficulties in GM owe something to historical problems with schools in the city region. In GM as a whole, in the past academic year 55% of pupils obtained five GCSEs at grades A*-C, including maths and English, which compares with the English state-funded average of 57.3%. Again, there are large differences within districts in GM.

The Greater Manchester city region has been a long-standing and emphatic supporter of apprenticeships. The districts that comprise Greater Manchester co-ordinate a strategic approach to apprenticeships through the apprenticeship hub. Of just under 30,000 apprenticeship starts last year, 27% were for 16 to 18-year-olds, 29% were for 19 to 24-year-olds and 42% were for those aged 25 and older. By level, 64% of starts are at the intermediate level, just over a third are advanced and 2% are at the higher level.

Analysis of job growth and economic forecasting suggest that the strongest job growth will be at level 4. Meanwhile, only a small minority of starts in the further education system are at that level, so there is an active debate about supply and demand mismatching. Employers in several key sectors report difficulties in recruiting the skills they need, and any MP who visits factories, workshops or other places of work in their constituency will hear that from the managing directors of those companies. In my constituency alone, I have recently been speaking to HellermannTyton, Manchester Airport and Endress+Hauser, and they have all highlighted that.

The city region is taking active steps to encourage more provision at level 4, including investing in apprenticeships and supporting the concept of an institute of technology in Greater Manchester. If I may be so bold, I really think that the agenda our current mayoral candidates should be talking about is how we close the gap in the Manchester economy. We spend roughly £18 billion. The first job of any new Mayor will be to break even—to bridge that gap—so that we can become more competitive as a conurbation.

The skills challenge is not simply on the supply side, however; there are also issues relating to skills utilisation. For example, in recent years the number of graduates has risen faster than the number of graduate jobs in the local economy, in spite of Media City, the growth of Spinningfields as a financial district and the growth of parts of central Manchester as an agglomeration of law firms. Demand for skills is also likely to be constrained by the business models of GM employers. I am loth to criticise employers, but it is clear that many in the city region pursue low-cost, low-value, low-skill business models to a greater extent than is the norm in the UK. That has to change.

Let me move on to productivity. Labour productivity in Greater Manchester is lower than the UK average. In 2014 gross value added per job in GM was £39,000; in the UK it was £45,000. There are productivity gaps between GM and the UK in all the main sectors, with the notable exception of manufacturing, where GM has an advantage. The largest productivity gaps are in the knowledge-intensive sectors, including financial and professional services and property. In my recent discussions with Accenture, the company was very clear that the Greater Manchester economy lacks digital skills, which will be one of the largest growth areas in years to come. The low-productivity sectors account for a growing share of jobs; in 2000 they represented 35% of employment, but by 2014 the proportion was 40%. Overall, GM has a £10.4 billion productivity gap with the rest of the country.

Low pay is a significant problem in Greater Manchester. Nearly a quarter of jobs in GM pay less than the living wage. In some districts, such as Oldham and Rochdale, the proportion is around 30%.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Kane: I would be glad to give way; it has been a long stretch.

Liz McInnes: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's gratitude—I can see that he is flapping a little. He makes a very good point about areas that get less than the living wage. My constituency is the second-worst in the north-west for constituents not being paid the living wage, which 40% of my constituents do not get.

Mike Kane: I could not agree more. The key thing is that it is a complicated mix of skills, qualifications and pay. I do not want to turn this into a row with the Government, but Opposition Members do not believe that the national living wage is the actual living wage, as defined by the Living Wage Foundation. As I said earlier, we need employers to invest in technology and the skills of their workforce, so that people can move up from cleaner to chief executive in all the companies in the conurbation.

Greater Manchester wages are still recovering from the effects of the recession. There has been a decline of living standards in Greater Manchester, where they have fallen faster than elsewhere in the UK. Average hourly pay in 2014 was below that of 2002. In 2004 workers earned £11.62 on average for every hour they worked. By 2014 that was £11. Since 2009 wages have fallen by 10%, and last year inflation-adjusted annual median pay was more than £1,200 a year less than the UK average. Low-paying sectors account for 36% of all jobs in GM's total employment market of 1.2 million jobs, and some 400,000 people work in those sectors. Approximately 130,000 women and 90,000 men were low paid in 2014. Men's wages declined most during and after the recession, leading to a shrinking of the gender pay gap due to that levelling down. By 2014, after adjusting for inflation, men earned, on average, £12.92 an hour and women earned just £10.37—a 25% differential. Well over half of young people under 25 are low paid.

The national programme of post-16 reviews was announced in July 2015 and will run for almost two years until summer 2017. There will be 41 reviews in total, covering all parts of England. The University and College Union has raised a number of serious concerns about the Government's area-based review programme, both in general terms and specifically in relation to Greater Manchester. Currently the net liabilities of the
post-16 sector are estimated to be £1.5 billion and there are around 80 colleges in discussions about mergers. Over the past five years, funding has fallen by nearly a third in key areas such as adult education. If we add inflation-based costs, colleges need to make efficiency improvements of around 40% to 50%. At the same time, the general trend is that quality is worsening, according to Ofsted, which is a damning indictment of the Government’s record in the sector.

The review in Greater Manchester started in September 2015 and is now reaching a conclusion. The core aim of post-16 area-based reviews is to ensure that colleges are in a stronger position to deal with the challenges they face in the future, making them more financially sustainable and better placed to provide the education and training needed in their local economies and communities. The July 2015 policy statement on the area-based reviews set out the expectation that they will lead to fewer, larger colleges. The draft proposals would create a number of new groupings in the further education sector: a group in the north comprising Bolton College, the University of Bolton and Bury College; a group in the east comprising Stockport, Oldham and Tameside Colleges; and a group in the centre that would include the Manchester College and Trafford College, along with a number of other training partners. There are also FE colleges that are yet to declare any alignment.

A significant flaw in the review process has been the exclusion of 11-to-18 schools and university technical colleges from discussions about the future structure of 16-to-19 education in the city region. Although there are good logistical reasons for managing a review process with a limited number of institutions, there are more than 50 schools with sixth-form colleges in GM, educating more than 8,000 young people. Some of those sixth forms have very small numbers and may not be financially sustainable at current and future funding rates.

There is also a problem with the banking system. One of the key barriers to implementing change in GM is the banks’ attitude to the sector. They insist on charging colleges with contractual break clauses for their loans when merging with other colleges. Those fees can amount to more than £1 million, which restricts viable colleges from coming together for the benefit of Greater Manchester. Does the Minister believe that colleges will have to divert funds from community development to cover those fees? The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Treasury have set aside as a figure for restructuring the FE sector nationally, which is rumoured to be in the region of £500 million. In GM it is being described as funding that will be available only as loans and not as one-off grants. Viable colleges will not want to saddle themselves with debt from the merger with another college.

So what needs to be done? It is clear that Greater Manchester needs to make progress in tackling the large number of people in the workforce without qualifications, as well as attainment at age 16 and higher level skills development. The area-based review and devolution of the adult education budget will help, but in the main they are focused on the 19-plus skills system. Much of the funding is spent on tackling the lack of achievement by age 16. The combined authority would like further powers over the 0-to-19 skills system, rather than its existing powers over the 19-plus skills system alone. Work is under way to put in place a memorandum of understanding with the Department for Education to ensure that its commissioning of provision is aligned with Greater Manchester’s needs and that decisions taken in one part of the system are consistent with those that we are making in the 19-plus part of the system, which will be a devolved matter.

The skills system is confusing for many people and the quality of advice and guidance on careers and education is variable. The Sainsbury review of pathways, which is due to be published shortly, could be significant in helping to clarify that. However, we need to recognise that current Government policy is that skills at level 3 and above are the responsibility of employers and individuals via adult learner loans. Such loans are currently available only for full qualifications, but many people and employers want and need specific short courses to gain employment or tackle skills shortages. Research has shown that 40% of digital and creative companies in Greater Manchester have lost business due to skills shortages. Targeted short courses, for example in social media, could help to solve some of those issues. Greater Manchester is therefore working with BIS as part of the devolution deal to examine the potential for flexibility in adult learning loans. It would be great to hear the Minister’s views on that.

We need to increase employer engagement in the skills system. We know, as local MPs, that there is a huge mismatch. There are some great examples, but there is a lack of consistency across Greater Manchester. We have to work with employer groups to get the message out about investment in skills and to get their input into the provision that GM needs to meet its future needs. We need better modelling of workforce requirements, so that we can train our young people for the jobs of the future. The apprenticeship levy is an opportunity to drive higher level skills development for new recruits to GM companies and to upskill the existing workforce, which will drive higher levels of productivity in GM firms. Greater Manchester has made the case to the Government for greater involvement in the apprenticeship levy implementation. It should also be noted that the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales have far greater control over the way in which the levy is spent. The area-based review will help shape an important part of the infrastructure that GM needs to develop future skills, but it only will be part of the solution.

2.49 pm

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Ryan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on getting this important debate for Greater Manchester. The decisions made in the review will have far-reaching consequences for young people and employers in the region. He gave an excellent and comprehensive outline of some of the issues that we need to tackle.

In my contribution, I will refer first to the excellent report prepared by Councillor Andy Sorton, who represents one of the priority 1 areas in Stockport—the Brinnington and Central ward. “Educational Attainment in Priority 1 Areas” was produced in July 2015. In his foreword, he sums up the problem:

Recent GCSE results showed a substantial drop in attainment for secondary school children in priority areas. Attainment in the Central Area of my ward fell from a low base of 36% attaining
The latest available figures, for 2014-15, show an improvement on that 36% attaining five A* to C grades in Central, but in the Brinnington area there was a further fall back to 15.3%, a drop of 6% on the previous year. Average attainment for the borough was 58.3%, similar to the previous year. Those are shocking statistics.

Stockport is a borough of contrasts, with areas among the 1% most and 1% least deprived in England. The “State of the Nation 2014” report, in a summary of the overall progress being made across the north-west, commented:

“38 per cent of poor children fail to achieve the expected level in reading, writing and maths at age 11: this varies from 32 per cent in Halton to 48 per cent in Stockport.”

Interestingly, of the four secondary schools with the highest number of students from priority 1 areas, when looking at English and maths GCSE results, only disadvantaged pupils at Stockport Academy performed well when compared with their peers by Ofsted. Stockport Academy was built under the Building Schools for the Future initiative of the previous Labour Government, recognising that issue of inequality of attainment for children in poorer areas.

There are further statistics, such as the December 2014 ones on 16 to 18-year-olds classified as NEET—not in education, employment or training—which suggest that 11% of young people from priority 1 areas fall into that category. The comparable figure for the rest of the borough is 4%. Also, 18% of 18-year-olds in priority 1 areas are not in education, employment or training. On absences, pupils from priority 1 areas are almost three times more likely to have an unauthorised absence from school than pupils from outside the areas. Also, 12.4% of all pupils from priority 1 areas were recorded as “persistent absentees” in the 2013-14 school year. That is more than twice the average rate across Stockport, which stood at 6.1%. The unemployment benefit claimant rate in priority 1 areas is three times the average for the borough. We all know the lifetime effect of failure in the education system for young people and their families.

In an October 2015 letter sent to Greater Manchester MPs, David Collins, the Further Education Commissioner, and Peter Mucklow, the Sixth Form College Commissioner, announced the area review of post-16 education and training institutions. The letter stated:

“This is an important opportunity to shape the provision for learners and employers in the Greater Manchester area and to ensure clear, high quality professional and technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes, and better responsiveness to local employer needs delivered by strong, high status, and where relevant specialist, institutions.”

I agree.

I also agree that savings could be made by amalgamation, with consequent administrative changes, such as the sharing of human resources and payroll, or by looking at duplication of course offers, provided that no young people are disadvantaged by travelling costs. There could also be an argument for having one principal for all the colleges. The area review, however, must also address that issue of inequality of attainment in secondary schools, and the response of the post-16 sector to that.

In the area review, I want to see proposals for further education that will engage young people, such as those in Brinnington, because the challenges are huge. If young people have lost interest at school and have stopped attending, how will that change when they reach 16? How will their educational attainment be improved by a further education offer when they have already failed in the secondary system? At the very least, the offer that Stockport College or colleges in other areas make must be local, and attendance must be affordable for the young people and their families. They must believe that what is on offer will make a difference to their life, that it is something they want to do, and that they will get a job, or self-employment, from it.

Those young people have ability and they are creative, but they are young people for whom the education system and the wider social care system have failed. They are the children of the children I worked with as a social worker; some are the children of those children. Failure will be the inheritance of their children, and they and the wider community will continue to pay a price for that.

Those issues are, of course, not within the remit of the area review, but the response to the review has to have regard to the circumstances of those young people. I will be interested to hear whether, as part of the review, any young people talked to the commissioners about their issues and how they might be engaged more in learning and developing the skills that future employers will need.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East mentioned, we are going through huge changes in jobs as a result of automation. I am the co-chair of the all-party group on retail, and we are undertaking an inquiry on the effect of automation on jobs. It is clear that there will be more jobs in retail, but entry-level jobs will be shelf-stacking, but managing the robots that stack the shelves. That will change the entry-level skills needed. We have to meet those challenges by ensuring that all young people—particularly those who are difficult to engage—have those skills.

I would like, in the area review’s reorganisation of colleges and courses, an offer of partnership working between young people and secondary schools in every locality. Without that, any reorganisation will continue to exclude young people from the opportunity to achieve something in their life by making them an offer that they cannot or will not accept.

Mike Kane: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about joining up the skills system and the further education system. It is astonishing to most Labour Members, who have in general been warm supporters of devolution, that the schools sector has not been devolved. Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector himself, has said that local politicians in Manchester and Liverpool should get more involved in improving standards in our schools. The one way in which we could do so is by having the school commissioner system devolved to the conurbations.

Does she agree?
Ann Coffey: I absolutely agree. That is an excellent point, which I am glad my hon. Friend has made, because I was about to make it. I put that point to the FE Commission—and indeed, I put it in my letter of that report—and he assured me that he was on the case. As my hon. Friend has just said, however, if we are to make partnerships work, we cannot have national Government in charge of one part of the partnership and local government in charge of the other. That is where there has been a history of failure in delivering social policy.

On the provision of education and skills to young people, there is no longer a separate education agenda and skills agenda; they have to be integrated from quite an early age. I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend that for the partnership to work, it must all be devolved to Greater Manchester. That is my plea. I hope that we can have further discussions about how we can make the partnership work, engaging those all-important primary and secondary education systems in how the FE sector responds.

That review will not solve but should have an impact on some key issues that need addressing, including the need to improve productivity, as my hon. Friend said, not just in Greater Manchester but right across the country, and to improve economic growth across the sub-region, particularly in the northern part of the conurbation around Rochdale and Oldham and perhaps into Tameside. The review could also help to reduce benefit dependency. It needs to address the “hourglass economy” that the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has described, in which we have too many low-level skills and some highly skilled workers but we do not have enough people with middle-level skills. I hope that the area review will go some way to helping to address that.

I like the ideas in the review of looking for economies of scale—that is positive—realigning real savings so money can be redirected to funding real priorities rather than structures, and devolving to and involving local authorities. However, I have some concerns about whether the review genuinely addresses problems with the curriculum offer in Greater Manchester. Will it reduce duplication of courses? Are the right courses being offered in the right places for the right people and the right companies? I am also concerned about the review’s scope. As my hon. Friend said, it does not include 11-to-18 schools or university technical colleges. That said, the process has been more positive than negative. Let me say also that the combined authority has done good work in bringing the review together and acknowledging that there are gaps in the work that has been done, not least on the curriculum but also on how FE connects with transport and on quality and the estates. That must surely be the next stage of what follows from the review.

Let me turn to Rochdale. Rochdale Sixth Form College and Hopwood Hall College both perform very well and are highly regarded by both their respective sectors and, most importantly, the learners themselves. I was at Hopwood Hall’s awards ceremony just last week, and was extremely impressed by the diversity of learners and the progress that they are making. I am relaxed about the sixth-form college. It performs very well, is very well run and is beginning to go down the road of acquiring academy status. Although I am also exceptionally happy with the performance of Hopwood Hall College, I am a little worried that it is currently looking like it will remain an autonomous and independent college, which means that it will not merge with any other colleges. I think that the management and leadership of the college will be happy with that, but I have concerns on two levels. First, it is a missed opportunity for the college’s leadership and expertise to be fed into helping underperforming institutions. Secondly, I am worried that the college will be squeezed between the bigger beasts that are being created. Although it looks attractive to remain independent—I am not making a Brexit argument in this instance—and it would be positive for the college solely to serve the precise needs of Rochdale, the truth is that the larger establishments will have better and bigger lobbying power.

Let me conclude my remarks with some points that the Minister may want to consider addressing. First, if several colleges remain independent, how will we guard against that squeeze? Secondly, what further scope is there to address the curriculum offer? Thirdly, will it be possible for the combined authority to reshape the proposals during implementation if they appear to be inappropriate?

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) for calling this important debate. I will concentrate my comments on the area review that is taking place and how it relates particularly to my constituency of Rochdale but also to the wider conurbation.

I am also concerned about the review’s scope. That must surely be the next stage of what follows from the review. Let me turn to Rochdale. Rochdale Sixth Form College and Hopwood Hall College both perform very well and are highly regarded by both their respective sectors and, most importantly, the learners themselves. I was at
I would like to join colleagues in taking the opportunity to reverse that position by making four brief points: first, that the skills revolution that we need in Greater Manchester depends upon a reasonably resourced and strategically valued FE sector; secondly, that we must improve our ability to predict what skills our economy and businesses will need in future; thirdly, that political interference and goalpost moving must be stopped for the sake of our local economy; and finally, that there needs to be a radical rethinking of FE provision for people with special educational needs in Greater Manchester to ensure that wider life chances are truly accessible to all.

Let me start with the need for resources and investment. As it stands, nearly half of the population of my borough of Tameside hold no qualifications beyond level 2. An enormous 48% of residents are only qualified to GCSE level or equivalent. Just 17% hold traditional degree-level qualifications and only 1% are qualified to postgraduate level. To boost wages, attract better jobs and reduce the local welfare bill, it is self-evident that we must urgently upskill the local economy.

It has long been my view that the most effective way to increase educational attainment is to invest heavily in early-years education. Interventions from birth will make the greatest difference to an individual’s life chances and provide the greatest return on investment to the taxpayer for every pound spent. However, to fail to invest adequately in further education is to write off successive generations of young people who did not benefit from the intensive early-years opportunities that we all want to see.

GCSE results have improved strongly in Tameside recently, but there are still significant legacy problems. It is imperative that an ambitious skills strategy forms part of the Greater Manchester devolution strategy and named funds are earmarked within that to support quality local FE institutions. It is also imperative that funds are directed to where they are needed most. I do not think that I am ever described as a parochial MP, and I absolutely understand that a strong Greater Manchester is essential to a strong Stalybridge and Hyde, but I am concerned that local FE leaders tell me that although 99% of young people with autism want to develop their employability, only 15% of adults with autism are in work. That is a shocking one in four young people with autism not accessing education beyond school.

My second point is that we must diversify our local skills mix. We must get better at predicting what skills the economy in Greater Manchester will really need. As it stands, the skills base in Tameside is unequivocally too narrow. The latest labour market data that I have for this debate suggest that I have more individuals employed in health, social care and education in my constituency than in all other occupations put together. That is clearly not a sufficiently diverse employment base.

I also have, however, twice the national average number of constituents employed in the manufacturing industry, with thriving employers such as the Hyde Group, Smurfit Kappa and Kerry Foods. Even though I said I would not mention the EU, I cannot resist praying for a remain vote next week to protect jobs in the manufacturing sector. Although I will always value public sector jobs and will fight to defend the role of manufacturers and producers, we also need to understand what Tameside’s and Greater Manchester’s role might be in a future, more knowledge-based, economy.

Quality apprenticeships in relevant areas, like the creative and digital training opportunities, are being provided locally by Brother UK, and that is an excellent start. I would also like to see a focus on future roles in emerging sectors such as green and low carbon technologies. We need to work more closely with our existing employers to map their likely medium-term needs while we try to attract other employers and steer our economy’s longer term needs.

My third point is that political interference is actively harming the success of further education in Greater Manchester. Just as primary school teachers have seen SATs altered at the last minute and secondary teachers have seen GCSE requirements amended without sufficient warning, so educators in the further education sector have seen goalposts moved counterproductively by the Government with their heavy-handed approach to remodelling qualifications. The most acute example of this is perhaps the reforms to functional maths and functional English assessments. Such courses provide the opportunity for those who have missed out on essential GCSE-level qualifications to have a second chance at acquiring those core credentials. The Government have now introduced external testing to replace teacher assessment, which has moved the goalposts so dramatically that pass rates in Tameside have halved, and in many places have fallen to single figures. If we make it impossible for people to acquire basic level numeracy and literacy skills, we effectively consign them to the scrapheap, and there will be no winners from this approach.

Finally, as the parent of a child at a special educational needs school, I cannot contribute to a debate such as this without mentioning the dire need to improve further education opportunities for those with special and complex needs. Take autism, for example. It was my great privilege to help Ambitious about Autism’s youth patrons to develop their employ autism campaign, which highlights that although 99% of young people with autism want to work, only 15% of adults with autism are in work. That is a shocking one in four young people with autism not accessing education beyond school.

The employ autism campaign asks for more opportunities to develop skills post-16. As part of my drive to see Greater Manchester become an autism-friendly city, I
want us to take a lead on this agenda with more specialist courses and more specialist day colleges, and with no young person left behind through a lack of post-school opportunities.

Ms Ryan, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to today’s debate and to re-establish further education in Greater Manchester as a top priority. Let us invest where it is needed and build a competitive sector that makes our region’s labour market fit for the future.

3.12 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Ms Ryan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on securing this debate and on the way he comprehensively set out the context in the education landscape. It was an excellent introduction.

I want to make a few short remarks about the process and scope of the area review, and about the effect on my constituents in south Manchester. Further education plays a vital role in our local economies and our communities. It can boost growth and drive personal achievement and social mobility. The best FE colleges are adaptable to local needs and provide skills and training where local areas need them most, and they can design courses according to local needs, such as the innovative higher education/further education hybrid courses offered at the Fielden campus of Manchester College in my constituency, so I welcome the chance to discuss FE and skills in Greater Manchester today.

We have a mission in Greater Manchester to skill up our communities to meet the challenge of the modern economy and to give them the flexibility and adaptability to thrive. We need to match our economic success with educational success, so there are questions about how we change our system to educate our young people, and how we deal with adult retraining and skilling up an underqualified population. These are big challenges. Overshadowing any discussion about FE and skills in Greater Manchester is the area review. Some would say that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has not been a cut in Government funding. Giving the

There is an argument that the area reviews have been too focused on structures and governance, rather than tackling the challenge. The review falls short of tackling the long-term reforms that Greater Manchester needs, and it may turn out to be a missed opportunity to properly review post-16 provision across the system.

Liz McInnes: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has spoken of its dissatisfaction with the proposals made by the 10 FE and 11 sixth-form colleges involved in the steering group? The GMCA is concerned that only two mergers have so far been proposed involving five colleges. Is my hon. Friend going to talk about that in his speech?

Jeff Smith: I will certainly refer to that. Such concerns are legitimate and the combined authority is right to raise them. They certainly need to be addressed.

The process needs to look at further education provision as a whole and should consult all post-16 providers. The Association of Colleges, Unison, the University and College Union and others have all pointed out the dangers of a narrow review process that ignores large numbers of FE providers. In its review of post-16 Government policy, the Public Accounts Committee argued:

“It is unclear how area-based reviews of post-16 education, which are limited in scope, will deliver a more robust and sustainable further education sector.”

I believe that is the case in Greater Manchester.

The area review, as we have heard, has not encompassed university technical colleges or the 50 school sixth forms in Greater Manchester, in which more than 8,000 young people are taught. There are 11 sixth-form colleges included in the Greater Manchester area review, of which 100% are judged good or outstanding. They are already doing a really good job for the students they serve. I have no problem with including them in a review of further education and skills in the region, but they do not work in isolation. The system needs to work together. I do not see how we can design a system for the future without looking at the whole system in the present.

The review also does not deal with the key issue of devolved funding. As we know, the Government have already moved to devolve £6 billion of health and social care funding to Greater Manchester, and there are plans of course for a wide package of devolution of resources that we in Greater Manchester have long argued for. I echo the comments made earlier about the need to have oversight of school improvement on a local and regional basis. The devolution of the adult skills budgets was announced in March, but there is no real sign of the same for 16 to 19 and apprenticeship funding. There is a question to be answered here. This inconsistency of devolution of funding arguably prevents the Greater Manchester Combined Authority from shaping the reviews according to the real demands of the region and the various parts of the sector that are trying to deliver the change that we need.

The needs of Manchester’s students are changing. There is higher demand than ever for English and maths courses; more students are choosing work-based learning over traditional FE pathways; and there are big increases in demand for English for speakers of other languages—ESOL—courses at a time when there has been a cut in Government funding. Giving the
Greater Manchester Combined Authority the power to manage and distribute funding according to need could help colleges to be more flexible in such developments. That feeds into the wider agenda. If we are going to devolve responsibility we need to give the combined authority the proper means to deliver it.

Finally, I want to highlight some specific concerns about the proposed Tameside, Oldham and Stockport merger that will particularly affect my constituents in south Manchester. The various merger possibilities have been described as shotgun weddings, and it does feel a little like that. I wonder how much consideration was given to the idea of some of the less successful colleges working with a variety of the more successful ones, rather than being forced into mergers that may not be appropriate. What appears to be happening on the east side of the conurbation is a merger of three less successful colleges into, potentially, one larger less successful college. I hope that that is not what will happen: we need to learn lessons from successful colleges.

Leaving aside the estimated £50 million of taxpayers’ money that may be needed to make the mergers viable, I am concerned about the effect on learners—particularly the nearly 400 constituents of mine who attend Stockport College. I am concerned about what the new arrangements may mean for them in terms of their courses and access to institutions. There is a worry that my constituents currently studying at Stockport and the other colleges will suffer reductions in the number of courses, increases in journey times or other disadvantages as a result of the proposed mergers. I seek reassurance that my constituents will not be detrimentally affected.

It appears to many people that the review has not yet dealt properly with issues of quality. It has simply looked at college mergers to address financial concerns. It has not dealt with retraining and reskilling and has not yet come up with a convincing plan that will give us the confidence that we have an FE sector fit for the job.

It has not dealt with retraining and reskilling and has looked at college mergers to address financial concerns. I seek reassurance that my constituents will not be detrimentally affected.

I hope that that is not what will happen: we need to learn lessons from successful colleges.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Ryan, and a great pleasure to be present at this debate. I congratulate all my colleagues who have spoken. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) gave a speech that was a tour de force, covering the whole area. That does not always happen in such debates; sometimes cobblers stick to their narrow lasts, but my hon. Friend should be congratulated, as should my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey), for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk).

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East introduced a personal point at the beginning of his speech, and rightly so, because the event he referred to was a seminal moment in the history of Greater Manchester. I hope I may be forgiven for saying that it gives me particular pleasure to be here today to hear the things that have been said, because I was born in St Mary’s hospital in the centre of Manchester. My parents came from Didsbury and Burnage, and I spent my first years—until I left school—in Levenshulme and Stockport, so the places and names that I have heard today have a lot of personal resonance for me, as well as their strategic resonance.

It is right to think of Greater Manchester as an organic area that had a long period of emergence and evolution. As a historian I am tempted to give a paean to the role of Greater Manchester in the history of the industrial revolution. [HON. MEMBERS: “Go on!”] We do not have the time. People talk about the northern powerhouse and other such things, and how to replicate them elsewhere; I have on occasion said that the Minister should remember that the Construction Industry Training Board apprenticeship levy took a long time to get together, and in the same way we need to recognise that Greater Manchester’s cohesiveness and forwardness has not come about in a period of two or three years. It came about over 30 or 40 years, going back to the mid-70s when the Greater Manchester county was created, and the 10 boroughs entered it. The Government in the 1980s negatively and vandalistically got rid of that, with consequences that remain today in the area of transport.

At the same time, that period was of seminal importance, because the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester came together in particular to defend their municipal ownership of Manchester airport. In a way that started the process of cohering and evolving to the point where we are today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East particularly talked about the fact that the Greater Manchester districts have for a long time been initiators, cheerleaders and co-ordinators for apprenticeships. When my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) and I compiled a pamphlet for the Smith Institute in 2013 about the work of local councils on apprenticeships, we highlighted the work of a number of Greater Manchester councils. That is something to remember in the context of my hon. Friend’s comments about the fact that, with regard to skills, the current devolution process is but half-formed. Without that involvement in apprenticeships, there is much that needs to be done about skills shortages that cannot currently be done through area reviews or by Ministers, however well-meaning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East made a huge number of salient points and referred to the skills shortages in key areas. He was right to quote, as other hon. Members have, the concerns of the University and College Union. One of the things that is missing, by and large, from the area review process is involvement and consultation. That is a frequent issue extending through government. I see it when I am writing my other hat, in higher education, where we cannot currently be done through area reviews or by Ministers, however well-meaning.

As I have said, colleges have done great work to support young people, but also older people, in gaining skills. They are vital to sub-regional economies. We cannot afford damage to the link between colleges and
businesses or the many decent networks of colleges and schools in the area, through errors and failures in the Government’s area review programme, even if it is an unintended consequence. That is why one of the first things I said when I took on my role on the Front Bench in October was that FE is all about getting local people into work, with skills, in the local economy. That is not just a pious plea. It is very necessary to think about it now. In January 2015 Professor Alison Wolf, who as the Minister will know was the author of the Wolf review of vocational education—which has been praised and much quoted by the Government—said that Britain’s supply of skilled workers could “vanish into history”. We cannot afford to let talented and skilled young people—and older ones—fall by the wayside because colleges have closed and the funding is not there to develop the skills needed to boost sub-regional economies. To that I would add the vital role of FE colleges in the community in working with local authorities and local enterprise partnerships.

We have heard a lot today about the working out of the devo max process—the devolution process in the Greater Manchester area. I particularly emphasise the point that my colleagues made to the Minister about the potential for combined authorities to take on skills, education and training powers. Over-centralised Whitehall-led area decisions that are taken now could hamper their ability to do that effectively. That is particularly the case for utilisation of the adult skills and community learning budgets that are being devolved under the relevant part of the settlement.

I want now to talk about some of the particular issues that have been touched on today in the Greater Manchester context. One hon. Friend—I cannot remember which one—referred to the Public Accounts Committee December report, which mentioned the absolute necessity of delivering “robust and sustainable” FE solutions. At the time that was said, we saw two things in the Greater Manchester process. First, the timescale that the Government set out—this is true across the country—was ludicrously optimistic. We know that there have been problems, delays, and everything that has gone with that.

The second point that has come out of what has been said today is the tension between what my hon. Friends are talking about doing—taking on more powers—and the clear frustration of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority that it is waiting in the wings, almost as a shadow boxer, while the process is going forward. I refer again to the points made by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in the FE Week article, which came after the fifth steering group meeting on 25 May. The Minister needs to take account of this:

“The GMCA said it ‘remains to be convinced’ that the proposed outcomes will ‘deliver the integrated learning infrastructure that is needed, taking Greater Manchester as a whole rather than focusing institutions by institution’. It also said that it “wants to ask the Secretary of State to award it the ‘power to make further changes to these proposals, should it become clear that the current options cannot deliver a Greater Manchester-wide learning infrastructure that meets needs’.”

I do not want to rain on the commissioner’s parade and echo what my hon. Friends have said about the significant amount of co-operation that is needed to go forward in a sensible way, and I know that the commissioners are constrained by the narrow remit the Government gave them, which has been quite clear in some of the things that have been said publicly and even more clear in some of the things that have been said privately. This is an iterative process, and I ask the Minister what he proposes to do to widen that remit and to give more of that ability to his commissioners and others to be flexible. The Greater Manchester area-based review progress report, which went to the leaders of the town councils, says:

“As Leaders will recall, the options chosen are not the decision of the GMCA, they are up to FE Commissioner, Secretary of State and College Boards…which are still incorporated bodies which no one has the right to close at present”.

That is the factual state of play, and it is therefore important that it is taken into account.

The Minister will know that there have been massive funding pressures in further education for several years, which have led to a £1.5 billion deficit across institutions nationally. The report that Bury College put forward stating why it wanted, or felt it needed, to enter into this process, said:

“The Further Education Sector has been subject to five successive years of funding cuts and fiscal restraints, which has weakened the financial stability of Colleges across the sector. No college has been immune to this impact and many colleges have already sought to mitigate the impact by exploring different structural arrangements such as federation, merger or shared services.”

I could go on about our critique of the way in which the Government have, while promoting apprenticeships funding, treated them rather as a one-trick pony and have not looked at other serious cuts, such as in adult skills, retraining and so on, but I will not. FE colleges have often been very adaptable, but that statement from Bury College demonstrates that even adaptable organisations need to have a bit of framework to breathe.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington said, this process seems to be a shotgun marriage. There would have been more confidence in the process if those broader institutions had been brought into the equation. Greater Manchester is a particularly sharp example of that. Figures were quoted of the numbers of sixth forms in schools and the number of sixth-form colleges. Comparative to the number of sixth-form colleges countrywide, there is a very high proportion. It is therefore particularly important that some of the particular needs are met, both of sixth-form colleges that are included in the process, but also of schools and academy sixth forms.

James Kewin, the deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, has talked about some of the flaws in the process in not including school and academy sixth forms. That, too, has been a problem. I ask the Minister again whether there is any prospect, even at this late stage, of taking account of that broader framework in the remaining reviews. When he or whoever comes to decide on the recommendations, will they bear that in mind when accepting—or mortifying—the recommendations the Secretary of State receives?

We have also heard about the impact on students. As I reminded the Minister when we had a debate on the north-east FE situation at the beginning of the year, mergers between colleges can be particularly harmful to the social fabric and social mobility of young people in rural and suburban areas. Suburban areas are an issue in Greater Manchester, and the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington
about how his students will be affected by what happens at Stockport College are a very good example. However, it is not just about the mass of students; it is also about some of the particular groups of students who may be affected. At the University and College Union’s recent conference, Elane Heffernan, a member of its disabled members standing committee, made that point, saying that FE is “one of the most integrated places where you can be” as a learner. I am conscious of what my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said about the need to beef up the role and position of students with special educational needs in FE, which is part of the point.

Another point I want to make is that the process will affect not just FE, but higher education. Literally thousands of people in the HE sector get their qualifications at FE colleges. Because of that, what happens to those FE colleges in the context of mergers will have a significant impact on the provision of HE in the areas concerned. I do not want to comment on the merits or demerits of individual proposals, but I am thinking particularly about the potential merger of the University of Bolton with Bury College and Bolton College. The Minister needs to think about that process as well, and I would like him specifically to address what will happen to higher education under this set of reviews.

To put this into the broader context, the Government’s Sainsbury review, which is very important, is about to come out, and hopefully a skills White Paper will come along with it. It seems bizarre to many of us that what is actually the higher skills issue is likely to be dealt with not in the new Higher Education and Research Bill, but in the schools-for-all Bill. I am not particularly concerned about where things turn up—it could be in one Bill or another—but I am concerned about the apparent lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I am even more concerned because, at the end of the day—this comes back to the points that my hon. Friends made—if we are to be successful in driving forward skills for older people as well as younger people in Greater Manchester and elsewhere, there has to be a strong engagement between that process and the process of job creation which, of course, also involves the Department for Work and Pensions. If it all goes wrong, the Government will have a lot to answer for, not simply because the structure process has sometimes been untimely, but because of the way in which they have framed it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington referred to many people having felt that, in this process, they were part of a shotgun wedding. Many of the processes may have been shotgun weddings, but we need to see what sort of baby they produce. The baby that they produce will be firmly the responsibility of this Government and those two Departments. I hope they will take on board what has been said about the combined authority, and think positively and creatively about widening its powers and allowing it, and the boroughs concerned, to have a real say in the final outcome.

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): I am going to call the Minister now, but may I ask him to be sure to leave just a couple of minutes at the end, so that I can go back to the Member who moved the motion?

3.40 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): I will be very happy to, Ms Ryan. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and to respond to what has been a really interesting and constructive debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on securing the debate and on approaching it in such a thoughtful and constructive fashion.

The area review is taking place in the northern powerhouse, in the Greater Manchester authority. I am sure that we would all be happy to admit that the co-operation between the Manchester authorities has been long standing and has many mothers and fathers. Nevertheless, I hope that hon. Members will recognise that on the northern powerhouse’s birth certificate the name George Osborne is there as “father”. The delivery of the vision of the northern powerhouse is what the area review and devolution of skills to the Greater Manchester combined authority are critically designed to achieve.

Mike Kane: The shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden), is the historian, but I just want to point out to the Minister that it was Daniel Adamson who built the ship canal in 1860 and who coined the phrase “northern powerhouse” when he envisaged a single market from the banks of the Mersey estuary to the banks of the Humber estuary— but carry on.

Nick Boles: I am always happy to be corrected on a point of history; I am sure that there is room for Mr Adamson’s name on the birth certificate as well.

It is a great pleasure to respond, because normally I find in these debates that, when the fundamental purpose of the Government’s policy has been attacked, I have to spend so much time explaining and defending it that I cannot actually address any of the more detailed questions of implementation that have been raised. Today, given that there seems to be a general acceptance that, at least in principle, the area review has the potential to create a stronger and more sustainable system of further education in Greater Manchester, I hope that I can actually spend the time available addressing some of the particular points.

I will start with the points made by the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East. As his hon. Friends have said, he gave a brilliant exposition of the skills challenges facing the Greater Manchester area. He specifically asked about concerns raised by the UCU. I want to reassure him that last week I met the union’s general secretary to discuss some of those concerns and how we can ensure that, where possible, we consult trade unions and their members on some of the ideas emerging from the area reviews. I have asked the union’s general secretary to come back with some specific ideas about how that might work. I hope that will satisfy some of the hon. Gentleman’s concerns.

The hon. Gentleman asked an important question about break clauses on bank loans—I have been asked it before in the House but have never had long enough to go into detail. I know that this has caused people some concern. We do not yet have a specific example of a college that is facing a very substantial payment that it was surprised by and that it does not want to enter into.
The first point to make is that in the restructuring of bank facilities it may be, in a merger or some other kind of transaction, that the bank will have the technical right to impose certain charges. It is a matter of negotiation. They may have the right to, but if they see that the overall new construction or group is actually going to be a better borrowing risk for them, and make it more likely that they will get their money back or be able to lend more money, which is what banks are in the business of after all, then they can novate loans—to use the jargon—without break costs when the new loan is lower risk.

The critical point, which will apply not only to break clauses but to everything in a sense, is that although we will be strongly encouraging colleges to undertake the changes and mergers when that is what is recommended, ultimately that will be a decision for them. They are independent institutions and they will be able to take into account the full range of costs and benefits. There may be costs, to some extent, or bank charges, but they will need to go ahead only if the benefits of other cost savings or advantages are greater than those charges. As I said, I hope that in reality those charges will not prove to be as much of a problem as the hon. Gentleman perhaps feared.

The hon. Gentleman raised a very interesting question that we will not be able to go into in great detail now. However, I hear him and have some sympathy with his point that adult learner loans are not available for short courses. Although we have career development loans, their terms of repayment are less attractive to students than those of adult learner loans.

**Mr Marsden rose—**

**Nick Boles:** May I just finish my sentence and then I will be happy to give way? I understand the point. I think we need to learn from some past mistakes. If we start having the taxpayer subsidising loan provision for very short courses, which is not something I want to rule out in principle, one has to ask how the Government and the taxpayer will be reassured that those short courses are genuinely valuable—as well as being valuable to the individual and their employer, they have to have some transferrable skills value. That is so that taxpayers’ money is not subsidising activity that is beneficial only to that narrow employer in that narrow job. That is something we are wrestling with, and I would be happy to hear ideas from the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East and other hon. Members on the subject.

**Mr Marsden:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and entirely take his point about not wanting to subsidise—if I can put it that way—short-term courses that are not going anywhere. That might lead us into a broader discussion about credit accumulation processes and the rest, but I do not want to touch on that now. The point I want to make is that at the moment, as the Minister will be well aware, the take-up of those adult learner loans was somewhat less than 50% at the last count. It might be—dare I say it?—in his interests, or in the future interests of any person occupying his post, when negotiating with the Treasury, to make the point that there is this demand in the way that my hon. Friends have described, and that it could be valuable if a reasonable construction of it could be made.

**Nick Boles:** I hear that, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Treasury is very much aware of the issue. We have obviously expanded the application of advanced learner loans to a broader age group and a broader range of levels, but he is right that we nevertheless have more budget than is currently being utilised and there may be a way safely to extend its use. There are also issues with the Student Loans Company, which has a pretty big administrative burden at the moment, as he will be well aware. It manages those loans, so there are also technical implications. I would be very happy to discuss detailed ideas about that with hon. Members in future.

I want to move on to the question, which a number of hon. Members raised, about the involvement of schools in the area reviews, the request by Greater Manchester Combined Authority for greater power over schools and—the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) raised this—whether what is going on in those schools is going to be considered as part of the area review. There are a couple of things to say. First, the regional schools commissioners are required to contribute to the underlying analysis for the area review and to be closely involved. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority is absolutely encouraged to have a very close relationship with the regional schools commissioner, as are individual MPs. I know that Government Members have started meeting the regional schools commissioners, as we have encouraged, and have found the meetings to be incredibly useful. Regional schools commissioners are available to meet hon. Members to discuss any concerns they might have.

On integration, in the sense of the programme of study that leads people and makes it more likely that they are going to succeed when they move into college and post-16 education, I hope that hon. Members will be willing to wait until the Sainsbury review and the skills plan are published. I can promise them that it will be very soon after the referendum, so it will give us something rather more interesting to talk about. I hope that will give a more complete picture of how we are looking at the curriculum, how people, including people with special educational needs, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) said, can be best placed to succeed in that curriculum, and how we can ensure better access and a better step up into further education programmes than is currently the case. That will all be addressed in the skills plan and the Sainsbury review. We are keen to discuss that with hon. Members in time.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) intervened to raise a number of concerns—the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East also referred to them—about whether the area review specifically in Greater Manchester is ambitious enough and whether it is taking too long. Theresa Grant, who is chairing the review, is one of the most impressive public officials I have come across in my time in government. I am strongly inclined to agree with anything she says about any subject. As the representative of the combined authority, she does not believe that the colleges are being sufficiently ambitious. Concerns were raised that those that are hanging on to their independence, for understandable reasons—perhaps they are already good at outstanding—may not be looking far enough out and should think about the future landscape and opportunities, not just about rifts and threats.
I strongly encourage the colleges that are part of the review to take on board Theresa Grant’s comments and to work with her in further meetings—I believe that there will be another one next week—to try to see whether there is a way to grasp the opportunities more boldly than the initial proposals were grasped. That is my comment about her comments as chair, because ultimately it is for the review and the individual colleges within it to decide what recommendations they will adopt and to implement them.

I understand that there have been questions, not least by the shadow Minister, about whether we could give the Greater Manchester combined authority more power to enforce some of the recommendations. If we render colleges no longer independent, their whole balance sheet will suddenly come into the public sector balance sheet. I am not sure that Greater Manchester combined authority wants all the liabilities of the Greater Manchester college sector on its balance sheet as it starts life as a combined authority, and nor do we in Government. We must be a little prudent.

Having said that, those colleges will understand that the Greater Manchester combined authority will shortly control the entire adult skills budget. It will form outcome agreements with different colleges and will be able to move money around, as they can do already with capital, as has been noted. If we are in the business of pleasing our customers, I hope that all the colleges in the area review understand that the Greater Manchester combined authority will be a tremendously important one and take on board its recommendations on how the review should unfold.

I think I have addressed everything I had noted. If no one wants to intervene before I sit down, I am happy to hand over to the hon. Gentleman who introduced the debate.

3.54 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It has been good to have the time and space to debate this matter and I thank everyone who has contributed. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) was right to highlight inequality within boroughs and not just between boroughs, as I did in my speech. We must reflect more on that in the review process. She continues to champion the cause of carers, people in care and their further education, which she does brilliantly in this House.

I could not agree more with my hon. friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), or rather I sort of agree and disagree. Level 2 to level 4 skills are missing. I believe, although I do not have empirical evidence, that globalisation and the advance of technology is sucking out some jobs as we go to advanced manufacturing in our economy. We must address that. People now in their 40s and 50s who did apprenticeships when they were young are being hit hard by globalisation and sometimes blame the wrong people politically. We as politicians must all think more about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) is right that we must have strong local colleges. They are doing amazing things in Tameside. Agglomeration and specialism are the way forward, but it must be remembered that that is easier in the south-east where there is fantastic transport. There must always be a strong local element.

My neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) is right that there is a feeling that this is more about form than function. It must concentrate on what the outcomes are for young people rather than protecting institutions as they stand.

The shadow Minister is an historian, and he does not have to prove his Mancunian roots to me. We have been talking about this ever since Arkwright, who powered his mill in Miller Street in 1792, and the industrial revolution—I will match my hon. Friend history for history. He is right to highlight the concerns of the UCU.

It is good that the Minister is talking to the trade unions. I will take his word about the break clauses and we will try to find specific examples to help the Government work this through. I will take him up on his offer to provide ideas for learner loans. I agree with him that Theresa Grant is one of the finest local government officers in the conurbation. She is leading on this and we wish her all the very best in the review.

Question put and agreed to.

3.57 pm

Sitting suspended.
Social Investment

4 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for social investment.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I think it was the former New York governor Mario Cuomo who liked to repeat this quote:

“You campaign in poetry; you govern in prose.”

I apologise in advance because many of the practicalities relating to social investment and social enterprises are technical by their very nature, so most of my speech will be in prose, and pretty dry prose at that, but just for a moment I want a word of poetry, or at least a word of vision, to remind us what social investment and social enterprises are all about. As Social Enterprise UK, the national body for social enterprises, puts it:

“Social enterprises trade to tackle social problems”

and

“improve communities, people’s life chances, or the environment. They make their money from selling goods and services in the open market, but they reinvest their profits back into the business or the local community. And so when they profit, society profits.”

As a Labour Member of Parliament, I was interested to learn that it was the great social activist and researcher the late Lord Michael Young, author of my party’s 1945 manifesto, who 53 years later, in 1998, founded the School for Social Entrepreneurs. That perhaps reflects the fact that some of the best ideas for social improvement today come from the social enterprise sector.

Social enterprises are everywhere and can do almost anything. They are coffee shops, cinemas, pubs, banks and bus companies, to give but a few examples. Allow me, Mr Chope, to use the example of a social enterprise in my constituency: Splash Community Trust, which runs Splash Magic. That social enterprise was formed to reopen Plas Madoc leisure centre after Wrexham County Borough Council decided to close it in April 2012. The local community came together to save the facility, which the Splash Community Trust now runs for the benefit of the community. Splash Magic provides not only swimming and leisure facilities for the local community, but employment for local people, tackling health, employment and social problems. It is a great success story. This debate is about Splash Magic and every other social enterprise in our country, and how best we can support them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for raising this very important issue. She has outlined one example of how social enterprises can make a difference. Some 2 million people have been employed through social investment, and it contributes £55 billion to the economy and has helped many social ventures. Does the hon. Lady agree that more community groups and small charities need to be aware of the help that there is in accessing funds, such as the Big Lottery Fund and other charitable funds, and that they should not be put off by long, complex forms and in-depth requirements, and be left feeling unable even to apply for community-changing grants?

Susan Elan Jones: I agree totally with what the hon. Gentleman says and the importance that he attaches to social investment—but now back to the prose. In 2012, according to ICF GHK’s report, “Growing the Social Investment Market”, which was commissioned by the Government, there were 68,000 social enterprises in the UK and they contributed at least £24 billion to the economy. Subsequent estimates suggest that the economic contribution could be far higher than that.

Social investment is of course the enabler of social enterprise. It is the use of finance to achieve a social as well as a financial return. The social investment market assists voluntary, community and social enterprises to raise capital that they may not be able to secure from conventional investment sources. It also helps investors to find organisations that will deliver for them a social as well as a financial return. The Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016, with which the Minister will be very familiar, gave charities the power to make social investments. I welcome that.

As it is often difficult for social enterprises to secure conventional bank loans, social investment is often a more suitable way for social enterprises to finance their activities. A significant reduction in grant funding in the voluntary sector and a move towards a dominance of contracts are two reasons for the increase in the popularity of social investment. Although social investors do expect a financial return, that often decreases in inverse proportion to the level of social return that investors wish to see. As a report for the Big Lottery Fund found, that means that social investors are often willing to accept lower financial returns if the social impact is greater.

Last year, a significant report was published. The “State of Social Enterprise Survey 2015”, supported by Santander, is the most comprehensive research undertaken into the state of the sector. It told of some great successes, such as how the proportion of social enterprises that grew their turnover in the 12 months prior to the report was 52%, well above the comparative figure of 40% for small and medium-sized enterprises. It also revealed that 31% of social enterprises are working in the top 20% most deprived communities in the UK. That is in itself an interesting figure and a sign of the social enterprises’ success.

However, the same research also stated that 39% of social enterprises believe that the lack of availability of funding or finance is a barrier to their sustainability, and although there was widespread support for the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, there was concern about its practical implementation. Both points need careful consideration and action.

I am sure that the Minister will want to praise Big Society Capital Ltd, which came about because people such as Martyn Jones, my predecessor as MP, campaigned on dormant bank accounts. Big Society Capital Ltd was set up under the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008, which defined Big Society Capital as an organisation that exists “to…enable other bodies to give financial or other support to third sector organisations”.

It was established by the Cabinet Office and launched as an independent organisation with a £600 million investment fund in April 2012. The investment fund comes from
[Susan Elan Jones]

dormant bank accounts via the independent Reclaim Fund and four leading UK high street banks. Both my party and the Minister’s are rightly proud of Big Society Capital.

As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on charities and volunteering, I was privileged to chair a meeting recently on social investments. An interesting range of opinions were expressed, many by practitioners who deal with social investments and individuals who run social investment funds. There were many excellent contributions at the meeting. I pay particular tribute to John Smart of the transport industry social enterprise HCT Group, with whom I discussed some ideas in greater depth. In the light of the ideas raised at the all-party parliamentary group meeting, I will make the following proposals, and I would be grateful if the Minister responded to them in turn. First, I would be grateful if the Minister considered a change in accounting regulations to allow quasi-equity to be disclosed as equity rather than debt. It is often inappropriate and/or difficult for a social enterprise to take out loans. That is particularly true during their start-up phase, when they need capital for growth.

Under Charity Commission regulations, charities are unable to raise equity—that is, sell shares—or distribute reserves by way of dividend. That poses the question of how a social enterprise or charity can raise money for its development or growth. Quasi-equity investment allows an investor to benefit from the future revenues of an organisation. Under a quasi-equity agreement, an investor would receive a percentage of a social enterprise’s future earnings, which means that if the organisation performs well, the investor receives a good return. Conversely, if the organisation does not do well, the investor will receive little or no return.

In a typical social loan, the investor is investing in the organisation to help it to grow, taking the risk that the growth will occur. That is similar to a conventional equity investment, but the organisation does not issue shares. However, under current regulations, quasi-equity must be disclosed as debt on an organisation’s balance sheet. That can lead to the balance sheet looking over-g geared, which is a particular problem when bidding for contracts, especially as commercial organisations tend to raise equity to fund expansion, and so do not face the same issues with their balance sheets.

A change in accounting regulations to allow quasi-equity to be disclosed as equity rather than debt would improve the social investment market. The change would be of great help to social enterprises that work with local authorities. When the social enterprise has the opportunity for open dialogue with commissioning authorities, it can explain its position and balance sheet. However, online portals are increasingly used as the method of bidding for local authority contracts, which provides no opportunity to explain the balance sheet position. Allowing quasi-equity to be disclosed as equity would go some way towards creating a level playing field between social enterprises and their mainstream commercial competitors. It would also be beneficial if contracting authorities could recognise that social enterprises, as not-for-profit entities, have different balance sheets from their commercial competitors.

Secondly, will the Minister consider an increase in the level of social investment tax relief? Individuals making an eligible investment can deduct 30% of the cost of their investment from their income tax liability, but only up to about £290,000 over three years. I know that there are many technical and legal issues, but change would attract more inward investment to the sector and allow social enterprises to expand and build on the good work that they are already doing to benefit society.

Thirdly, will the Minister further discuss the role of social impact bonds? There is clearly a wide range of different views on the subject, and I suspect that the Minister has heard many of them. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, for example, is concerned about the fact that such a high proportion of the Cabinet Office’s spending—somewhere between £80 million and £105 million, I believe—is being committed to social impact bonds, which it sees as largely untested and as having a costly commissioning model. Although the organisation welcomes opportunities to learn more about how that model could be used to deliver social outcomes, it questioned whether SIBs should be such a high priority for the Cabinet Office, at the expense of other projects, until there is a better evidence base for their efficacy.

Some of us see social impact bonds as an effective way of de-risking contracts for the delivering social enterprise and the commissioning body, and as a good way for social enterprises to tap into available funds and have a social impact without the cost and commitment of loan or quasi-equity structures.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to make my points today, and I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

4.14 pm

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I begin in the traditional fashion by congratulating the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing the debate. I welcome her interest in a very inspiring sector. She said it was quite dry, but I found her comments very interesting and I will come back to some of her ideas in due course. Her comments should not have been unexpected because, as she said, she chairs the APPG on charities and volunteering. The group recently held a session on social investment, which obviously proved to be interesting and has generated a number of ideas.

Social investment can drive innovation in the sector, as we heard from the example of Splash Magic in the hon. Lady’s constituency. It is a powerful tool to tackle some of the biggest challenges in society today and, in the case of her constituency, to tackle jobs and growth issues. Social investment helps economic growth by supporting the UK’s thriving social economy. It also supports social innovation by channelling funding towards entrepreneurial solutions to longstanding social problems, and helps public services by delivering better outcomes and, in some cases, savings to the taxpayers.

I have embarked on an ambitious reform programme for charities and social enterprises because it is my aim to deliver a sector that is more independent, resilient and sustainable over the long term, and much better able to meet the challenges that it faces. Since the
general election, the Office for Civil Society has supported the creation of a new fundraising self-regulator. I know that is not directly relevant to social investment, but it is still important to raising money for charities, in particular. The new self-regulator is being led by Lord Grade, as the hon. Lady will know. It has the legislative powers needed to give the public confidence that fundraising scandals are a thing of the past, and is a chance to restore the public trust and confidence needed so that a generous public continue to donate to the causes that matter most to them.

The new Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016 gives the Charity Commission tougher powers to enable it to regulate the charity sector much more effectively. As the hon. Lady said, the new Act also clarifies the law on social investment, enabling smaller charities to have the confidence to get involved in this hugely beneficial area.

The UK is now recognised as a world leader in social investment. For example, we set up the world’s first social investment bank, Big Society Capital—the hon. Lady went into some of its history—and the first social investment tax relief, which I will talk about further. The first ever social impact bond was also in this country, so we have a lot to be proud of.

We also created Access, the Foundation for Social Investment, to which the hon. Lady did not refer. That has £100 million to support more organisations to take on and get ready for investment, helping to stimulate the pipeline of social investment deals over the next 10 or 15 years. We have made money available through the local sustainability fund, which was created to help organisations to secure a more sustainable way of working by providing funding and support to help them to review and transform their operating models.

Jim Shannon: In addition to what the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) said in her speech, we also recognise the good work of the Big Lottery Fund. It is always good to recognise organisations that make a significant contribution to social investment, and the Big Lottery Fund enables that to happen. Does the Minister feel it is important to encourage and support that?

Mr Wilson: The Big Lottery Fund has some £700 million of grants at its disposal each year, and it is an important part of the funding landscape in this country. It does an awful lot of great work, and I encourage organisations that perhaps have not made funding proposals to the Big Lottery Fund in the past to do so now. The Big Lottery Fund is trying to do a lot to make it easier for organisations to get hold of grants and to ensure that it is focusing on some of the more disadvantaged areas across the United Kingdom.

Returning to my previous comments, I want the leadership that the Government have shown on social investment to continue. The Government are therefore supporting social impact bonds, as the hon. Member for Clwyd South said, and so far we have created 32 social impact bonds, which is more than the rest of the world put together. We have enormous experience of social impact bonds and the social impact bond market. SIBs work on the principle that the Government pay only for the outcomes that we want to see and that we agree should be delivered. Social investors provide the up-front investment to scale up innovative services and are repaid by the Government based on the outcomes delivered.

SIBs are being deployed to get to the heart of some of the biggest challenges that we face as a country. They often focus on things such as early intervention, which will help us to contain the ever-expanding demands on our public services. I recently visited the AIMS—accommodation, intense mentoring, skills—project of the Local Solutions organisation in Liverpool, which is supporting young homeless people into accommodation, training and employment. The programme allocates a trusted mentor to each young person to provide a single contact point, delivering personalised support across multiple services. The programme is financed via a SIB and is a great example of how commissioning for outcomes can give social sector organisations the freedom to do what is needed, when it is needed. SIBs help to foster genuine partnership between the Government, social sector organisations and social investors, supporting organisations that can innovate in ways that big government finds difficult. Perhaps most importantly, SIBs focus on delivering meaningful outcomes for people, and there is more to come.

As the hon. Lady will probably have picked up, the Prime Minister recently announced our new £80 million life chances fund, which is an important next step on the journey and will show how social investment can transform local public services. The fund is a down payment on a social impact bond market that I hope and expect to be worth £1 billion by the end of this Parliament. I want to see more social impact bonds and to support those who want to use this innovative source of capital, which is why we are working with the University of Oxford to create a new centre for excellence that will develop world-leading research in social impact bonds and innovative Government commissioning and will provide the practical support that local commissioners need as part of that process, but there is more to the market than social impact bonds.

Susan Elan Jones: The Minister is making some interesting points about SIBs, and the debate will clearly continue among organisations, but may I draw him on to the issues of quasi-equity and of equity and debt, please?

Mr Wilson: The hon. Lady made three specific proposals. The first was a change to the accounting rules, which she believes will help social investment by disclosing equity, rather than debt. I understand that, and I am happy to look at it. The second was an increase in the level of tax relief. Obviously I will need to discuss that with Treasury colleagues. Again, I am happy to look at it, but I cannot give her any commitments. Thirdly, she wanted to discuss further the whole investment in SIBs, which I have been trying to address.

I will talk about some other issues, too. Alongside charities and conventional social enterprises, new kinds of businesses are committed to making a social impact through their business without having constraints on how they distribute profits. Such businesses are part of the UK’s already diverse and growing social economy, and an independent review is currently considering how to increase the economic and social impact of mission-led businesses in the UK.
The hon. Lady mentioned dormant assets, which is another area that offers real opportunity. I believe there is a host of such assets that belong, in aggregate, to the public and should therefore be used to benefit society, not specific firms that may be sitting, unwittingly or not, on these stores of potential public value. I have set up an independent commission on dormant assets to explore what additional assets could be released to good causes, potentially transforming the way we support the sector.

We have done, and are doing, a lot to support social investment, but I do not plan to be complacent. There is more that we can do, and I will continue to drive the agenda forward. The breadth and innovation of our social sector in the UK is truly inspiring, as the hon. Lady will have witnessed. We are surrounded by incredible organisations that deliver life-changing services and reach all corners of our society. For example, I visited the social enterprise Clarity, which has been providing employment for blind and disabled people for 160 years. Employment in manufacturing a range of beauty and household products enables Clarity’s staff to develop their independence, build their confidence and play a full part in society. Such organisations demonstrate exactly why I am so committed to the sector, which is why I am determined to build their resilience and sustainability so that they can thrive and grow.

Again, that is where social investment comes in. I want to make it easier for anyone to be a social investor, from individuals to foundations to corporate organisations. I want to help investors to connect, through their investments, with the causes that matter the most to them. I would like to see pension providers offer products in which a percentage of their members’ money goes to social investments. We are seeing that work successfully in the French pension system, in which billions of euros have been channelled to social impact investments. Product providers in this country have so far made limited progress on developing social investment offerings for retail investors, so that area has real potential.

Some organisations are pioneering retail products. Threadneedle, for example, has a UK social bond fund with tens of millions of pounds under management that can be accessed by individual investors. That is just the tip of the iceberg for retail fund offerings. Millennials will be the beneficiaries of the largest intergenerational wealth transfer in our history, and in the future successful investment managers and product providers will need to cater for their preferences. They are more interested in values-based lifestyles than previous generations, which includes consumption choices but also the way they want to invest. The Government want to back those people in the choices they want to make, as well as supporting the incredible social enterprises and mission-led businesses we have in the UK to grow in scale to make an even bigger impact on the lives of beneficiaries and communities that they are changing every day.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to discuss social investment in Westminster Hall today. Social investment is important because it is part of the long-term future of civil society in this country. We have a truly inspiring social sector here in the UK that contributes not only to the lives of our citizens but to the economy at large. We have all seen at first hand the impact that such organisations are having and the difference that they make to people who need them the most. We all want to ensure that the sector can thrive, which is why I am focused on delivering a sector that is more independent, more resilient and more sustainable over the long term. We can see that social investment is working. There is demand from social enterprises and investors alike, which is why I know that social investment is here to stay and will continue to grow and drive this vital sector.

Question put and agreed to.
Ceramic and Brick Industries

4.29 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I beg to move.

That this House has considered the ceramic and brick industries.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr. Chope, and to see Members from both sides of the Chamber here in Westminster Hall. As vice-chairman of the all-party group on ceramics, and because the brick industry is in my constituency, I felt that it was important to raise this issue with the Minister.

The ceramics industry employs around 20,000 people in the UK, generating £2 billion in sales and exporting products all over the world. It is undoubtedly an industry of huge importance to our country.

In my constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills, there has been a large ceramics presence in the area since the early 19th century, when clay and coal mining boomed in the district. The availability of jobs in mining resulted in a population surge in Aldridge, to 2,478 by 1901, and by 1906 two of the mines—known locally as Drybread, which is near Coppice Road, and Bare Bones, at Leighwood—employed nearly 1,500 people between them. There is also the Brownhills Miner. If anyone is travelling through Brownhills or is on the A5, please make a detour to see Jigger, a 40-foot statue standing at the end of Brownhills High Street. It is a wonderful reflection of a proud industrial heritage.

Aldridge-Brownhills is now home to four companies working in the ceramics industry, which directly employ around 300 people across five sites. Some of the most famous clay products in the world originate in Aldridge, from the beautifully hand-crafted Imperial Bathrooms products, which are exported all over the world, to the bricks made at the Ibstock and Wienerberger sites, which are used to build new housing stock in the UK. Recently, some of the clay for the stunning art installation by Paul Cummins called “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red”—the poppies, as many will know, that were installed at the Tower of London—came from the Potclays quarry in Brownhills.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. May I ask her to say a word not only for the fantastic ceramics industry itself—I am truly blessed in Stoke-on-Trent South with some wonderful businesses that are directly involved in ceramics—but all the ancillary businesses, which do related work such as designing or maintaining kilns?

Wendy Morton: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman makes a very valuable point. In any discussion about business, it is always worth reminding ourselves that it is not only the one business that matters but all the other businesses that feed into it, be it businesses that work with kilns, businesses that provide paint brushes or businesses that do a whole host of other things. Also, there are all the other businesses, which are often family businesses, around the area, which perhaps provide sandwiches or other things for the people working in all these companies.

However, the ceramics industry is approaching a worrying period of uncertainty. The European Commission published its legislative proposals for the emissions trading system phase 4 in July 2015. These proposals cover the period from 2021 to 2030 and propose a target of achieving at least a 40% reduction in EU greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The key issue for ceramics within the EU ETS proposals is carbon leakage, notably the evaluation of industries so that they are deemed either at risk or not at risk of it. Some sectors are likely to meet the proposed carbon leakage quantitative threshold, but the situation for other sectors, mainly the heavy clay industries and particularly those that produce bricks, clay roof tiles and clay pipes, is less clearcut, which is why I felt there was a need for this debate.

The UK Government recently announced their position on the EU ETS phase 4 and suggested that free allowances should be focused on only a handful of sectors, with other sectors receiving a lower-tiered proportion. The ceramics industry is extremely concerned by this tiering proposal, as ceramic manufacturing sites would need to purchase significantly more allowances. Indeed, it is predicted that heavy clay producers such as those in my constituency would have to buy all their carbon allowance after 2027. A number of ceramic manufacturers have said that that charge alone is likely to exceed their profits.

As part of its Ceramic EARTH campaign, the British Ceramic Confederation has used figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change to estimate that UK heavy clay construction product manufacturers will pay more than £40 million by 2030 under this proposal, which equates to almost £1 million per year per factory on average.

Clearly this situation concerns me and many other people, because businesses, jobs and investment are at stake. Therefore, I ask the Minister to continue to look at this proposal, which is for a system that supports only a few energy-intensive industries at the expense of many others. I genuinely fear that the UK proposal will burden businesses with very high extra costs. In fact, energy costs and climate-related taxes already make up around 30% of a brick maker’s production costs, and I fear that this proposal will only add to the issues that they face.

I am sure that others in Westminster Hall today are aware that there is a growing demand for housing in this country—we often discuss and debate it in the Chamber. Construction of houses is at an eight-year high and therefore the demand for materials is growing too. Brick is the most popular cladding material for building walls, with over 80% of new homes using bricks. Brick is unmatched for its durability, low maintenance costs, aesthetics and lifetime sustainability.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting one of the brick factories in my constituency and it was an inspiration to follow the production of bricks, from the clay pit behind the factory all the way through to the finished product at the end. It was only when I stood on top of the huge kiln that I really appreciated just how much energy goes into such large kilns to produce bricks for us.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The point that the hon. Lady made about the sustainability of the industry is a good one, and she made it well. Clay pipe making is very prominent in my constituency—90% of the UK’s production of clay pipes takes place in my constituency. Of course, clay pipes are very sustainable and very long-lasting, with a life of well over a hundred years. Does she agree that, although other forms of
production are of course valid and important, we ought not to forget the importance of such manufacturing capacity?

**Wendy Morton:** The hon. Lady makes a very valuable point. I will focus more on bricks, because they are produced in my constituency, but I appreciate and understand that this issue is not only about bricks but about clay pipes. When we look around the country, we often hear stories about, for example, the sewers under London. They have been in place probably for centuries, using British-manufactured clay products, pipes, bricks and lots of other things as well. I thank her for making that point.

To meet the UK demand for new housing, we will need a 60% uplift in clay products for over a decade. Unfortunately, rising demand for bricks and clay roof tiles has been met by unprecedented levels of imports. We need to encourage and focus on investment here in the UK, and consider future innovation. In 2014, brick imports accounted for 25% of sales in this country, representing a direct loss of around £80 million per year for the UK economy. The rising rate of imports of heavy clay from outside Europe shows how the EU ETS phase 4 will not really work if the industry loses its full carbon leakage status.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady is setting a very important scene. I do not have any clay making or ceramics works in my constituency, but I see the issue that she is raising. Surely there is a very simple solution. On 23 June, vote no and get out, and we will not have to be under the regulations that she has referred to.

**Wendy Morton:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I happen to disagree with him in terms of this debate. In fact, I have yet to declare my position on Europe, but it will become clearer later today.

The UK has some of the most energy-efficient manufacturing plants in the world. Specific energy consumption—in other words, energy efficiency—in the entire ceramics sector has improved by around 30% just over a decade. To do this, hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested to make many UK plants as energy-efficient as is currently possible, and yet they could all be forced to buy all of their carbon allowance if the tiering proposal is accepted. I ask the Minister this simple question: is that fair?

The uncertainty in the industry caused by the proposals and the rise of imports means that future investment is becoming difficult and unsteady. It will make the UK even more vulnerable to higher carbon non-EU imports. We need stability and continuity. As someone who comes from a business background, I know how important that is for businesses from all sectors. It is only through stability and continuity that they feel safe and secure in investing in the future.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on securing this important debate. Michelmersh in my constituency is a fantastic local brick maker. It would always make the point that it wants continuity and certainty so that it can make investment decisions that ultimately mean that jobs stay in the UK and do not disappear to China.

**Wendy Morton:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The subject of the debate is important, because behind it are jobs and our local economy. I do not wish to see de-industrialisation. The UK has a proud industrial history. We should also recognise that importing products from outside the EU would defeat the point of the emissions trading system. Overall, manufacturers outside the EU are not as well regulated. The electricity generation and the fuels used are more carbon-intensive, and the transportation of goods to market emits additional carbon.

As I said, the matter of housing is frequently raised in the House. The British Ceramic Confederation estimates that the Government’s programme of house building has the potential to create more than 3,000 direct ceramic manufacturing jobs in the UK and give a big boost to the sector and GDP. However, that is not being realised because of the threat of carbon leakage loss and the uncertainty that brings.

Turning to energy costs, brick makers in the UK pay about 80% more for their electricity than the EU average price, according to Eurostat. Despite much mention of the renewables compensation scheme for energy-intensive industries, brick makers are not compensated at all in the UK for renewables costs. I am sure my right hon. Friend the Minister will know that seven ceramic manufacturers in the UK are likely to receive renewables compensation, in contrast to more than 100 German ceramic and clay sites. Clearly we do not have a level playing field, and we need one.

**Robert Flello:** Given that a lot of the players in this market that have factories in the UK also have factories in such places as Germany, surely one pressure comes from saying to those companies, “You can get compensated in Germany. Put your production in Germany, not the UK.”

**Wendy Morton:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. At the end of the day, I want a level playing field for our industries in the UK so that we can compete. We need to extend the number of companies that the compensation covers. I am pleased to note that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) is here today. She is chair of the all-party group on ceramics. I am sure she will make reference to and, I hope, welcome the Chancellor’s announcement of the ceramic valley enterprise zone status in her constituency. That is welcome news, and I am sure she will have more to say on that, but we need the right energy and carbon policies to unlock investment at this critical time when we continue to secure the country’s economic recovery.

The Government have set a key target in their construction strategy of a 50% reduction by 2025 in the trade gap between total exports and total imports for construction products and materials. Ceramics and bricks can make a real contribution to that target, but that will happen only if we have a level playing field that enables us to compete.

The ceramics industry does not just face issues within Europe. As a result of dumped imports, between 2006 and 2011 a huge number of direct jobs were lost in the
c: The ceramics industry is, I fear, one of the most vulnerable to overcapacity in the Chinese economy. If market economy status is conferred on China by the EU, despite it only meeting one of the five necessary criteria, it will make the maintenance of adequate and meaningful anti-dumping measures, which currently protect tiles and tableware, impossible, the progress the industry has made since 2011 will be lost, and the industry will once again be put at risk. It would also further add to the uncertainty the sector is facing. What assessments have the Government and the Minister made of the impact of market economy status for China on the ceramics industry? Will they continue to listen to the views of the industry? Colleagues in the European Parliament recently rejected MES for China in a plenary vote.

I come from a business background. I believe in manufacturing. Businesses need continuity and stability to invest, innovate and thrive. As a country, we cannot decarbonise by de-industrialising and shifting our carbon emissions to another part of the world. Will the Minister look seriously at this issue? I want our industries to prosper and thrive. The ceramics industry needs competitive energy prices and the rejection of market economy status for China, but above all it needs a level playing field. That is why I am asking the Government to recognise the strategic importance of the ceramics industry and, in particular, bricks, pipes and roof tiles. I am sure that other Members will mention other products, too, and I leave that to them. We need the Government to look at today’s industries to see how they can be best be supported to thrive in tomorrow’s markets.

4.46 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I thank the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) for securing such an important debate. I agree wholeheartedly with all her comments, with the exception that I think the priority should always be tableware.

I am the chair of the new all-party group on ceramics, and am proud to represent the Potteries—the historic centre of our country’s ceramics industry—so it will come as no surprise that I consider the sector to be of great importance. Across Stoke-on-Trent, more than 7,000 people are still directly employed in ceramics—more than in any other industry. With the ceramic valley enterprise zone, the future of the industry is clear; there is huge opportunity for development and huge potential. We need to ensure the level playing field that the hon. Lady spoke about so articulately.

I was saddened in our last debate to hear that the Minister so rarely finds the time to eat a proper meal from our excellent Stoke-on-Trent tableware, or even from the less-than-excellent Chinese tableware utilised by her Department, but that lack of familiarity with the craftsmanship of Tudson, Churchill or Steelite need not concern her in today’s debate. There is so much more to the ceramics industry than just tableware, important though that is. It is those other applications that I wish to focus on today.

In my constituency, we are proud to be home to Johnson Tiles, the UK’s leading tile manufacturer and pioneers in the field of ceramic design. Like the brick factories in the constituency of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, it is a major employer and a big contributor to our national economy. Bricks and tiles are not just important to the livelihoods of our constituents, however; they are key strategic industries in their own right, providing the raw materials that our country needs to build and to grow. The Government have repeatedly stated their commitment to a major programme of house building, which I very much support. We cannot build new homes without the raw materials for construction, and the Government’s ambitions, if fulfilled, could be an incredible opportunity for our brick and tile industries.

Angela Smith: And pipe industry.

Ruth Smeeth: Indeed. My hon. Friend will undoubtedly highlight that later. I am concerned that under the Government’s policies on these sectors, the benefits will not be felt as keenly as they should or could be. Indeed, if we do not support the industries appropriately, the benefits of any construction boom will be reaped not by our businesses, but by brick factories in north Africa, Turkey and elsewhere, where costs of production are lower and future risks less pronounced.

Despite their importance in the supply chain for house building and construction, and despite the wide range of high-tech applications, I fear that the brick and ceramic industries are being treated as poor relations by the Government. I can only hope that this debate will help to persuade the Government that more can and must be done to support the industry, which sets the benchmark for innovation and for commitment to sustainable manufacturing.

The British Ceramic Confederation’s EARTH campaign is doing valuable work in highlighting some of the major issues affecting the brick and ceramic industries. One such issue concerns China’s ongoing bid for market economy status. I have spoken before in this hall about the threat that MES for China would pose to British industry, and I have also raised the Government’s apparent acquiescence to China’s demands. Nevertheless, the ceramics industry’s concerns on this matter are significant and bear repeating. Granting market economy status to China would leave us with no defence against unfair Chinese dumping practices, and would allow our domestic market to be flooded with inferior goods at prices that are simply not achievable without the state intervention and rock-bottom labour costs that Chinese industries take advantage of—or exploit.

It is well established that China has, to date, met only one of the five criteria required for market economy status. It is also recognised that the impact on the British economy of granting China such a status would be severe, with a potential cost of 3.5 million jobs across the UK—jobs we can ill afford to lose.

Robert Flello: I would, of course, mention wonderful firms such as Mantec, Wedgwood and Cromartie, but I do not want to go through the list because you will not
allow me, Mr Chope. In addition to the “legitimate” importation, or dumping, of Chinese goods in the UK, there is still a massive problem with counterfeiting—including with dangerous chemicals and materials—and intellectual property theft by companies in China. That is being dumped on our market as well.

Ruth Smeeth: I totally agree with my hon. Friend and neighbour in Stoke-on-Trent South. I am dealing with one such case in my constituency, in which a company has, unfortunately, been a target of infringement. We have to look seriously at what we can do to provide support. There is no easy answer, but we have to deal with these problems at every level.

Robert Flello: And not give China MES.

Ruth Smeeth: And not give China MES to make the situation even worse. Let us be clear: these fears are not baseless. They have been raised time and again by all the major employers in the sector, including those in my constituency, and by GMB, the trade union that represents the sector, and which has done an incredible job in both the UK and Europe to highlight the challenges that MES would pose.

In the European Parliament, these concerns have been widely recognised. A recent vote against granting market economy status to China was overwhelming: 546 votes in favour of not granting MES, and just 77 against not doing so. Furthermore, the motion received support from British MEPs from across the whole political spectrum—Labour and Conservative—who were united, as I hope we are today. Does the Minister agree that that demonstrates just how valuable our EU membership is to the protection of British industry? Will she confirm whether the Government will listen to their European representatives and work with our EU partners to help block China’s bid?

It is heartening to see so many Members from both sides of the House here today; it is a sign, I hope, of the depth of feeling on the issue. We all want our excellent brick and ceramic industries to continue to grow, thrive and prosper; all we are asking for is a level playing field, so that those ambitions can be fulfilled.

4.53 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on securing this debate.

I shall focus on the EU emissions trading system policy, which has already been highlighted but is of particular concern to Wienerberger, a brick manufacturer based in Kingsbury in my constituency. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, I had the chance to stand on top of the kiln when I visited the company recently, which was quite exciting. Wienerberger has 13 factories throughout the country that produce bricks and roof tiles. It is employs 1,165 people in the UK. Its Kingsbury factory alone produces 40 million bricks per annum, which is enough to build 5,000 new homes.

Wienerberger’s specific problem is the proposal concerning the future carbon leakage policy. As has already been pointed out, and as I know the Minister is aware, carbon leakage in this sense refers to the relocation of UK production to locations where it is cheaper to manufacture because of environmental policies and/or lower energy costs. The direct result is a loss of investment and jobs from the UK economy. In EU ETS phase 3, ceramic sector installations, which include brick and clay roof tile factories, are deemed to be at risk of carbon leakage. As a result, factories receive a proportion of allowances based on the average of the top 10 performers across the EU in that sector, free of charge. If, as has been proposed by the UK and France, a tiered approach to carbon leakage risk is adopted in phase 4, it is likely that the ceramic sector will be reclassified as no or low risk and will thus receive significantly less free allocation.

Wendy Morton: Does my hon. Friend agree that with the increased demand for housing, we should be looking at ways to support the brick manufacturing industry?

Craig Tracey: My hon. Friend pre-empted part of my speech. She is absolutely right that we need more houses, and that it makes absolute sense for the bricks for those houses to come from local businesses in the UK.

The loss of the free allocation I have described will, when combined with an escalating market price for carbon allowances, significantly increase the cost of production. Meanwhile, competing construction materials, such as cement, will retain free allocation, creating market distortion. The situation is particularly acute in the UK as the carbon price floor, a UK-only policy instrument, adds further costs to the EU ETS carbon price for power producers. That additional cost is being passed on to businesses via electricity prices, with manufacturers being unable to pass them on to customers. Countries such as Germany and Italy are compensating for renewable electricity charges, but the UK is not. That further reduces the competitiveness of the UK brick and clay roof tile industry.

Wienerberger has factories across Europe, including in countries with significantly lower electricity costs than the UK. Any increase in UK production costs makes future investment in its UK factories far less attractive than investment in other European countries.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): On that very point, the family-owned Hinton Perry & Davenhill brickworks in my constituency has recently invested £5 million in new energy and production efficiency measures. Does my hon. Friend agree that undermining the business model on which such brickworks operate reduces investment in energy efficiency, thereby worsening the situation, rather than helping?

Craig Tracey: I cannot say much more than that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the nub of the problem. It is about investment as much as anything else.

Given the Government’s commitment to delivering 400,000 affordable housing starts by 2021, and the Construction 2025 strategy, which seeks to achieve a 50% reduction in the trade gap between total exports and imports of construction products and materials, it is essential that we maintain a UK manufacturing base of bricks and clay roof tiles. In order to achieve that, we must support local manufacturers in the UK, which will ultimately reduce the need for imported materials.
Competing construction materials such as cement and steel are set to retain carbon leakage status, creating distortions in the UK market. Importing construction products will have a negative effect on the UK trade balance and increase the UK’s consumption-based emissions. I should add that it is not only the brick and ceramics industries that raise these concerns; there is also support from other energy-intensive sectors, such as paper and glass industries.

In summary, my asks of the Minister are that the Government support these very important industries by ensuring that no tiered approach is applied, and that ceramic installations retain full carbon leakage mitigation; by maximising the provision of free allowances to preserve the UK’s competitiveness; and, finally, by allowing the current qualitative assessment process to continue. I look forward to hearing my right hon. Friend the Minister’s response.

4.59 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on securing it.

As Members know, in the autumn statement the Government committed to building 400,000 new homes in this Parliament. I am pleased that brick manufacturers want to play their part in achieving the Government’s ambitious goal. Yet with that ambition comes a need for the steady production and supply of building materials for Britain’s new homes. When Britain last built 200,000 new houses a year, it required stocks of more than 1 billion bricks and the production of almost twice that number to fulfil orders and keep the prices of basic construction materials stable. Although I am pleased that figures from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills show an increase in brick production, and that the Office for National Statistics and the chair of the Brick Development Association agree with those figures, we need to ensure that the brick manufacturing industry and the other elements that go into building our homes are recognised. They must be appreciated as an important staple for house building and increasing market values.

Wendy Morton: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we seek to build more houses, the construction industry needs a continuity of construction materials? That includes bricks, roof tiles, pipes and everything else that is required for constructing a home.

Mary Robinson: I totally agree. We need exactly that package if we are to achieve this ambitious target.

I welcome the British Ceramic Confederation’s ceramic EARTH campaign, which aims to raise the profile of the industry’s important contribution to the UK economy. To be able to compete internationally and secure jobs, we must ensure that all sub-sectors receive mitigation measures to fully guard against the leakage of carbon investment and jobs outside the EU, and there must be action to lighten the cost of UK/EU energy, climate and environmental policies, which harm the sector’s ability to remain competitive on the international stage.

I share an interest with my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills and for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey); my constituency is home to the national headquarters of Wienerberger, the UK’s third largest brick manufacturer. Wienerberger is responsible for producing all the elements of construction. It is the only multinational producer of clay block for walls, clay roof tiles, ceramic pipe systems, and concrete and clay pavers. It provides what the firm calls a “whole building envelope”.

Wendy Morton: My hon. Friend is talking about one of her local companies that produces bricks. Does she accept that the many companies across the country that manufacture such products, from small family-run companies to the much bigger national and international companies, are all affected by the EU ETS and the market economy status?

Mary Robinson: That is exactly right. They have an all-pervasive influence.

Innovation and speed are important in meeting the Government’s targets. Innovation can drive down construction time. For instance, Porotherm—Wienerberger’s clay block walling system—has been used to build an apartment block complex in South Harrow, which is currently being finished. It has reduced the construction time by 20% from 15 to 12 months. One floor is rising every eight days, readying the roof for installation within 10 weeks. That new method of brick production has reduced overall construction time and speeded up access to home ownership. Therefore, where there is demand for good-quality housing, and where there are brownfield sites with appropriate planning permission for construction, we should recognise that developments in the brick industry enable quicker construction and allow properties to be released much sooner than the market is currently used to.

It is clear from Members’ contributions that investment in new capacity is needed to help the industry with the production of bricks. That should be at the forefront of our concerns. As Members have mentioned, in the EU ETS phase 3, all ceramic sectors and sub-sectors are deemed at risk of carbon leakage for direct carbon costs, but they will not be compensated for indirect carbon costs. The key issue for phase 4 legislation is to guard against the leakage associated with indirect and direct costs. However, there are shortcomings to those proposals—most notably, an insufficient number of free allowances for the industry. Thus there would be a uniform percentage reduction, known as the cross-sectoral correction factor, to keep within the minimum. To avoid the CSCF, the introduction of a tiered approach, although helping a limited number of sectors, could be damaging to other sectors. Under this tiering, ceramic installations would see a significant reduction in the level of free allocation received. That is worrying for the firms that are involved in the production of bricks, roof tiles and drainage pipes, which may cease to receive free allowances. That will make investment in UK operations challenging and undermine much needed investment in capacity.

The UK ceramic industry is steeped in heritage. Now more than ever it is vital to Britain’s growth. As we seek to build more homes, we should remember that good
homes are built on strong foundations, and we should do all we can to ensure that those foundations are built on a strong brick and ceramic manufacturing industry.

5.5 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on bringing forward this very important debate. She spoke of the 20,000 people employed in these heavy industries, which generate £2 billion-worth of sales and exports worldwide. Interestingly, she said that ceramics, clay and coal mining have been in her constituency since the 19th century.

I, too, have a ceramics business based in my constituency. Having visited to Raeburn Brick and listened to its concerns, I feel obliged to speak up for it in this place. It is Scotland’s only remaining clay brick company, and makes 15% of the bricks used in Scotland. When I was doing some research earlier, I noted some of the names of the bricks, including Jacobite, Livingstone, MacKintosh Smooth, Holyrood Buff and Orkney Buff—very interesting. It uses clays won locally in west central Scotland.

I am familiar with many of the issues that the industry faces. As a member of the Scottish steel taskforce, I have listened to a wealth of evidence from many different sources about the problems that our energy-intensive industries face. We all recognise that the road ahead is not easy, and the industries acknowledge that there are serious and significant challenges. The ceramics and brickmaking industry is an important part of Scotland's manufacturing heritage.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) raised the issue of EU support and funding during Prime Minister’s questions, and it is important that we recognise the vital role that the European Union plays.

Throughout the steel crisis, the Scottish National party consistently called on the UK business sector to bring forward a comprehensive and revised industrial strategy for heavy industry in the UK. That is more crucial than ever if we are to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the ceramics industry and other heavy industries in the UK.

Although the SNP Government in Scotland support energy-intensive industries, they recognise that energy efficiency and clean energy are the key to meeting our ambitious climate change targets and contributing to long-term and sustainable economic growth. We are well on our way. In fact, this week it was announced that Scotland has exceeded our 2020 target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42% six years early. The transition to a lower-carbon economy is not easy. The challenge is that the payback on such investments is often achieved in the long term, so we need strong leadership, technical expertise and access to appropriate finance. We also need to support manufacturers that are taking a lead by adopting and investing in energy-saving measures, as Raeburn Brick is doing. We need a proactive response that engages constructively with the industry. Ceramics cannot be allowed to slump into crisis before the Government are willing to respond.

Many Members made very interesting points. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said that we have to achieve a 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030. That means companies in her constituency will have to purchase more allowances, at a cost of £40 million between now and 2027, which equates to £1 million per year per factory, she said.

It is important to support all heavy industry. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough spoke up for clay pipe making in her constituency—

Hon. Members: Penistone and Stocksbridge.

Margaret Ferrier: Sorry about that—I mean the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith). I should have known that, because we have met many times to talk about heavy industry—my apologies.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) spoke about ancillary firms also being important, and kiln production. He spoke kindly about Wedgwood, to mention it again, and that we have to be careful about market economy status for China, which has counterfeit ing and dangerous chemicals in some products.

Wendy Morton: The hon. Lady always speaks with such passion about the industries in her constituency. Does she agree that we need to look not only at the EU emissions trading scheme, but at market economy status for China? Only by having a level playing field can we encourage businesses to do their bit, which is to invest and innovate for the future.

Margaret Ferrier: The hon. Lady makes a good point. We will hear from the Minister in her response to all our points. We have heard many times that market economy status will not mean that we cannot bring anti-dumping cases, so I am interested to hear how she will respond to everyone’s concerns.

We heard from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) that there is more to ceramics than brick alone; it includes tableware. A tile manufacturer is a big employer in her constituency, and it has major concerns. The brick and tile industry has bases in north Africa and Turkey, where production costs are much lower, so we have to support our ceramics in the UK. She also made mention of labour costs, which are lower in those countries, although employees there can be exploited.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), which includes Bedworth, spoke about his brick and tile manufacturer in Kingsbury, which employs 1,100—

Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but by convention the time available is split between the Opposition spokesmen. I have to call the Minister at 20 past, so if the time is to be split equally, the hon. Lady’s time is up.

Margaret Ferrier: I apologise, Mr Chope, and will conclude by saying that we have heard many concerns from Members in all parts of the House. We look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate everyone on their contributions to the debate, in particular the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton)—I was going to call her the hon. Member for brick, because she was such an advocate for her brick makers, but I realised others might claim the title. However, she rightly celebrated the industry in her constituency, and pointed out her concerns about the uncertainties caused by some of the issues mentioned, which I will return to in my remarks.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), or the hon. Member for ceramic tableware, as we might call her. She said that the industry is treated as a poor relation, and referred to the industry's EARTH campaign, as well as market economy status, which is a thread running through the debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), and for Bedworth, on his contribution—the hon. Member for tile and brick perhaps. He spoke about the potential negative interest of the Government proposal on the emissions trading scheme. I also congratulate the hon. Member for ceramic tableware, as we might call her. She said that the industry is important, and I want to praise it for taking the initiative with its EARTH campaign, which has been mentioned. The campaign raises the key issues that the Government need to address in order to secure the future of the industry. The industry employs many thousands of people, and there are 480 ceramic and brick manufacturing businesses in Great Britain, although that number has fallen from 640 in 2009. They are a key part of a modern UK economy.

The highly regarded new extension of Tate Modern is an example of a resurgence in the use of brick in construction and British architecture. The high-profile use of brick in an iconic building, combined with the strong growth figures forecast for the housing industry, which we have heard about, mean that there is a glowing future for the brick industry in the UK, which is renowned globally for its excellent design and architecture expertise and the innovative materials that make that possible.

Recently, the energy-intensive industries have made common requests to the Government, many of which have been mentioned. I will reiterate briefly that the cost of compliance under the renewables obligation compensation package must be looked at, and a level playing field is needed across Europe. We welcome the consultation that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is conducting, but action is required.

Carbon emissions can be massively reduced by undertaking research and development into energy saving and efficiencies, new innovations in fuel and energy efficiency, heat recovery, and furnace design. As hon. Members have said, we also need to be protected from cheaper Chinese products, otherwise we have the dumping of goods being produced for less than the cost of production, as we have seen in the steel industry. That is one of the key demands of the EARTH campaign.

The housing industry needs to be primed to create homes for millions of UK citizens awaiting decent housing, which will help to create demand in many UK materials products, including ceramics, bricks, steel and glass. The UK is pioneering new approaches in the brick and ceramics industry, with research in areas such as kiln firing and energy efficiency. I pay tribute to the work of the industry and to ceramics research centred in Stoke-on-Trent. Research and development in the brick and ceramics industry needs to be systematically spread across the whole of the materials industry.

We have not heard mention of this so far today, but a proposal is with the Government for the creation of a materials catapult, which could bring about the upscaling and commercialisation of relentless, continuous innovation in the materials sector, taking new science from the discovery stage to the practical stage, ready to be picked up by business. However, the brick and ceramic industries, in common with the rest of the UK materials sector, do not benefit from the support of an innovation catapult.

In developing the UK catapults, Professor Hermann Hauser outlined the foreign criteria for a new catapult to flourish: a large global market to exploit; a UK global lead in research capability; and the necessary absorptive capacity to exploit commercially in the UK. The UK materials sector clearly meets those guidelines, so I am interested to hear from the Minister what is the latest thinking is on the establishment of a catapult in this field, and whether that could bring the UK into line with other advanced nations, including our competitors in the European Union, which I know the Minister is a strong supporter of, as I am.

Robert Flello: The advanced materials catapult is exactly the right thing to do, for the reasons given by my hon. Friend, but would it not be tragic if, at the same time as developing it, we lost the production to other countries?

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why the issues that have been identified in the debate are so important and why it is very important that the Government responds to each of the as the EARTH campaign, with particular reference to the Government's slight obsession with pushing through market economy status for China. It is clear from the recent vote in the European Parliament—it was cross-party, cross-sector and an overwhelming result—that there are strong feelings about that matter, yet the Government seem intent on pushing ahead, despite such a strong expression of opinion. I would be grateful if the Minister could update us on whether that is having any influence on the thinking and whether the Government are listening seriously to the voice of industry with regard to that.

I do not want to take up any more time because we want to hear from the Minister, but I urge her to listen to the requests from hon. Members and the demands from the industry, and tell us what she is doing about the proposal to create a materials catapult for the UK sector, with bricks and ceramics at the heart of that research and development, together with steel, aluminium, glass and those sorts of materials. That could give the sort of assurance to those great British industries that secures their continuity well into the 21st century.
5.20 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. May I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on securing this excellent debate and everybody who has contributed to it? It is indeed a fascinating subject. Such is my interest in all the sectors in my brief—especially ceramics, because of the breadth and depth of the sector—I am getting to the stage now where I could bore for Britain on the different technologies and techniques and how exciting it is. Yes, it relies on many traditional methods. I am helped by the breadth and depth of the sector—I am getting to the stages in my brief—especially ceramics, because of the breadth and depth of the sector—I am getting to the stage now where I could bore for Britain on the different technologies and techniques and how exciting it is. Yes, it relies on many traditional methods. I am helped by that.

I always have to pay tribute to my excellent Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), who, within his constituency has Morgan Advanced Ceramics—actually, this is a serious point. I quickly looked at its website, and when we see the astonishing high value products it makes, it is almost difficult to believe that they all fall within the wonderful broad category of ceramics, which, of course, includes clay pipes.

As I said, brick has been used by people for building for at least 5,000 years for good reason: it is a durable and it is energy efficient. It is to be commended and, if I may say, it should be used at every opportunity. The sector is very diverse, including electronics, aerospace, automotive and healthcare.

After a prolonged and painful restructuring in recent decades, some parts of the brick and ceramic sector have seen a revival in past years. Strong demand from house builders has meant that previously mothballed brick factories have reopened and substantial investment has been made in others, such as the Ibstock Brick Ltd facilities at Chesterton and Ibstock in Leicestershire. Unfortunately there is nobody here from Leicestershire, but that is an outstanding company. In ceramics there has been new investment in both technology and factories, with distinguished names such as Waterford, Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Wade and Steelite leading the way.

In response to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), I want to put the record straight. I do eat when I can—I enjoy eating, in fact. However, I always have to pay tribute to my excellent Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), who, within his constituency has Morgan Advanced Ceramics—actually, this is a serious point. I quickly looked at its website, and when we see the astonishing high value products it makes, it is almost difficult to believe that they all fall within the wonderful broad category of ceramics, which, of course, includes clay pipes.

Robert Fello: Shameful!

Anna Soubry: It is absolutely shameful—I could not agree more. When we last debated this issue, I have to confess that I did not know Steelite, which is a disgraceful admission from the Minister responsible for ceramics. By a happy chance, that very weekend I happened to be staying somewhere in Scotland—I will not name it—where they used Steelite. It is an outstanding ceramic because it is incredibly durable. It has many other qualities, too—it can be very fashionable and traditional—and I could go on. It has outstanding British quality and it has stamped on its back proudly that it is all made in Britain. I know that the industry has been keen to overcome some of the difficulties it has had. Frankly, we know that some companies have imported products and then, because they will slip them and perhaps finish them off, they then put “made in England” on them. Anyway, Steelite is made here in Britain and it is brilliant.

The business environment has been tough, and it still is tough for many parts of the sector, especially those businesses that are caught up in the supply chains for sectors such as steel. We all know the difficulties they have been suffering. However, we are getting the fundamentals of the economy right. By way of example, we are cutting corporation tax to 18% by 2020, which is important to support the sector and indeed all manufacturing. We are cutting red tape and investing £6.9 billion. Again, all of that is important, as is our work creating apprenticeships so that we keep our skills base up.

In relation to Stoke-on-Trent in particular, the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local enterprise partnership has achieved many things. For example, there was £159,000 for Keeing and Walker, Fairey Technical got £159,000, Hygan Products got £30,000 and Siak Transfers got another £10,000 to help them with new jobs and new investment, looking to the future. The Ceramic Valley enterprise zone along the A500 corridor was announced in the autumn statement to help the United Kingdom to compete with the growing technical ceramics sectors in the United States, Germany and Italy. The Government’s city deal with the LEP includes a flagship proposal for the UK’s first at-scale, low-carbon heat network system, which will support the region’s world famous advanced manufacturing and applied materials sectors, including ceramics.

I turn to the sometimes controversial—understandably so—EU emissions trading scheme and reform. We are a strong supporter of the EU ETS as a cornerstone of EU climate and energy policy. It can help industry to carbonise in a cost-effective way in the transition to the low-carbon economy we all want, but the United Kingdom Government believe that improvements to the EU ETS in phase 4 can help it function more effectively and target carbon leakage support at those sectors at greatest risk. What we do not want is for us to be exporting jobs and importing carbon, so we have to get that absolutely right.

We favour a tiered approach that would focus a limited supply of free allocation on those sectors that need it most. Our recent joint non-paper with France sets out a number of potential approaches to tiering. It is important to note that, at this stage, we do not favour any one particular approach. We acknowledge that parts of the ceramics industry are at risk of carbon leakage and we are engaging proactively with the ceramics industry to discuss its concerns. It is always a pleasure for me to meet with it.

We are keen to see more simplified procedures and a potential increase in scope for the small emitter opt-out and to ensure that innovation funding is available for industry. All of those measures can help installations in the ceramics sector. The really important point, which was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, who so ably represents her constituency, is that, like all sectors, this sector asks for nothing more than that level playing field. She is right that, as other hon. Members mentioned, it is only right and fair that,
as a Government, we do or do not do stuff to ensure a
level playing field. That is a proper and right ask to
make.

Turning quickly to EII compensation and what we
call the 2050 road maps, the industrial energy costs in
this country are higher than in other European countries.
We know that we face a genuine and serious challenge
in our country, but in answer to my hon. Friend the
Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), who
made a very good contribution, eligible ceramics companies
can apply for compensation for the indirect costs of the
renewables obligation and the small-scale feed-in tariffs
scheme. We have been working closely with the British
Ceramic Confederation and ceramics companies to help
them to apply for that. We have worked closely with the
sector to develop a 2050 road map to help it to reduce
greenhouse gas emissions and increase its energy efficiency
while remaining competitive. We all agree that we now
need to see some real action to ensure that our energy
costs are cheaper, in particular for the benefit of our
manufacturing sector.

I know that MES for China is controversial and I am
aware of the vote. The Government of course continue
to listen, but we should not get overly hung up on
market economy status. Russia has it and the Commission
is still able to act to put on tariffs, for example, and so
on. Of course, the Government continue to listen.

There were some excellent contributions from all
hon. Members. My hon. Friends the Members for Cheadle
(Mary Robinson) and for North Warwickshire mentioned
Wienerberger, an excellent brick company. It does not
just make traditional bricks, as the hon. Member for
Motherwell—I have the wrong constituency again. I
apologise.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Rutherglen and Hamilton
West.

Anna Soubry: I thank my PPS for that help. The hon.
Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret
Ferrier) also made the point that it is not just traditional
bricks that are proving so popular. A modern approach
to bricks, based on traditional methods, means that
bricks are now being seen as a beautiful design and
feature in themselves in any work that is undertaken.

Because I am going to run out of time, let me say that
I am happy to look at procurement. Perhaps we could
do some work in persuading local authorities to do
more in the procurement of British bricks.

5.29 pm

Wendy Morton: In the short time that I have, I thank
you, Mr Chope, for keeping us in good order this
afternoon, and I thank the Minister for coming along
and listening to us. I was pleased to hear that she is
engaging proactively on some of the issues, and I urge
her to continue to listen to the sector. I thank all the
Members from across the country who have participated
in the debate.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question
put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).
Written Statements

Thursday 19 May 2016

TREASURY

National Infrastructure Commission

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): Yesterday, I laid the response to the National Infrastructure Commission consultation [CM 9289]. This reconfirms the Government’s plans to establish the Commission via primary legislation, and sets out a number of areas where policy has developed following public consultation.

On 5 October 2015, the Chancellor announced the creation of the National Infrastructure Commission to provide expert independent analysis of the long-term infrastructure needs of the country. The Commission has been operating in interim form since then.

The Government held a 10-week public consultation between 7 January and 17 March on the governance, structure and operation of the Commission. The public consultation attracted 136 responses, primarily from industry associations, companies, lobby groups, local authorities and research bodies. The majority were very supportive of the concept, and of the Government’s proposals for fully establishing the Commission.

The response confirms that the Commission will produce a national infrastructure assessment once in every Parliament, setting out its analysis of the UK’s infrastructure needs over a 10 to 30-year time horizon. The Commission will also examine pressing and significant infrastructure challenges in studies set by the Government. The Government will be obliged formally to respond to the Commission’s recommendations.

To fulfil its objectives, the Commission will be able to request information and analysis from Government Departments. The Commission will work within a remit to ensure that it recommends infrastructure that is sustainable and affordable and offers real economic benefits.

The Government intend to introduce legislation to place the Commission on a permanent, independent footing as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Copies of the response are available in the Vote Office, Printed Paper Office and on the gov.uk website. [HCWS2]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils: 23-24 May

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 May and I will attend the General Affairs Council on 24 May. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Dutch presidency. The meetings will be held in Brussels.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) will be preceded by the annual EU-Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting. The FAC agenda will include the Syria/Iraq/counter-Daesh regional strategy, the EU global strategy and external aspects of migration. Ms. Mogherini is expected to cover the Arctic and Libya in her opening remarks.

EU-Eastern Partnership ministerial

EU Foreign Ministers will meet with the Foreign Ministers of the six Eastern Partnership states—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine—to review progress on the Eastern Partnership initiative since the EU-Eastern Partnership summit held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015.

Syria/Iraq/counter-Daesh regional strategy

The May Foreign Affairs Council will review of External Action Service (EEAS)/Commission programmes and projects undertaken within the framework of the March 2015 regional strategy for handling Syria, Iraq and the Daesh threat. This review will assess how the EU has been supporting political transition in Syria, political settlement in Iraq and efforts to defeat and degrade Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

The European Union global strategy

Over lunch the High Representative will update Ministers on the preparation of the European Union global strategy. External aspects of migration

Ministers will exchange views on the external aspects of migration. We expect the focus of the discussion to be on common security and defence policy (CSDP) activities to support the development of border security in Libya and the Sahel. Building the capacity of the Libyan coastguard is of particular importance. We will also use the opportunity to discuss progress on Valletta action plan implementation. With a range of high-level international events this year, leading up to the UNGA high-level event on large movements of migrants and refugees, there is an opportunity for the international community to build a sustainable global response to large population movements and the issue of irregular migration, by placing an emphasis on global responsibility sharing, reducing large-scale irregular migration, and providing protection and humanitarian support to those who need it.

The Arctic

Following the recent publication of the joint communication on the Arctic, Ministers will discuss whether the EU’s policy in the Arctic is appropriately focused. We also expect discussions on the EU’s application for formal observer status at the Arctic Council.

Libya

Discussions will focus on the latest developments in the Libyan political process. The EEAS is planning for a possible civilian CSDP mission for Libya. We will press the EU to develop a realistic and achievable offer based on the needs of the Government of National Accord and the situation on the ground. We are aiming for progress towards agreeing an updated mandate for
EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Sophia), to include capacity-building for the Libyan coastguard. The Vienna ministerial on 16 May underlined international support for the Libyan political agreement, Presidency Council and Government of National Accord.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL
The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 May is expected to focus on rule of law and preparation of the June European Council.

Rule of law
The GAC will conduct its annual dialogue on the rule of law, focusing on the issue of the integration of migrants.

Preparation of the June European Council
The GAC will prepare the agenda for the 28-29 June European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE
Government’s Legislative Programme 2016-17

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Following yesterday’s state opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills, which were announced yesterday:

Better Markets Bill
Bill of Rights
Bus Services Bill
Children and Social Work Bill
Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill
Criminal Finances Bill
Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill
Digital Economy Bill
Education for All Bill
Higher Education and Research Bill
Lifetime Savings Bill
Local Growth and Jobs Bill
Modern Transport Bill
National Citizen Service Bill
NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill
Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill
Overseas Electors Bill
Prison and Courts Reform Bill
Pensions Bill
Small Charitable Donations Bill
Wales Bill

The following Bills will carry over from the last session:

Finance (No.2) Bill
High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill
Investigatory Powers Bill
Policing and Crime Bill

The following Law Commission Bills will be introduced:

Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the No. 10 website at: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street.

NORTHERN IRELAND
Government’s Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The second Session UK legislative programme unveiled in the Queen’s Speech on 18 May includes a number of measures directly relevant to the people of Northern Ireland. The majority of the 22 new Bills containing provisions that apply in Northern Ireland either in full or in part. Once again, this is a strong programme of legislation for Northern Ireland contained in a one nation Queen’s Speech from a one nation Government. The Government also reaffirm their commitment to the implementation of the Stormont House agreement and “Fresh Start” agreement.

The Government are using the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people; increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and strengthen national security. Bills such as the Better Markets Bill and the Digital Economy Bill demonstrate our commitment to strengthening the UK economy and supporting businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland, and right across the UK. The Lifetime Savings Bill provides important support for those on lowest incomes and in encouraging the younger generation to save regularly. The Criminal Finances Bill provides a new legislative framework to tackle money laundering, criminal assets and terrorist financing.

The following is a summary of the legislation announced in the Queen’s Speech and its proposed application to Northern Ireland. Some Bills are still under development, including final decisions on the extent to which provisions should extend to Northern Ireland. The list identifies the lead Government Department. It does not include draft Bills.

The following Bills will extend to Northern Ireland, in whole or in part. Some deal mainly with excepted/reserved matters. Discussions will continue between the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that, where provisions for a transferred purpose are included in any of these Bills, the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be sought for them.

Better Markets Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
Bill of Rights (Ministry of Justice)
Criminal Finances (Home Office)
Digital Economy Bill (Department for Culture, Media & Sport)
Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill (Law Commission Bill)
Lifetime Savings Bill (HM Treasury)
Overseas Electors Bill (Cabinet Office)
Modern Transport Bill (Department for Transport)
Small Charitable Donations Bill (HMRC)
Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill (Department for Culture, Media & Sport)
Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)
Higher Education and Research Bill (Research Councils) – (Department for Business, Innovations and Skills)
National Citizen Service Bill (Cabinet Office)
Pensions Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)
NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill (Department of Health)

The following Bills will have limited or no application to Northern Ireland:
Bus Services Bill (Department for Transport).
Children and Social Work Bill (Department for Education)
Local Growth and Jobs Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)
Prison and Courts Reform Bill (Ministry of Justice)
Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill (Home Office)
Wales Bill (Wales Office)
Education for All Bill (Department for Education)

This statement provides a summary of the new Government legislation for 2016-17 and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills.

In line with the Sewel convention, the Government will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure legislative consent motions where appropriate.

The Bills listed in section 1 will apply to Scotland, either in full or in part. Section 2 details Bills that will not apply in Scotland, though some elements could be extended later following discussion with the Scottish Government.

Section 1: Legislation applying to the United Kingdom, including Scotland (either in full or in part):
Better Markets Bill
Criminal Finances Bill
Lifetime Savings Bill
Modern Transport Bill
Overseas Electors Bill
Pensions Bill
Small Charitable Donations Bill
Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill
Digital Economy Bill
Wales Bill (as a constitutional bill this extends to the UK, but policy will impact on Wales)
Higher Education and Research Bill
Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill
Bill of Rights

Section 2: Legislation that will not apply in Scotland, though some elements could be extended following discussion with the Scottish Government.

Better Markets Bill
Criminal Finances Bill
Lifetime Savings Bill
Modern Transport Bill
Overseas Electors Bill
Pensions Bill
Small Charitable Donations Bill
Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill
Digital Economy Bill
Wales Bill (as a constitutional bill this extends to the UK, but policy will impact on Wales)
Higher Education and Research Bill
Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill

SCOTLAND

Government’s Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Following the passage of the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament is now poised to become one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Ensuring the smooth transfer of those new powers will be a major priority for the UK Government over the next parliamentary Session and beyond.

A total of 13 of the 21 new Government Bills for this Session of Parliament contain provisions that apply in Scotland, either in full or in part. Elements of others may extend later depending on discussion with the Scottish Government.

The Government’s legislative programme has three clear aims: to deliver security for working people across our country, to increase the life chances for the most disadvantaged, and to strengthen our national security. Some of the Bills announced yesterday apply across the UK, while others cover areas where responsibility is devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

UK legislation on the digital economy will enable the building of world-class digital infrastructure including fast broadband and mobile networks, as well as helping to support new digital industries.

A new Lifetime Savings Bill will create a new help to save scheme to support those on the lowest incomes to save and also a new lifetime ISA, providing savers with a bonus on savings that can be used for a first home, or retirement, or both.

A Better Markets Bill will give UK consumers more power and choice, open up markets and make economic regulators work better. We will also take forward further reforms in a Pensions Bill that will provide greater protections for people in master trusts and remove barriers for consumers who want to access their pension savings flexibly.

WALES

Government’s Legislative Programme (Wales) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The Government’s second legislative programme announced in the Queen’s Speech on 18 May contains a wide range of measures that will apply to Wales either in full or in part.

The following Bills and draft Bills will extend to in whole or in part:
Better Markets Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
Bill of Rights (Ministry of Justice)
Children and Social Work Bill (Department for Education)
Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill (Home Office)
Criminal Finances Bill (Home Office)
Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)
Digital Economy Bill (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)
Education for All Bill (Department for Education)
Higher Education and Research Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill (Law Commission Bill)
Lifetime Savings Bill (HM Treasury)
Modern Transport Bill (Department for Transport)
National Citizen Service Bill (Cabinet Office)*
Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)
NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill (Department of Health)*
Overseas Electors Bill (Cabinet Office)
Prison and Courts Reform Bill (Ministry of Justice)
Pensions Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)
Small Charitable Donations Bill (HMRC)
Wales Bill (Wales Office)

The following Bills will not extend to Wales:
Bus Services Bill (Department for Transport)
Local Growth and Jobs Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

*Discussions with the Welsh Government on these Bills will consider their application to Wales.

Discussions will continue with the Welsh Government on Bills that might include provisions that require the consent of the National Assembly for Wales or Welsh Ministers.
Written Statement

Tuesday 24 May 2016

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Pre-Competitiveness Council

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and Minister for Intellectual Property (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) has today made the following statement.

The Competitiveness Council is taking place in Brussels on 26th May-27th May. I will be representing the UK on day one (internal market and industry) with Shan Morgan (deputy permanent representative to the EU) representing the UK on day two (research and innovation).

The Dutch presidency is seeking a new approach with the Telecoms Council and Internal Market discussion of Competitiveness Council being split over one day, with a joint lunch in-between. This is designed to bring greater coherence between the two Councils given their joint interests on the digital single market. Ed Vaizey will be representing the UK at the Telecoms Council which is the subject of a separate statement.

Day One

There are two legislative items on the agenda for the internal market and industry discussion. First the Commission will be seeking a general approach on the portability proposal, which is aimed at ensuring the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market. Secondly there is the first reading of the proposal to amend the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services directive.

The non-legislative items on the agenda are the adoption and debate of two sets of Council conclusions on better regulation and digitisation of industry. There is a presentation from the Commission, followed by an exchange of views on the competitiveness ‘check-up’ state of play of the real economy.

Other business items on the agenda are the first reading of the e-commerce package, readout from the recent Friends of Industry meeting in Warsaw, information from the presidency on the quantum technology conference, information on high performance computing and big data enabled applications, and information from the Slovak presidency on their upcoming EU presidency priorities.

Our objectives for day one of the Competitiveness Council:

To secure a general approach on the portability regulation that will ensure consumers benefit from access to digital content purchased in their home country when travelling within the Union, without introducing excessive burdens to businesses that supply such services; and

To secure ambitious language in the presidency conclusions that is in line with our better regulation priorities.

Day Two

Day two will see the Minister for Universities and Science confirming three sets of Council conclusions.

The negotiated conclusion on FP7 (7th Framework Programme For Research and technological development) and future outlook is in line with the UK position.

It recognises FP7 has contributed to the competitiveness of Europe’s industry and has strengthened scientific excellence.

The findings of the evaluation are an important consideration for the UK presidency priorities, on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and ideas for the next programme after that.

The UK supports the conclusions on research and innovation-friendly regulation as they emphasise the potential impact of EU policy-making on innovation.

The UK is content with the negotiated conclusion on open science as it is in line with UK open science policy.

Under other business items there will be presentations on the 2016 ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures) roadmap, the work programme of the incoming Slovakian presidency, and information from the Commission on the European Innovation Council.

[HCWS7]
Written Statements

Wednesday 25 May 2016

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 25 May 2016

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Brussels on 25 May 2016. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

- **Anti-tax avoidance package**
  - The presidency will seek a Council general approach on a compromise text relating to the anti-tax avoidance directive.

- **Current legislative proposals**
  - The presidency will update the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

- **State of play of the banking union**
  - The Commission will give an update on several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive.

- **VAT action plan**
  - The Council will exchange views and aim to agree draft Council conclusions relating to the Commission’s VAT action plan, published 7 April, and a European Court of Auditors special report.

- **European semester**
  - Following preparation by the Economic and Financial Committee, the Council will adopt conclusions on the 2016 in-depth reviews of macroeconomic imbalances and the implementation of the 2015 country specific recommendations.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Telecommunications Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Telecommunications Council will take place in Brussels on 26 May 2016.

The UK’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, Shan Morgan, will represent the UK. Below are the agenda items and the positions we intend to adopt.

The first item is for agreement for a general approach on the proposal for a decision on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union (First reading—EM 5814/16 + ADD 1&2). The UK will support this general approach. We do not expect any interventions on this item and UK does not intend to intervene.

This item will be followed by a debate on the EU electronic communications regulatory framework. The debate will be informed by three questions from the presidency. The UK intervention will include the need to consider regulatory tools in addition to the assessment of significant market power in order to improve connectivity in challenging geographical areas. We will also speak about the importance of protecting national competence with respect to spectrum management and of taking a proportionate approach to the regulation of “over the top” services.

This will be followed by five items under AOB. The first two items are a progress report from the presidency on proposal for a directive of the European Union on the accessibility to public sector bodies’ websites (First reading—EM 16006/11) and a progress report from the presidency on measures to ensure a high common level of network and information security across the Union (NIS—First reading—EM 6342/13). We do not expect a debate on either of these items. There then follows two further AOB items, both information from the Commission on developments on internet governance and the role of digital platforms in the digital economy respectively. We do not currently expect a debate on either of these items.

Finally, under AOB, the Slovakian delegation will inform the Council of their priorities for their forthcoming presidency before Council adjourns until the next meeting in quarter four 2016.

[HCWS8]
The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): Today the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has announced its decision to create a combined BIS headquarters and policy function in London to deliver a simpler, smaller Department that is more flexible and responsive to stakeholders and businesses by 2020. This involves basing all policy roles in London by 2018 and closing the St Paul’s Place office in Sheffield.

Everyone affected will be able to stay in post in their current location until January 2018 and if they choose to take up a post in London there will be financial assistance for travel available for the first three years.

Anyone choosing to leave will benefit from the best exit terms currently available in the civil service. The support package on offer will include money for re-skilling, career coaching, and time off to look for other jobs.

The executive board and ministerial team take the future of staff affected by this decision, and the contribution they have made, very seriously. We are aware this decision will directly affect people’s lives, livelihoods and families and it has therefore not been taken lightly. Support for staff has been and remains our priority.

This unanimous decision has been reached by the BIS executive board after the Department conducted a consultation with staff and with the departmental trade unions which closed on 2 May. Inevitably it has been a period of uncertainty for staff but the consultation period has enabled the executive board to reflect on its proposal, to hear from staff, to take into account the equality analysis, and to consider the alternative business models which have been put forward.

Following the recent spending review, BIS has set itself the target of becoming a more flexible and efficient Department, as well as reducing its cost to the taxpayer. We have committed to deliver reductions in the Department’s operating expenditure which equate to around £350 million by 2020. Savings of this magnitude can only be delivered by fundamentally changing the Department’s overall business model in a way that works for a smaller workforce with more streamlined structures in a demanding service and policy environment.

BIS 2020 is the transformation programme to deliver that new business model—creating a Department that is simpler, smaller, and better for users by 2020. As a transformation programme it is ambitious. It means reducing our operating costs and associated headcount by 30% to 40%; more than halving our 45 public bodies; and rationalising customer support, grant giving and digital service delivery. It also involves reducing our locations from around 80 sites to seven business centres plus a regional presence across the country. These business centres will each focus on a key area of business activity bringing together expertise and helping us to build our capability.

One of these business centres will be a combined BIS headquarters and policy function in London. Crucial to this decision was bringing together BIS’ policy capability which is currently dispersed across 14 offices, and locating it near Ministers, Parliament, and other Government Departments in Whitehall.

Over the course of this Parliament our policy function will reduce from around 2,800 roles to around 1,500 roles, reflecting the size of the Department’s pay bill on our operating expenditure. As we get smaller we need a simpler structure that allows staff to interact easily and to respond rapidly and flexibly to Ministers, Parliament and other stakeholders. Being more flexible, agile and re-deployable enables us to respond to the challenging demands of modern Government. The steel crisis is a recent example of where we have had to urgently re-deploy large numbers of staff to address an urgent priority.

Operating split site and split team working as we become smaller would put an increasing strain on our organisational effectiveness which is why the executive board has concluded that a combined headquarters and policy function is the most effective model to continue to serve Ministers and stakeholders flexibly, effectively and sustainably.

[HCWS30]

Higher Education Student Support

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): I can confirm that I am laying regulations today, which are subject to parliamentary scrutiny, to launch a new postgraduate master’s loan.

Students will be able to apply for a loan of up to £10,000 as a contribution towards the cost of an eligible postgraduate master’s qualification. The loan will be available to eligible students under the age of 60 undertaking certain full or part-time master’s courses in any subject from academic year 2016-17 onwards. Repayment will be on an income contingent basis to ensure the loan is affordable.

By delivering on this manifesto commitment we will be helping to remove the financial barrier faced by many wishing to study at this level and providing students with the means to invest in their futures.

[HCWS14]

Consumer Protection: Resale of Tickets

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): Together with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, I am today laying before Parliament an independent report by Professor Michael Waterson, on the outcome of his “review of consumer protection measures concerning online secondary ticketing facilities”.

The report is required by Section 94 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015. The report is available at: www.gov.uk website and is available in the Libraries of both Houses.
The Government will carefully consider the report’s recommendations and will be providing a response in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Waterson for his time and diligence in carrying out this review into an important topic for consumers.

Post-Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Lord Price) has today made the following statement.

I represented the UK at the EU Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) in Brussels on 13 May 2016. A summary of the main discussions follows.

EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)

Trade Commissioner Malmström introduced CETA and made clear that the EU now needed to implement the deal. The Commission intended to sign the deal at the end of October at the EU-Canada summit. A consent vote in the European Parliament would then follow in late 2016, or early 2017. I urged rapid implementation of CETA. I and most of my counterparts from other member states were of the view that this trade agreement should be mixed as it contained areas of member state competence.

TTIP

Commissioner Malmström highlighted good progress on some areas but that work remained on others. The Commissioner’s aim was to finalise TTIP under the Obama Administration. Before the summer, negotiators were therefore working towards full consolidated texts in most areas. The EU was also pushing for a new US procurement offer.

All member states reiterated their desire for a balanced and ambitious agreement. I pressed for conclusion of an ambitious deal in 2016, pointing out that with projected economic gains from TTIP of €250 billion globally, each month’s delay was €8 billion foregone for the EU economy. I signalled the UK’s desire to see the Commission table a market access offer in financial services.

Trade-related aspects of the recent communication on steel

Commissioner Malmström outlined the Commission’s response so far to the steel crisis, and went on to set out the latest Commission ideas for disapplying the “lesser duty rule” (LDR), and redefining the methodology for calculating the injury caused to industry. She finished by announcing that the Commission had that day launched an anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese imports of hot-rolled coiled steel. Discussion revolved around whether LDR needed to be disapplied in extreme cases.

I lauded the Commission’s efforts on the steel crisis so far, including the announcement on hot-rolled coiled steel. I said that trade defence modernisation was needed, and the UK was keen to play a constructive role in finding a solution. But on LDR, the evidence suggested that the rule had been working and had delivered the right results.

WTO Post-Nairobi

In preparation for the 11th WTO ministerial conference (December 2017), Commissioner Malmström said the EU should focus on the areas where it could add most value, i.e. on the development of rules rather than market access negotiations, and on sectoral initiatives.

Indemnity for Petition Officers (Recall Petitions)

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Department concerned to present to Parliament a minute giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

Insurance for specific elections has historically provided extremely poor value for money, with claims made under such cover being smaller than the cost of the insurance premium. An indemnity therefore provides better value for money and this approach has been taken for elections since 2009.

On this basis, I have today laid a minute setting out the Cabinet Office’s proposal to indemnify petition officers for claims that arise out of the conduct of their duties in relation to the Recall of MPs Act 2015. This Act requires a recall petition to be held if one of the provisions under section 1 of the Act is met in relation to an MP. The responsibility for the conduct of the petition will rest with the petition officer for the constituency in which the petition is to be held. Section 6 of the Recall of MPs Act 2015 provides that every constituency is to have a petition officer for a recall petition and identifies who the petition officer is for each constituency: in England and Wales, it is the person who is the acting returning officer for UK Parliamentary elections for the relevant constituency; in Scotland it is the returning officer for UK parliamentary elections for the relevant constituency. The petition officer is an independent entity, separate from both central and local government.

We will also provide a certificate confirming that we will bear any employee liabilities of the returning officer which would otherwise be covered by insurance procured under the Employers’ Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. An indemnity was previously provided by the Home Office to returning officers for the 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner elections and Cabinet Office regularly provides indemnities for UK parliamentary and European parliamentary elections. HM Treasury has approved the indemnity in principle.

Attachments can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-05-26/HCWS35/.

Double Taxation Conventions

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A double taxation convention with Uruguay was signed on 24 February 2016 and with the United
Arab Emirates on 12 April 2016. The text of each convention has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and will be made available at: www.gov.uk website. Each text has been scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons.

**Insurance Fraud Taskforce**

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The Insurance Fraud Taskforce was established as an independent body by HM Treasury and the Ministry of Justice in January 2015 in order, “to investigate the causes of fraudulent behaviour and recommend solutions to reduce the level of insurance fraud in order to ultimately lower costs and protect the interests of honest consumers”.

The final report of the Insurance Fraud Taskforce published on 18 January 2016 made 26 recommendations to tackle fraudulent activity ranging from organised or premeditated crime to opportunistic fraud. It is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/insurance-fraud-taskforce-final-report.

The Minister of State for Civil Justice (Lord Faulks) and I are very grateful for the work of the taskforce members, and to all those who contributed to it. We are particularly grateful to David Hertzell for his efficient stewardship of the taskforce.

The report highlighted the particular problem of fraud in relation to low value personal injury claims and the Government have established a programme of reforms in this area, particularly in respect of whiplash claims. We are pleased that the report’s recommendations reflect and support that reform programme. The Government accept each of the recommendations addressed to it and we will set out in due course how we propose to implement them. However, there needs to be a concerted effort by all those involved in the insurance process to tackle this serious problem, which is estimated to cost policyholders up to £50 each per year, and the country more than £3 billion. We therefore expect organisations tasked with taking forward recommendations to do so with urgency. The Government will do what they can to assist and, in order to make sure that all of the recommendations are actively pursued, we will seek an update on progress later in the year.

**Counter-terrorist Asset-freezing Regime**

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (TAFA 2010), the Treasury is required to report to Parliament, quarterly, on its operation of the UK’s asset-freezing regime mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1373.

This is the 18th report under the Act and it covers the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2016. This report also covers the UK implementation of the UN ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida organisations asset-freezing regime (ISIL-AQ) and the operation of the EU asset-freezing regime in the UK under EU regulation (EC) 2580/2001 which implements UNSCR 1373 against external terrorist threats to the EU. Under the ISIL-AQ asset-freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designsations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the EU ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011. Under EU Regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designsations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under part 1 of TAFA 2010.

Annexes A and B to this statement provide a breakdown, by name, of all those designated by the UK and the EU in pursuance of UN Security Council resolution 1373. The one individual subject to a designation, which has been notified on a restricted and confidential basis, under sections 3 and 10 of TAFA 2010 is denoted by “A”.

The table attached sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter ending 31 March 2016.

**Legal Proceedings**

Moazzem Beg, who was previously designated under TAFA 2010, lodged an appeal on 3 November 2014, challenging the Treasury’s decision to revoke rather than quash his designation. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

One individual, C, designated under TAFA 2010, lodged an appeal against his designation on the 26 May 2015. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

Mohammed al Ghabra’s challenge of his listing under the EU ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida regulation was heard by the CJEU in February 2016. Judgment is to follow.

There were no criminal proceedings in respect of breaches of asset-freezes made under TAFA 2010, during the reporting period.

**Annex A: Designated persons under TAFA 2010 by name**

**Individuals**

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI
2. Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI
3. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER
4. Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB
5. Mansoor ARBABI
6. Usama HAMDAN
7. Nur Idiris HASSAN NUR
8. Nabeel HUSSAIN
9. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN
10. Mohammed KHALED
11. Parviz KHAN
12. Musa Abu MARZOUK
13. Khalid MISHAAL
14. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED
15. Abdul Reza SHAHLAI
16. Parviz KHAN
17. Ali Ghomel SHAKURI
18. A (restricted designation)

**Entities**

1. Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
3. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)

---

The one individual subject to a designation, which has been notified on a restricted and confidential basis, under sections 3 and 10 of TAFA 2010, is denoted by “A”.

The table attached sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter ending 31 March 2016.

**Legal Proceedings**

Moazzem Beg, who was previously designated under TAFA 2010, lodged an appeal on 3 November 2014, challenging the Treasury’s decision to revoke rather than quash his designation. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

One individual, C, designated under TAFA 2010, lodged an appeal against his designation on the 26 May 2015. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

Mohammed al Ghabra’s challenge of his listing under the EU ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaida regulation was heard by the CJEU in February 2016. Judgment is to follow.

There were no criminal proceedings in respect of breaches of asset-freezes made under TAFA 2010, during the reporting period.

**Annex A: Designated persons under TAFA 2010 by name**

**Individuals**

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI
2. Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI
3. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER
4. Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB
5. Mansoor ARBABI
6. Usama HAMDAN
7. Nur Idiris HASSAN NUR
8. Nabeel HUSSAIN
9. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN
10. Mohammed KHALED
11. Parviz KHAN
12. Musa Abu MARZOUK
13. Khalid MISHAAL
14. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED
15. Abdul Reza SHAHLAI
16. Ali Ghomel SHAKURI
17. Qasem SOLEIMANI
18. A (restricted designation)

**Entities**

1. Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
3. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Education, Youth, Culture and the Sport Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council will take place in Brussels on 31 May. Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for intellectual property will represent the UK at both the culture/audiovisual and the sport sections of the Council.

Culture and audiovisual

The Commission is expected to present its draft proposal for a recast audiovisual media services directive. The audiovisual media services directive seeks to ensure the effective operation of the internal market for television broadcasting services by ensuring the free movement of broadcasting services throughout the EU. This new proposal follows a Commission consultation on revision of the existing directive, to which the UK submitted a detailed response.

The presentation will be immediately followed by a policy debate on revision of the audiovisual media directive and the promotion of European content. The UK intervention will reiterate the key messages in its response to the Commission consultation, including the importance of maintaining the country of origin principle that means a channel is regulated in the country in which it is licensed, rather than each of the countries to which it broadcasts.

The Council will then be asked to adopt Council conclusions on the role of Europeana for the digital access, visibility and use of European cultural heritage. The conclusions will emphasise the importance of promoting access to cultural heritage through digital channels and will propose that Europeana moves to a more sustainable funding model by October 2017. The UK intends to support the adoption of the conclusions.

Sport

Turning to the sport sector, the Council is expected to adopt draft conclusions on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sport events. The draft conclusions look to ensure that integrity, transparency and good governance are present through all stages of a major sporting event, including feasibility, bidding, preparation, organisation, evaluation, and legacy. The UK has already embedded these measures into the bidding processes for major sporting events and so intends to support adoption of the conclusions.

This will be followed by policy debate on improving governance in sport. The debate will be focused on the role Governments can play in the promotion of integrity and governance of sport. The UK will intervene to share examples of work the UK is already carrying out around governance and integrity in sport and to highlight the Prime Minister’s recent anti-corruption summit and the domestic charter for sport and governance code, which will be launched later this year.

Other Business

The European Commission will present information on the forthcoming European year of cultural heritage (2018). This will then be followed by information from the French delegation on the interoperability of digital
The police and the NHS—while allowing them freedom
requirements for the key local partners—the local authority,
behaviours and practices. And it will set out clear
and young people, embedding improved multi-agency
together more effectively to protect and safeguard children
This framework will support local agencies to work
introduce a stronger but more flexible statutory framework.
Government response sets out in detail our plans to
made by all those who put forward their views as part of
review and the radical, inquiring approach he has brought
Finally, there will be a presentation from the Slovak
delegation on the work programme for their incoming
The UK will also be represented at a high-level structured
dialogue on sport after the main Council meeting. This
dialogue has been organised by the Netherlands EU
and Poland, on the financing of cultural projects under the European
local level. It is very important that the local agencies

Finally we plan to amend arrangements for child
death overview panels (CDOPs) as part of these reforms.
We will put in place arrangements to transfer national
oversight of CDOPs from the Department for Education
to the Department of Health, while ensuring that the
keen focus on distilling and embedding learning is
maintained. That reflects the very high proportion of
child deaths which have a clinical or public health cause.
These important reforms will take time to implement
and I recognise that change can be difficult to manage
at local level. It is very important that the local agencies
currently engaged in LSCBs continue working together
to keep children safe while preparing for the future.

EDUCATION

LSCB Review and Government Response

The Minister for Children and Families (Edward Timpson):
Today I am publishing Alan Wood’s review of the role
and functions of local safeguarding children boards
(LSCBs), along with the Government’s response.
Local agencies—police, health, local authorities,
schools—are the frontline when it comes to safeguarding
our children and it is vitally important that they work
together to ensure children are protected from harm.
There is widespread evidence that the current arrangements,
delivered through LSCBs, are not always as effective as
they need to be. That is why we asked Alan Wood to
carry out this important review, which looked at local
multi-agency arrangements, the child death review process
and how the intended centralisation of serious case
reviews could work.
Alan’s wide experience in the sector has been invaluable
and I thank him for his hard work in undertaking this
review and the radical, inquiring approach he has brought
to it. I am also grateful for the valuable contributions
made by all those who put forward their views as part of
Alan’s far-reaching consultation.
The review sets out a wide range of proposals. The
Government response sets out in detail our plans to
introduce a stronger but more flexible statutory framework.
This framework will support local agencies to work
together more effectively to protect and safeguard children
and young people, embedding improved multi-agency
behaviours and practices. And it will set out clear
requirements for the key local partners—the local authority,
the police and the NHS—while allowing them freedom
to determine how they organise themselves to meet
those requirements to improve outcomes for children
locally.
We intend to bring forward legislation on revised
multi-agency working arrangements as soon as possible
to implement these changes.
We have already proposed some changes, through the
Children and Social Work Bill, in relation to new
arrangements replacing the existing system of serious
case reviews. We intend to establish a child safeguarding
practice review panel, to review cases which are complex
or of national importance. We will also bring forward
further changes to address the need for good quality,
rapid local reviews, linked to the reform of multi-agency
working arrangements.
Finally we plan to amend arrangements for child
death overview panels (CDOPs) as part of these reforms.
We will put in place arrangements to transfer national
oversight of CDOPs from the Department for Education
to the Department of Health, while ensuring that the
keen focus on distilling and embedding learning is
maintained. That reflects the very high proportion of
child deaths which have a clinical or public health cause.
These important reforms will take time to implement
and I recognise that change can be difficult to manage
at local level. It is very important that the local agencies
currently engaged in LSCBs continue working together
to keep children safe while preparing for the future.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Planning Act 2008: Hornsea Offshore Wind Farm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and
Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I have been asked
by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make
this written statement. This statement concerns an
application made under the Planning Act 2008 by SMart
Wind Limited on 30 January 2015 for a proposed
development known as the Hornsea offshore wind farm
(zone 4)—project two (“the development”).
The development would consist of up to 300 wind
turbine generators, each with a capacity of between
6 MW and 15 MW, approximately 89 km east of the
East Riding of Yorkshire coast. The total installed
capacity of the development would be up to 1,800MW.
The Planning Inspectorate’s examining authority
commenced examination of the application on 16 June
2015 and the examining authority’s report was delivered
to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
on 16 March 2016.
Section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008 requires the
Secretary of State to make her decision within three
months of receipt of the examining authority’s report
unless she exercises her power under section 107(3) to
extend the deadline and make a statement to the House
of Commons announcing the new deadline.
The deadline for the decision is to be extended to
16 August 2016 (an extension of two months). This
extension is to enable the Secretary of State to obtain
further information in order to fully assess the possible
impact of the development on the southern North sea possible special area of conservation for harbour porpoise, and to ensure that her duties in relation to the requirements under regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 have been met.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant development consent for the development.

[HCWS11]

Carbon Capture and Storage: Yorkshire and Humber

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): This statement concerns the application made by National Grid Carbon Limited under the Planning Act 2008 on 18 June 2014 for the construction of a pipeline of approximately 75 km in length from the White Rose carbon capture and storage project to the coast at Barmston in the East Riding of Yorkshire (“the pipeline project”).

The proposed pipeline project would transport carbon dioxide from industrial emitters and electricity generating stations fitted with carbon capture infrastructure to an offshore pipeline system and a storage facility under the North sea. Consent applications for the offshore pipeline system and the proposed storage facility are being considered outside the Planning Act regime.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make her decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority’s report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline. The deadline for the decision on the pipeline project was 19 May 2016 having been extended from 19 November 2015 by way of my written ministerial statement of 19 November 2015 [columns 21-22 of the Official Report].

The Secretary of State has decided to extend the deadline for the decision to 31 August 2016 to allow consultation on the need case for the pipeline project given the decision to refuse consent for the White Rose CCS project on 13 April 2016 and consideration of other relevant outstanding issues.

The decision to set the new deadline for the project is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent for the project.

[HCWS21]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), represented the UK at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 17 May in Brussels.

There were four main agenda items. The presidency introduced the first debate on climate and agriculture since the COP21 agreement. The target is to cut 40% of emissions by 2030, which requires legislation on national targets and includes initiatives such as LULUCF (land use, land use change and forestry). Commissioner Hogan, DG Agriculture, sought to reassure the Council of the need to balance food security with climate targets. In a full round table, all member states supported ambitious climate goals as long as they do not compromise food security, and there was a general call to include and strengthen environment CAP tools.

The Commission then presented the Eurobarometer results, which show significant public support for the EU’s work and standards on animal welfare. All member states except Austria and the Czech Republic pushed the Commission to establish a platform to share best practice on implementation and enforcement between themselves. Commissioner Andriukaitis, DG Sante, agreed to present his plan at the next Council.

The Czech Republic raised an issue about the different qualities of multinational branded food products sold across the single market. Commissioner Andriukaitis encouraged any member states to send any evidence of consumers being misled to the Commission.

Commissioner Hogan then made a short presentation on the state of play of CAP simplification. He gave a summary of direct payment simplifications enacted so far, and made it clear that greening simplification would be discussed in June Council. There were interventions, including from the UK, on the proposed yellow card system. The UK reiterated requests made in March Council on audit and controls simplification.

Commissioner Hogan then moved to update member states on the market situation support measures. During this agenda item four related AOBs were addressed: the crisis situation in the milk market; the situation in commodity markets; severe damages in agricultural production due to late frost and snow; and geographical indications during international trade negotiations.

There was a full round of interventions from member states who maintained their existing positions on the market crisis. The UK intervention focused on sustainable solutions to improving the market situation and noted progress made in these areas such as increased export opportunity, the work of the market taskforce, and the new meat market observatory that will be up and running by the summer

Any other business items

Austria requested that TTIP be discussed. Several member states had complained about a lack of transparency in sensitive TTIP negotiations. Commissioner Hogan intervened about this and other trade deals. He reminded Council that his objective was to conclude deals, but that he was looking at the big picture. On Mercosur, the Commission had amended the EU offer but he warned the Council that there would be a compromise on agriculture at some point.

The Commission reported back on the recent G7 agriculture meeting in Japan. He noted valuable conclusions had been reached, with formal cooperation having been agreed on anti-microbial resistance and animal disease.

Poland introduced the proposed NEC Directive, and described the impact it could have on agriculture. They noted that reducing ammonia emissions would be costly for farmers, particularly medium-sized farms. Commissioner Hogan reported that Commissioner Vella was looking for a compromise in trilogues.

[HCWS15]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 May and I attended the General Affairs Council on 24 May. The Foreign Affairs Council was
chaired by the high representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council was chaired by the Dutch presidency. The meetings were held in Brussels.

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2016/05/23/

EU—Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting

Immediately before the Foreign Affairs Council, EU Foreign Ministers met with the Foreign Ministers of the six Eastern Partnership states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine) to review progress on the Eastern Partnership initiative since the EU-Eastern Partnership summit held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015. Ms Mogherini concluded it was a positive meeting, reaffirming commitment and unity in the partnership.

Libya/Operation Sophia

The Council agreed conclusions setting out the decision to extend the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia by one year and to expand it to include capacity-building and training of the Libyan coastguard and implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya. In that context the Government welcome the recent letter from the president of the presidency Council of the Government of national accord, Mr Serraj, requesting support from and expressing readiness to co-operate with the EU.

It is important that planning for this new mandate is completed as quickly as possible so that these new tasks can begin. The Government will work with other EU member states and international organisations, as well as with the Libyan authorities and countries in the region, to achieve this. The Government share the view expressed by Ms Mogherini and the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, that there is scope for greater co-operation between the EU and NATO in the central Mediterranean; and is working with partners in both organisations to take this forward.

**EU Daesh/Iraq/Syria regional strategy**

The Council considered a review of the March 2015 regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Daesh threat and adopted conclusions. The EU and member states discussed priority areas for Iraq, including governance reform, economic reform and development, humanitarian assistance, and stabilisation, all of which are reflected in the conclusions. An EEAS/commission options paper on increasing EU efforts in Iraq will be circulated in July. Responding to UK-led efforts, the EU agreed to step up its efforts within, and contribution to, the global coalition's campaign against Daesh. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition based on the principles of the Geneva communique?, including the establishment of a transitional governing body, which is needed to bring a lasting peace to Syria, defeat Daesh in Syria and allow refugees to return home. Ministers agreed that there can be no peace under Assad, who is responsible for the vast majority of attacks against civilians and deaths in the country during the civil war. The EU will support the international Syria support group’s call for full humanitarian access to all those in need in Syria and for compliance by all parties with the cessation of hostilities. The EU will step up support to the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee (HNC), representing the Syrian opposition in the UN-brokered talks in Geneva.

**EU Global Strategy**

Ms Mogherini updated Ministers over lunch on the preparation of the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy. The strategy will identify and describe EU member states’ interests, priorities and objectives, existing and evolving threats, challenges and opportunities and the instruments and means to meet them. The Government support this initiative, which complements the UK’s strategic defence and security review, and have engaged regularly with Ms Mogherini during its preparation. The Government believe that the global strategy can enhance UK and other member states’ foreign and security policy by covering the full range of external action tools and setting broad direction, rather than proposing detailed action on specific issues.

**External aspects of migration**

Ministers exchanged views on the external aspects of migration and adopted conclusions. The Foreign Secretary raised the need to focus on implementation of the outcome of the Valletta summit and for effective EU co-ordination ahead of upcoming international events such as the world humanitarian summit and high level meetings taking place in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2016.

**General Affairs Council**

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2016/05/24/

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 May focused on preparation of the June European Council and the rule of law.

The presidency informed the Council that due to the change in date of the June European Council, the GAC will now take place on 24 June in Luxembourg.
Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC discussed the agenda for the European Council on 28-29 June, which the Prime Minister will attend. The Council agreed the draft agenda which will cover: migration; jobs, growth and investment; external issues; and the outcome of the UK referendum.

On migration, I welcomed the progress made since the EU-Turkey summit and emphasised that additional work needed to be done to tackle the upstream pressures, in particular looking at the Sahel, Somalia and Libya routes.

On jobs, growth and investment, I said that it was important to fully implement the single market, and in particular improve access for services across Europe and the digital single market.

Rule of Law

The Council held its second annual rule of law dialogue, which focused on the current challenges related to the integration of migrants into member states. In particular, the Council discussed the importance of ensuring both the rights of migrants and values shared by member states are respected.

[HCWS13]

Jaguar Land Rover

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I would like to inform the House that the British embassy in Beijing has accepted an offer, from Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), of nine vehicles for their official fleet.

The value of this arrangement is around £340,000. The new vehicles will replace a range of official vehicles, of many foreign brands, that are currently used by the embassy. Under the arrangement, JLR has offered to purchase nine existing fleet vehicles at second-hand value of £115,000, and provide the new vehicles by way of gift of a value of £225,000.

The saving to the British taxpayer from this arrangement is estimated to be around £300,000, which represents the cost of replacing the nine vehicles by other means. JLR is the UK’s leading exporter of goods to China, and this arrangement will help promote British excellence in manufacturing. The new vehicles that JLR will provide have been made in the UK, using British steel.

I am pleased to announce Professor Mona Siddiqui’s appointment as chair of the review, the terms of reference, and the appointment of the panel.

Professor Mona Siddiqui OBE is a highly respected professor at the University of Edinburgh, specialising in classical Islamic law, juristic arguments, and contemporary ethical issues, who was appointed OBE for services to inter-faith relations. Professor Siddiqui will be supported by a review panel consisting of Sir Mark Hedley, Sam Montaz and Anne Marie Hutchinson OBE QC. Imam Sayed Razawi and Imam Qari Asim will serve as advisers to the chair and panel. Together these individuals represent a wide range of experience and expertise.

HEALTH

HPV Vaccination

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am today announcing that a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination pilot for men who have sex with men (MSM) will start this June.

Since 2008, an HPV vaccination programme for girls has been delivered to help prevent cervical cancer, which also confers a benefit for many boys over the life course.

HPV infection is also associated with ano-genital and oral cancers, and genital warts. In November 2015, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised that a HPV vaccination programme should be introduced for MSM aged up to 45 years who attend genitourinary medicine (GUM) and HIV clinics, subject to procurement of the HPV vaccine and delivery of the programme at a cost-effective price.

Through this pilot, the HPV vaccine will be offered during existing appointments at selected GUM and HIV clinics in England to test delivery in these settings. Public Health England is in the process of agreeing which GUM and HIV clinics will take part in the pilot. A full roll-out of an HPV vaccination programme for men who have sex with men will be dependent on the progress and outcome of the pilot.

[HCWS17]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Counter-Extremism Strategy

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Many people in this country of different faiths follow religious codes and practices, and benefit from the guidance they offer. Religious communities also operate arbitration councils and boards to resolve disputes. The overriding principle is that these rules, practices and bodies must operate within the rule of law in the UK. However, there is evidence some Sharia councils may not follow this principle and so, through the Government’s counter-extremism strategy, I committed to commissioning an independent review to understand whether, and the extent to which, Sharia is being misused or applied in way that is incompatible with the law.

I am pleased to announce Professor Mona Siddiqui’s appointment as chair of the review, the terms of reference, and the appointment of the panel.

Professor Mona Siddiqui OBE is a highly respected professor at the University of Edinburgh, specialising in classical Islamic law, juristic arguments, and contemporary ethical issues, who was appointed OBE for services to inter-faith relations. Professor Siddiqui will be supported by a review panel consisting of Sir Mark Hedley, Sam Montaz and Anne Marie Hutchinson OBE QC. Imam Sayed Razawi and Imam Qari Asim will serve as advisers to the chair and panel. Together these individuals represent a wide range of experience and expertise.

Sharia law review terms of reference

Many British people of different faiths follow religious codes and practices, and benefit from the guidance they offer. Some religious communities also operate arbitration councils and boards which seek to resolve disputes. There is, however, some evidence that Sharia councils may be working in a discriminatory manner.

This review will be a full, independent review to explore whether, and to what extent, the application of Sharia law may be incompatible with the law in England.
and Wales, such as legislation around equality. The review will also examine the ways in which Sharia may be being misused, or exploited, in a way that may discriminate against certain groups, undermine shared values or cause social harms. It will not be a review of the totality of Sharia law, which is a source of guidance for many Muslims in the UK.

This review will focus on issues including:
the ways that Sharia may be being used which may cause harm in communities;
the role of particular groups and Islamic authorities in England and Wales;
the role of Sharia councils and Muslim arbitration tribunals;
the treatment of women—particularly in divorce, domestic violence and custody cases; and
seeking out examples of best practice in relation to governance, transparency, and assuring compliance and compatibility with UK law.

[HCWS19]

Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): A meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council was held on 20 May. I attended on behalf of the UK.

The Council began with an adoption of the A items, before a discussion on the current migration situation. The Commission reminded Ministers that the EU-Turkey agreement of 18 March has had a significant impact but needs to be implemented in full, and that it had assessed Turkey as a safe third country for the purposes of returns from Greece. Supported by a number of others, I intervened to emphasise the need to get returns working properly, calling on the Council to support the Commission’s assessment.

The Council then moved on to talk about the central Mediterranean route. I supported the Italian position on the need to enhance our efforts upstream and highlighted the need to build on successful approaches such as the Niger centre. I and others emphasised the importance of proper asylum processes, including appropriate use of detention, and screening.

A number of member states also intervened to highlight the difficulties with relocating migrants from Italy and Greece. The UK does not, of course, take part in the EU’s relocation mechanism.

The presidency concluded that the Council had expressed political support for returning migrants to Turkey and reflected this position in its post-Council press statement.

Next, the presidency chaired a discussion on Schengen visa policy in the context of the revised Schengen visa suspension mechanism and specific proposals to lift Schengen visa requirements for Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo and Turkey. All Ministers were in agreement that benchmarks must be met prior to any liberalisation. The UK welcomed the revised visa suspension mechanism and the possibility of triggering it on public security grounds. Ministers agreed a general approach on the visa suspension mechanism, allowing the presidency to begin trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament.

The UK also noted the close relationship between liberalisation and the wider EU relationship with these countries; it would be important to establish clear and firm expectations on security and migration. The UK is not a member of the Schengen border free zone, so neither the visa suspension mechanism nor the Schengen visa programmes for Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo and Turkey will apply to the UK.

The presidency concluded that the Council expected further reporting on Kosovo and Turkey once all benchmarks had been met, that Georgia would go to COREPER the following week for agreement to start negotiations with the European Parliament, and that Ukraine would be discussed further.

Finally, the presidency updated Ministers on the negotiations for the European border and Coastguard. The European Parliament had not reached a position. There had been no significant change since the general approach was agreed in April. The UK will not participate in this measure.

[HCWS31]

Report of the Biometrics Commissioner

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Today I am publishing a report of the Biometrics Commissioner, on the retention of biometric material by the police on the grounds of national security, which I asked the Commissioner to prepare the following publication of his second annual report on 11 March 2016.

The Biometrics Commissioner, Alastair MacGregor QC, is appointed under section 20 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. His responsibilities are:
to decide applications by the police for extended retention of DNA profiles and fingerprints from persons arrested for serious offences but not charged or convicted;
to keep under review national security determinations made by chief officers under which DNA profiles and fingerprints may be retained for national security purposes;
to exercise general oversight of police use of DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints.

I am grateful to Mr MacGregor for this report. No redactions to it have been made on the grounds of national security.

Copies of the report will be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS25]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foreign Affairs Council for Development

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Baroness Verma) has made the following statement:

On 12 May, I attended the Foreign Affairs Council for Development in Brussels. The meeting was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign
Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini. She also hosted a joint lunch with the Afghan Minister of Finance, Ekkil Hakimi, which discussed the preparations for the upcoming Brussels conference on Afghanistan, in September this year. A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted will be deposited in the Library of the House for the convenience of members.

Revision of the European Consensus of Development in light of the 2030 agenda

The Council discussed the prospects of updating the 2005 European Consensus on Development—the EU’s overarching development strategy. Discussion of a new European Consensus on Development in light of Agenda 2030 focused on the links between development policy and the areas of security, humanitarian, migration. I led calls for a long-term approach, with our commitment to 0.7% and the “Beyond Aid” agenda at the heart of implementation. Also discussed was the need for modernised, innovative financial instruments, with general support for a greater role for the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Trade, private sector and sustainable development

Council conclusions on global value chains, which the UK had strongly supported, were adopted with agreement on the integral role of the private sector and trade for sustainable development. The garment initiative was held up by Development Commissioner Mimica as a good example of a multi-stakeholder and the “policy coherence for development” approach. I highlighted the UK’s promotion of the involvement of the private sector in sustainable development in recent years, and argued that it is clear that to achieve the 2030 Vision for sustainable development more investment capital is needed from the private sector.

Afghanistan conference

Discussions were held on the forthcoming Brussels conference on Afghanistan, and Council conclusions on this subject were adopted with the UK’s full support. The Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October 2016 is a key opportunity for the international community to reaffirm their ongoing commitment to Afghanistan’s security and development. During the lunchtime session, Afghan Finance Minister Hakimi presented the Afghan National Unity Government’s new national development strategy to the Council.

Joint programming

Council conclusions on joint programming were agreed, which stated that the approach will remain voluntary. I emphasised the point that local context is key when discussing the suitability of a particular programme. Consideration of this should drive joint programming as a complement, not replace, bilateral relationships and programmes. This view was echoed by a number of other member states and supported by the Council conclusions.

Migration and development

Council conclusions on forced displacement were agreed by the Council. More broadly on the subject of migration, Commissioner Mimica said that the emergency trust fund for Africa agreed at the Valetta summit in November 2015 was an important tool, and urged member states to support and contribute to it. I set out the UK’s support for the trust fund, but called for greater consistency in its operation, as well as an ongoing commitment to strong oversight. I also noted that the EIB could play a key role in responding to the causes of the migration crisis.

Preparation of the World Humanitarian summit

Conclusions were adopted by the Council concerning preparations for the World Humanitarian summit, which took place from 23-24 May in Istanbul. It was the first global summit on humanitarian issues, and it came at a time of unprecedented need. The Council were agreed that the summit would be an important opportunity to take ambitious and practical steps that will drive real change on the ground.
Published: 26 May 2016

communities, with widespread agreement of the need to work together better. The UK led the way to secure agreement to a “Grand Bargain” on more efficient humanitarian financing. This will change the way donors and agencies do business, including by adopting common standards to put affected people at the centre of the response, streamlining reporting systems and increasing the use of cash-based approaches in crisis situations. UN agencies pledged a more systematic use of shared analysis and planning. The UK, alongside other partners, will continue to drive this reform agenda in the months and years ahead.

Ensure a stronger focus on protecting and empowering women and girls in crises. I also committed to put gender equality at the heart of 21st-century humanitarian action, going beyond protection and making sure girls and women have a voice, choice, and control—even when crisis hits.

Overall, the summit was a success with widespread agreement that the humanitarian system needs to reform and an emerging consensus on the way forward, in particular a renewed commitment to compliance with international humanitarian law. Improving the architecture to tackle forced displacement and migration was a major theme running throughout the summit as was the need to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind: girls and women, youth and people with disabilities. A more effective and efficient global humanitarian system will help to build global security and prosperity—which will, in turn, help advance the security and prosperity interests of the UK.

The summit provided us with a compelling agenda for change—now we need to deliver. We will hold participants to their commitments, particularly the UN, and renew our efforts to roll out a new approach in crisis-affected countries.

JUSTICE

Prisons

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): This Government are committed to making sure our prisons become places of reform, and an emerging consensus on the way forward, in particular a renewed commitment to compliance with international humanitarian law. Improving the architecture to tackle forced displacement and migration was a major theme running throughout the summit as was the need to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind: girls and women, youth and people with disabilities. A more effective and efficient global humanitarian system will help to build global security and prosperity—which will, in turn, help advance the security and prosperity interests of the UK.

The summit provided us with a compelling agenda for change—now we need to deliver. We will hold participants to their commitments, particularly the UN, and renew our efforts to roll out a new approach in crisis-affected countries.

Closing facilities like that at HMP Kennet will enable us to invest the money in a modern prison estate, with facilities for training and rehabilitation that help prisoners turn their lives around.

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) reported in March 2015 on Women in the UK Intelligence Community, and today I am laying the Government’s response before both Houses of Parliament. The Government and all agencies wholeheartedly agreed with the ISC’s statement that,

“Diversity should... be pursued not just on legal or ethical grounds—which are important in themselves—but because it will result in a better response to the range of threats that we face to our national security”.

I am grateful to the Committee for its thorough examination of this issue. Our response provides an update on the progress that has been made over the last year. I am determined to see positive change, recognising that it will take time to achieve the full impact we want.

Since the publication of the ISC’s report, all three agencies have increased their focus on all aspects of diversity, and have taken concrete steps to attract, encourage, and support women. The ISC rightly pointed to the benefit of sharing initiatives across the intelligence community, and I welcome the joint activities the agencies have delivered, and their collaboration with international partners.

Diversity strengthens our public sector organisations. Ensuring the agencies reflect the country they serve will be essential in enabling them to respond to the complex threats we face. This has been a positive year for promoting all forms of diversity in the intelligence community, as their exceptional commitment to inclusion has been externally acknowledged and celebrated. But there is more to be done to sustain our efforts and build on this success.

TRANSPORT

HS2 Phase 2a

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I am today announcing to the House the Government’s package of measures to provide assistance to owner occupiers along the line of route for phase 2a of the High Speed 2 project (west midlands to Crewe).

This announcement responds to the public consultation the Government conducted from November 2015 to February 2016 on the long-term property compensation and assistance schemes for phase 2a. A Command Paper setting out the Government’s detailed response and way forward has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament today.

Following detailed consideration, the Government are to implement the following long-term property compensation and assistance schemes for phase 2a which are based upon schemes already in place for phase 1
(London to west midlands) of the route. They will apply with immediate effect and replace the temporary exceptional hardship scheme that has been in place for phase 2a since 2013.

Express Purchase—owner-occupiers may be able to sell their property to the Government at its full unblighted market value (as it would be if there were no plans for HS2), plus 10% (up to a maximum of £53,000, known as a home-loss payment) and reasonable moving expenses, including stamp duty. Need to sell—this scheme does not have a boundary and is available to owner-occupiers who can demonstrate a compelling reason to sell their house but are unable to do so other than at a discount because of HS2. The Government will pay the full, unblighted value for these properties.

Rent back—is available if a property that the Government has purchased under any of the HS2 property schemes is suitable for letting.

Extended homeowner protection zone—where a property is removed from surface safeguarding, an owner-occupier will in most instances continue to be able to apply under express purchase for a period of five years from the date the property ceases to be affected by the directions.

Further measures will be provided in rural areas where the line runs on the surface in recognition that the short-term effects on communities can reasonably be expected to be much more marked in these areas. This rural support zone (RSZ) will cover the area outside safeguarding up to 120 metres from the centre line of the railway. The RSZ will run from the connection with phase 1 near Fradley in the west Midlands to the A500 south of Crewe. The schemes available in the RSZ are:

Cash offer—this is a lump sum payment of 10% of the unblighted open market value of a property. This payment is a minimum of £30,000 and is capped at £100,000. This scheme will be available to eligible owner-occupiers from today until one year after phase 2a first opens for public use. Voluntary purchase—eligible owner-occupiers will be able to sell their home to the Government for its full unblighted value. This scheme will be available from today until one year after phase 2a first opens for public use. This scheme will be made available when Royal Assent is obtained for the phase 2a hybrid Bill.

Homeowner payment scheme—those beyond the rural support zone and within 300 metres of the centreline of the railway will, following Royal Assent of the HS2 phase 2a hybrid Bill, be able to apply for a homeowner payment ranging from £7,500 to £22,500.

I also confirm that we are going to make a number of changes to the discretionary property assistance schemes which will apply to phase 1 and phase 2a. They will be implemented with immediate effect. Key changes include:

NTS health and mobility—we have added additional guidance on health and mobility whereby HS2 Ltd will give wider consideration to an applicant’s health and mobility and suitability of their current property.

Valuations for NTS, EHS and RSZ—we are going to permit the use of local valuers in the valuation process.

I believe these refined schemes demonstrate our continued commitment to provide a package of compensation and assistance schemes for owner-occupiers along the HS2 route that far exceeds what is required by law in recognition that HS2 is an exceptional project. I am confident the schemes we now have in place represent the best possible balance between supporting affected communities and providing value for money for the taxpayer.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): I am pleased to inform the House that my Department has published its refreshed programme for rail franchising. Through this my Department is setting out an ambitious plan for new rail franchises that will give passengers high-quality rail services.

It is making it clear to the whole rail industry that competition for rail franchises is the best way to secure services for passengers at good value for the taxpayer.

Through our plan for the railways we are making journeys better for everyone—we are reducing crowding, cutting journey times and improving trains and stations across the country. This supports our regional economies, creating jobs and opportunities and connecting people to business.

During this Parliament my Department has already delivered the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises which will oversee a massive £1.2 billion private-sector investment in our rail services. This includes hundreds of brand-new modern trains, thousands more seats, more services. Together this will deliver a modern, 21st century service for passengers, help to close the economic gap between north and south and help bring the northern powerhouse to life. We expect to continue to deliver similar results for our upcoming franchise competitions.

Private sector competition is good for passengers, local communities and taxpayers. That is why as part of our latest schedule we have started the competition for new franchises for the Intercity West Coast, East Anglia, South Western, East Midlands and West Midlands. I am confident that, through these franchises we will deliver the rail network this country needs.

I am placing a copy of the franchising schedule in the Libraries of the House.

[HCWS34]

WORK AND PENSIONS

British Steel Pension Scheme

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): Today I am publishing a consultation on options for the British Steel Pension Scheme. Britain’s steel industry is an important part of our economy and this Government are working to help the industry secure a long-term viable future. As part of this work we are considering the future position of the pension scheme. The consultation includes a full range of options that consider whether and how the scheme could be separated from the existing sponsoring employer and whether it will be necessary to reduce the benefits within the scheme. The consultation will run until 23 June 2016. I will place a copy of the consultation document in the House Library.

[HCWS16]
Written Statement

Monday 6 June 2016

PRIME MINISTER

G7 Summit

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I attended the G7 summit in Ise Shima, Japan, on 26-27 May. This was the 42nd G7 summit, and the third without Russia since its exclusion in March 2014, following the illegal annexation of Crimea.

This was the first summit under Japan's chairmanship since 2008. Under Prime Minister Abe's leadership, Japan has focused its G7 presidency on the global economy, regional prosperity and security, quality infrastructure, global health security and women's economic empowerment. G7 leaders also discussed key issues in foreign policy: trade, energy and on the need for change and development. Prime Minister Abe invited leaders from Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Laos, Chad, and the heads of the UN, World Bank, OECD, IMF and African Development Bank to join two sessions on regional stability and development. I had a number of bilateral discussions and formal meetings with Prime Minister Abe of Japan and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh.

The G7 is a group of nations bound together by common values and common principles—freedom, democracy, the rule of law, a belief in open markets and respect for human rights. It is a forum where true democracies and like-minded countries come together for frank discussions on the biggest issues we face.

I went to the G7 summit with five clear objectives: to push for progress on global trade talks, particularly the EU-Japan free trade agreement; to highlight the dangers of increasing global resistance to antibiotics; to encourage G7 leaders to tackle the global scourge of corruption by committing to take forward the outcomes of the UK's Anti-Corruption summit on 12 May; to keep up the pressure to defeat Daesh; and to ensure support for the Minsk agreement. We made good progress on each.

Leaders discussed the substantial benefits new trade agreements would bring for all our citizens. We agreed to make a renewed push on the trade agreement between the EU and the US, and we agreed to reach a political agreement on the EU-Japan trade agreement by the end of the year. This was a significant step forward. I also pushed for progress on plurilateral deals in the WTO on green vehicles, and on the need for the WTO trade facilitation agreement to be implemented, to ensure that the poorest are not left behind.

On the threat from growing resistance to antibiotics, I made clear to leaders the scale of the problem, and the risk that if we do not act on this now, there could be 10 million excess deaths a year by 2050. Last month, Jim O'Neill published his authoritative review on antimicrobial resistance, challenging us all to act now.

As a first step, I announced that the UK has put in place £265 million to track the spread of resistance in developing countries, and £50 million into a global fund for antimicrobial resistance research and development. I also announced that we will cut inappropriate prescribing in the UK by half by 2020, leading the global field in reducing demand for antimicrobials. The UK will work with international partners to develop a system that incentivises pharmaceutical companies to bring new products to market. The G7 recognised the recommendations of Jim O'Neill's review in the G7 Ise Shima Vision for Global Health. I also spoke to the World Bank and others about this at the summit.

I continued the push for global action to tackle corruption, and the G7 agreed to take forward a co-ordinated, ambitious global effort to defeat corruption, endorsing the outcomes of the UK's Anti-Corruption summit. The G7 agreed to play a leading role in implementing these actions, and also agreed to a G7 action plan to fight corruption.

On the global economy, leaders discussed the risks to the world economy and to jobs and growth at home, particularly from the economic transition in China, the problems in some emerging economies, and the consequences should the UK decide to leave the EU. I highlighted the success of our monetary, fiscal and structural reform policies in the UK to reduce the deficit and put the UK back on a path to growth, and made clear the need for each country to choose its macroeconomic policy tools according to national circumstances.

I led discussions among G7 Heads on terrorism and extremism. We agreed that Islamist extremism is the threat of our generation, and that Daesh is the most violent current manifestation. G7 leaders agreed that the international community must keep up the pressure to defeat this terrorist death cult, and endorsed a G7 action plan for countering terrorism and violent extremism.

I emphasised that Britain is playing its part in confronting Daesh militarily. Our RAF pilots have now conducted more than 700 airstrikes in Iraq and since December, more than 40 in Syria—which is more than any nation other than the US. With coalition support, Iraqi forces have already retaken over 40% of the territory once held by Daesh. Our intelligence services are co-operating with each other as never before, and at the summit, leaders agreed to do more.

I underlined that we must go beyond fighting terrorism and tackle the root causes of extremism. In the G7 action plan for countering terrorism and violent extremism, leaders committed to do more to work with the private sector to tackle the poisonous ideology of terrorism online, such as through working with internet service providers and administrators of relevant applications to facilitate counterterrorism investigations and to help prevent the use of the internet for terrorist purposes to recruit and radicalise young people in our communities. We discussed all of these things and shared ideas with each other.

Leaders underlined that Ukraine is the victim of Russian-backed aggression. G7 leaders were clear that existing sanctions against Russia must remain in place until the Minsk agreement is fully implemented, and that the EU should therefore renew the sanctions currently in place at the June European Council.
G7 leaders discussed the continuing migration crisis in the Mediterranean. We agreed that we must continue supporting jobs and livelihoods in poor and unstable African countries, to try to reduce migratory pressures—and the UK is doing a great deal already in this respect. But we also agreed that we need strong borders and a means to return those who attempt to cross them illegally, often at grave risk to their own lives. In the eastern Mediterranean, on average nearly 2,000 people arrived a day before the EU-Turkey deal was signed. Since then, the average has been fewer than 100 and in May was fewer than 50. Although the agreement remains fragile, it is saving lives and reducing migratory pressures, and needs to be fully supported.

G7 leaders discussed the need to achieve the same objectives on the central Mediterranean route. We are working to agree a plan to boost the capability of the Libyan coastguard. And I announced at the G7 that, once a detailed plan is agreed with the Libyan authorities, the UK will send a training team to assist in its implementation. I also announced that, once the relevant permissions and UN Security Council resolution are in place, I will deploy a naval warship to the south central Mediterranean to combat arms trafficking in the region. Together these developments will help stabilise Libya, secure its coast and tackle the migration crisis.

Leaders also discussed energy and climate change, and reiterated the need to move ahead with the momentous agreement reached in Paris last November to keep global temperature rise to below two degrees. Leaders underlined the importance of increasing women’s education and training, as well as providing greater access to science, technology, engineering and maths subjects, as set out in the G7 guiding principles for building the capacity of women and girls.

Finally, leaders underlined the need to continue supporting the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development goals. Leaders agreed that we must leave no one behind, and agreed that the 2030 Agenda lays the foundation for a more peaceful, stable, inclusive and prosperous international community. Significantly, G7 leaders reiterated their respective commitments to providing 0.7% of gross national income in overseas development assistance, where the UK is the only member to be meeting this target.

This was a successful summit for the UK, and I look forward to working with the Italian G7 presidency to take forward many of these important issues at next year’s G7 summit, which Prime Minister Renzi announced would be held in Sicily.

[HCWS36]
Written Statement

Wednesday 8 June 2016

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Pre-council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The final Justice and Home Affairs Council of the Dutch presidency will take place on 9 and 10 June in Luxembourg. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire) will attend the justice day and I will attend the interior day.

Justice day (9 June) will begin with a discussion on the draft directive on the supply of digital content. The presidency will present a paper outlining progress in negotiations. The Immigration Minister will welcome progress on this dossier.

The presidency will next seek a general approach on the draft regulations relating to matrimonial property regimes and registered partnerships. These proposals are being considered under the enhanced co-operation procedure, and the UK does not participate.

The presidency will seek member states’ support for the way forward on a range of issues relating to the internal functioning of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO). The UK is clear that it will not participate in an EPPO.

Next on the agenda will be a progress report on negotiations on the draft directive on the protection of the Union’s financial interests. The UK has not opted into this directive.

The presidency will seek support for the proposal to extend the European criminal record information system (ECRIS) to include third country (non-EU) nationals. The Immigration Minister will intervene to support the principles behind the ECRIS proposal and to emphasise the importance of finding a suitable technical solution.

Over lunch, the presidency intends to hold a discussion on compensation for victims of crime. It will focus on improving co-operation between member states’ competent authorities to enhance access to compensation for victims of crime in the EU.

After lunch, the presidency will seek agreement of Council conclusions on improving criminal justice in cyberspace and a steer from Ministers on the direction of further work by an expert group, notably around jurisdictional issues. The Immigration Minister will intervene to agree the importance of tackling cybercrime and to stress that best use should be made of existing tools.


Under any other business, the presidency will update on discussions with service providers on tackling online hate speech.

The presidency will also update Ministers on the recent EU-US JHA ministerial meeting in Amsterdam on 1-2 June, and the Slovakian presidency will present its JHA priorities.

Interior day (10 June) will begin with a discussion on the draft weapons directive, which relates to the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons. The presidency will seek a general approach on this directive. I will welcome the presidency’s efforts to reach this position but will continue to press for more restrictive controls on some types of weapons.

The Council will then turn to the presidency’s data-sharing road map. The road map contains a number of practical proposals aimed at enhancing data sharing between EU member states for JHA purposes, which reflects proposals from the UK and France. I welcome the presidency’s prioritisation of this work to enhance internal security across Europe.

The next discussion, on the fight against terrorism, will focus on a paper from the European Counter Terrorism Co-ordinator which makes a number of recommendations, including promoting the role of the Europol Counter Terrorism Centre (EUCTC) in tackling the terrorist threat. I will support the work of the EUCTC in tackling terrorist finance, online radicalisation and firearms, while re-asserting the importance of respecting Member State competence in relation to national security.

Next, the presidency will seek an exchange of views on a report on the implementation the renewed internal security strategy, which is a Council-led initiative. I support the implementation of the strategy.

Over lunch, the presidency will lead a discussion on migration, before a formal agenda item on the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March and on migration through the central Mediterranean. I will seek to ensure a continued focus in the Council on the effective implementation of the statement, and that the Council continues to retain oversight of both the levels of migration through the central Mediterranean and activities to manage this migration.

The Council will then discuss proposals on the relationship between the Schengen states and Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo, and Turkey. The presidency will seek a general approach in relation to Georgia and an exchange of views on the other proposals. There are no direct policy implications for the UK as we do not participate in the immigration and border aspects of the Schengen area.

Next on the agenda is the European border and coast guard, where the presidency will provide a progress update on negotiations with the European Parliament. The UK supports action by Schengen states to improve management of the external border. The UK will, of course, not participate in this Schengen-building measure.

The Council will then turn to a discussion on the situation within the Schengen area as far as internal controls are concerned, based on a report from the Commission covering developments up to March 2016. The UK does not participate in the border elements of Schengen.

Under any other business, the Commission will formally present their proposals to the Council on reform of the common European asylum system. No discussion is expected on this item. The presidency will also update Ministers on the outcomes from the high-level meeting on cyber-security, which took place in Amsterdam on 12-13 May.
Written Statements

Monday 13 June 2016

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Post-Competitiveness Council

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) has today made the following statement.

The Competitiveness Council took place in Brussels on 26-27 May. Under-Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills, Baroness Neville-Rolfe, represented the UK during the internal market and industry discussions on day one, with Shan Morgan (UK Deputy Permanent Representative) representing the UK in the research discussion on day two.

The presidency presented on the recent Quantum Technology conference in Amsterdam. This was followed by a presentation by Luxembourg on high performance computing. There was no debate.

The next item dealt with the Commission’s online content portability proposal. I have previously made you aware of the UK’s interest in the speedy implementation of this package. The proposal means citizens will be able to watch films, sport and other subscription services while on holiday or working temporarily in another member state. Following interventions by a number of member states, the Council agreed a general approach to the regulation. The proposal will now pass to the European Parliament who will agree its position in the coming months which could mean implementation of the proposal by the end of 2017.

At the regular competitiveness check-up the Commission gave a presentation that highlighted the issue of EU productivity. The UK welcomed the presentation and highlighted the link between services and productivity; I spoke about the significant amount of evidence which shows how important services are to economic growth.

The following item was a policy debate on the better regulation proposals. I spoke for the UK in support of the conclusions, which build on the Commission’s better regulation package released in 2015. The competing interest of serving a greater number of SMEs is balanced by a clear commitment to reduce burdens on business through the introduction of targets.

There was a presentation by Slovakia as the incoming presidency following on from Luxembourg on high performance computing. There was no debate.

The next item dealt with the Commission’s online content portability proposal. I have previously made you aware of the UK’s interest in the speedy implementation of this package. The proposal means citizens will be able to watch films, sport and other subscription services while on holiday or working temporarily in another member state. Following interventions by a number of member states, the Council agreed a general approach to the regulation. The proposal will now pass to the European Parliament who will agree its position in the coming months which could mean implementation of the proposal by the end of 2017.

The presidency presented on the recent Quantum Technology conference in Amsterdam. This was followed by a presentation by Luxembourg on high performance computing. There was no debate.

The next item dealt with the Commission’s online content portability proposal. I have previously made you aware of the UK’s interest in the speedy implementation of this package. The proposal means citizens will be able to watch films, sport and other subscription services while on holiday or working temporarily in another member state. Following interventions by a number of member states, the Council agreed a general approach to the regulation. The proposal will now pass to the European Parliament who will agree its position in the coming months which could mean implementation of the proposal by the end of 2017.

At the regular competitiveness check-up the Commission gave a presentation that highlighted the issue of EU productivity. The UK welcomed the presentation and highlighted the link between services and productivity; I spoke about the significant amount of evidence which shows how important services are to economic growth.

The following item was a policy debate on the better regulation proposals. I spoke for the UK in support of the conclusions, which build on the Commission’s better regulation package released in 2015. The competing interest of serving a greater number of SMEs is balanced by a clear commitment to reduce burdens on business through the introduction of targets.

There was a presentation by Slovakia as the incoming presidency following on from Luxembourg on high performance computing. There was no debate.

The next item dealt with the Commission’s online content portability proposal. I have previously made you aware of the UK’s interest in the speedy implementation of this package. The proposal means citizens will be able to watch films, sport and other subscription services while on holiday or working temporarily in another member state. Following interventions by a number of member states, the Council agreed a general approach to the regulation. The proposal will now pass to the European Parliament who will agree its position in the coming months which could mean implementation of the proposal by the end of 2017.

The presidency then opened a debate on open science, noting that the Council conclusions called for a transition to open access to publications in Europe by 2020.

There was general agreement that the benefits of open access were achievable, though a number of member states highlighted concerns on practical issues such as remuneration systems for scientists publishing in open access journals. Following the discussion, the Council approved the draft conclusions. There followed a presentation from Professor John Womersley (Chief Executive of the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council, and Chair of ESFRI, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures). Professor Womersley briefed the Council on ESFRI’s work to develop an updated set of priorities for European research infrastructure.

Commissioner Carlos Moedas followed this with a brief summary of the responses that had been received to the public consultation on his proposal for a European Innovation Council.

Finally the incoming Slovakian presidency outlined its priorities on research, which included “support for young researchers”, “implementation of widening participation under Horizon 2020” and “improving the framework conditions for researchers in the EU”.

[HCWS39]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy Council (6 June 2016)

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): Today, my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change made the following statement.

I am writing to report on discussions at the Energy Council held in Luxembourg on 6 June.

The Council, chaired by the Dutch presidency, featured discussions around a central theme of energy security.

The meeting began with the Council approving a general approach on the proposed decision with regard to intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) in the field of energy.

For the second agenda item European Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete opened a policy debate on gas security of supply by calling for improvements to regional co-operation, solidarity and the transparency of commercial gas contracts. This was in order to address vulnerabilities that still exist in the case of major disruptions to gas supplies. Interventions from member states were mixed; some supported the Commission’s approach whereas others referenced the need for a more flexible, voluntary approach to regional configurations. There was further discussion on the concept of solidarity arrangements and how these would apply not only to EU member states but to energy community states; a group of countries from south-east Europe and the Black Sea region.

Later, the Dutch presidency presented their conclusions on electricity market design which they hoped would provide guidance to the Commission on their proposals due out by the end of the year.

In the afternoon the Council listened to presentations from the Dutch presidency on the security of supply of medical radioisotopes for nuclear medicine and the potential for a more reactive and flexible approach to dealing with future nuclear power plant closures. The Council welcomed the Commission’s initiative and their intention to present a revised regulatory framework.

The presidency then opened a debate on open science, noting that the Council conclusions called for a transition to open access to publications in Europe by 2020.

There was general agreement that the benefits of open access were achievable, though a number of member states highlighted concerns on practical issues such as remuneration systems for scientists publishing in open access journals. Following the discussion, the Council approved the draft conclusions. There followed a presentation from Professor John Womersley (Chief Executive of the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council, and Chair of ESFRI, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures). Professor Womersley briefed the Council on ESFRI’s work to develop an updated set of priorities for European research infrastructure.

Commissioner Carlos Moedas followed this with a brief summary of the responses that had been received to the public consultation on his proposal for a European Innovation Council.

Finally the incoming Slovakian presidency outlined its priorities on research, which included “support for young researchers”, “implementation of widening participation under Horizon 2020” and “improving the framework conditions for researchers in the EU”.

[HCWS38]
HEALTH


The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will meet on 16 and 17 June in Luxembourg. The health part of the Council will take place on 17 June in the morning.

The main agenda items will be the adoption of Council conclusions on:
- Food products improvement;
- The next steps under a one health approach to combat antimicrobial resistance;
- Strengthening the balance in the pharmaceutical systems of the European Union and its member states.

Under any other business there will also be:
- Information from the Dutch presidency on:
  - Public health conferences that were organised and held by the presidency
  - The state of play of negotiations concerning the regulations on medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices
- Information from the Commission on:
  - The European fund for strategic investments and the investment plan for Europe
  - The EU response to Zika
  - Health systems performance assessment (HSPA)
  - Proposed new analytical products to support better knowledge and stronger evidence-based policy making, under the banner of the “State of Health in the EU”
- Information from the French delegation on the election of the WHO Director-General
- Information from the Polish delegation on the European Committee for Standardisation’s (CEN) work programme for 2016 with regards to health-related activities
- Information from the Slovak delegation on the priorities for their forthcoming presidency, which will run from July until December 2016.

A draft copy of the latest agenda can be found online at:
http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-06-14/HCWS40/ [HCWS40]
The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Brussels on 25 May 2016. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following items:

**Anti-tax avoidance package**

Ministers held an exchange of views on a compromise text relating to the anti-tax avoidance directive. Ministers agreed that this file would return to ECOFIN in June for further discussion and possible agreement.

**Current legislative proposals**

The presidency updated the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

**State of play of the banking union**

The Commission gave an update on several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive.

**VAT action plan**

The Council held an exchange of views and agreed Council conclusions relating to the Commission's VAT action plan, published 7 April, and a European Court of Auditors special report.

**European semester**

Following preparation by the Economic and Financial Committee, the Council adopted conclusions on the 2016 in-depth reviews of macroeconomic imbalances and the implementation of the 2015 country specific recommendations.

The presidency will update the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

**State of play of the banking union**

The Commission will give an update on several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery road map and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive.

**Analysis by the Commission on temporary VAT derogations—reverse charge mechanism**

Following a request by the Czech Finance Minister, the Commission will present analysis relating to widening the use of the reverse charge mechanism to combat VAT fraud. This will be followed by an exchange of views.

**Implementation of the stability and growth pact**

The Council will be asked to endorse the draft decisions to close the excessive deficit procedures for Cyprus, Ireland and Slovenia based on recommendations by the Commission. As these decisions cover euro area member states, the UK does not have a vote.

**Report of the European Court of Auditors on the excessive deficit procedure**

Following preparation by the Economic and Financial Committee, the Council will adopt conclusions relating to a European Court of Auditors report on effective implementation of the excessive deficit procedure.

**Contribution to the European Council meeting on 28-29 June 2016**

The Council will prepare a number of items ahead of June European Council. Specifically, Ministers will endorse the 2016 country specific recommendations, part of the European semester process.

Following this, views will be exchanged on: national productivity boards within the euro area; economic and fiscal governance; unified euro area representation at the IMF; and the Commission's recent communications on external aspects of migration and the investment plan for Europe.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Luxembourg on 17 June 2016. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

**Anti-tax avoidance package**

The presidency will seek a political agreement on a compromise text relating to the anti-tax avoidance directive. The UK is not taking part in the financial transaction tax.

**Financial transaction tax**

An update will be provided on the progress regarding implementing a financial transaction tax in participating member states. The UK is not taking part in the financial transaction tax.

**Strengthening the banking union**

A presentation will be given on a road map regarding strengthening of the banking union, alongside an oral update from the presidency on progress made in Council working groups.
wildlife trafficking. They will also discuss a Council statement on the ratification of the Paris agreement.

The following items are due to be discussed under any other business:

a) NOx emissions by diesel cars
b) Recent international meetings:
   i) High-level meeting (Montreal, 11-13 May 2016) and preparations for the ICAO assembly (Montreal, 27 September to 7 October 2016)
   iii) Eighth Environment for Europe ministerial conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016)
c) REACH forward priorities for effective regulation (Brussels, 1 June 2016)
d) High-level meeting “Make it Work” (Amsterdam, 4 April 2016)
e) Communication on environmental implementation review
f) Global amphibian deaths—combating the fungus Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans (Bsal) infecting salamanders and news in the EU
g) Informal meeting of the Environment and Transport Ministers (Amsterdam, 14-15 April 2016)
h) Endocrine disruptors
   i) Work programme of the incoming presidency

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council/General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 June and I will attend the General Affairs Council on 24 June. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Dutch presidency. The meetings will be held in Luxembourg.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is expected to include the Arctic, Sahel, middle east peace process and Macedonia. Ms Mogherini is expected to raise Libya, Burma, cultural diplomacy and the forthcoming EU-China summit in her opening remarks.

The Arctic

The UK will support the proposed Council conclusions on the Arctic which we expect to be adopted at the Council, following the publication of the Joint Communication on 27 April. The conclusions acknowledge the important role the EU has in helping to meet the challenges now facing the region, and that the EU should focus on those areas where it can add value, such as research, climate change and the environment.

Sahel

The discussion will focus on the EU’s overall approach to the Sahel, and its support to the G5 Sahel group of countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). Ministers will consider how to accelerate implementation of the Mali peace agreement one year after its signature. The UK priority will be to ensure the EU’s approach in the Sahel and the instruments at its disposal are focused on tackling the long-term drivers of instability and migration.

Middle East Peace Process

Ministers will exchange views on the outcome of the international meeting which was held in Paris on 3 June.

Macedonia

Discussion will focus on the long-standing political crisis in Macedonia. We expect Ministers to register their concern about negative developments in the rule of law, and the impact on regional stability, as well as signal to Macedonia’s leaders that they must reverse this negative trend.

Libya

Discussions will focus on extending EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia’s mandate to take on two additional tasks: capacity-building and training of the Libyan coastguard and implementing the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 June is expected to focus on preparation of the June European Council, European semester, inter-institutional agreement, better regulation and transparency.

Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC will discuss the agenda for the 28-29 June European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend. The agenda will focus on migration, jobs, growth and investment, external relations and the outcome of the UK referendum.

European semester

The GAC will look to approve the country specific recommendations ahead of the European Council.

Inter-Institutional agreement (IIA) and better regulation

The Commission’s 2017 work programme is tabled for discussion at the General Affairs Council ahead of its release in October. The GAC will also discuss legislative programming in future years.

AOB—Slovakia’s presidency priorities

The GAC will take note of the draft priorities presented by Slovakia for their EU presidency, which begins on 1 July. They intend to focus on four areas: economic and financial; single market; external relations; and migration. The Slovak presidency will continue the work of the Dutch presidency, and be followed by that of their trio partner, Malta.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs post-Council statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The final Justice and Home Affairs Council of the Dutch presidency took place on 9 and 10 June in Luxembourg. The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire) attended the justice day and I attended the interior day.
Justice day (9 June) began with a progress report on the draft directive on the supply of digital content. The proposal aims to advance the growth of cross-border e-commerce in the EU by setting common rules for governing the supply of digital content.

The Council then discussed four files in which the UK does not participate: matrimonial property regimes; registered partnerships; the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO); and the directive on protection of the Union’s financial interests. Ministers agreed general approaches on both matrimonial property regimes and registered partnerships, enabling negotiations with the European Parliament to begin. Ministers secured broad conceptual support on a number of issues relating to the internal functioning of the EPPO, and on the directive on protection of the Union’s financial interests. Ministers did not reach agreement on a number of compromise options. The presidency then presented a progress report on negotiations to extend the European criminal record information system (ECRIS) to third country (non-EU) nationals. The Immigration Minister intervened to support the principles behind the ECRIS proposal and to emphasise the importance of finding a suitable technical solution to data sharing.

Over lunch, the presidency facilitated a discussion on the compensation of victims of crime, focusing on improving co-operation and sharing best practice. The Commission committed to look at practical steps to support improved co-operation.

After lunch, the presidency sought a steer from Ministers on work to improve criminal justice in cyberspace. The Immigration Minister intervened to agree the importance of tackling cybercrime and to stress that best use should be made of existing tools.

Under any other business, the Commission informed Ministers that a code of conduct to combat hate speech online had been developed with the IT industry and the Commission will present an impact report to Council in December. The presidency also updated Ministers on outcomes from the recent EU-US JHA ministerial meeting on 1 and 2 June. Finally, the incoming Slovakian presidency presented its justice and home affairs priorities. The A points were then adopted.

Interior day (10 June) began with a discussion on the draft weapons directive, which relates to controlling the acquisition and possession of weapons. Supported by other member states, I intervened to welcome the progress made, but underlined the potential to go even further in ensuring appropriately high standards of regulation. The presidency concluded that there was support for a general approach and trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament will now begin.

The Council then turned to the presidency’s data sharing road map. The road map contains a number of practical proposals aimed at enhancing data sharing between member states to enhance security and law enforcement, which reflects in particular proposals made by the UK and France. I fully supported the presidency’s prioritisation of this work to enhance internal security across Europe, particularly the sharing of data between Schengen and non-Schengen member states. Several member states supported both my position and the objectives and actions set out in the road map.

The discussion on the fight against terrorism focused on a paper from the European Counter Terrorism Coordinator (EUCTC) which made a number of recommendations to advance work to tackle the terrorist threat. I welcomed the role of the EUCTC in supporting member states in tackling terrorist finance, online radicalisation and firearms, and stressed the clear difference in mandate and competence between the work of Europol and that of the member state-driven Counter Terrorist Group (CTG). The CTG, which has provided a multilateral platform to enhance co-operation between independent European intelligence services, also gave a presentation.

The Council noted a report on the implementation of the renewed internal security strategy and the presidency updated Interior Ministers on the outcomes of the EU-US JHA ministerial meeting on 1 and 2 June, and the outcomes from the high-level meeting on cybersecurity on 12 and 13 May.

Over lunch, there was a discussion on migration through the central Mediterranean route and the Commission presented its communication on external migration. After lunch, the Council discussed the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March. Supported by the Commission, I intervened to ensure a continued focus in the Council on the effective and full implementation of the statement by leaders.

The Council then discussed proposals concerning the relationship between the Schengen states and Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo, and Turkey. There was an exchange of views on these proposals and the Council did not agree a general approach on Georgia. The UK does not participate in these measures.

Next on the agenda was the European border and coastguard, where the presidency provided a progress update on negotiations with the European Parliament. The UK does not participate in this measure.

The Commission then presented its proposals to the Council on reform of the common European asylum system. Finally, the incoming Slovakian presidency presented its justice and home affairs priorities to Interior Ministers.

[HCWS45]
Petitions

Wednesday 18 May 2016

PRESENTED PETITION
Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Community Pharmacies

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 386 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Jim Cunningham.]

[PP001695]

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Green belt land between Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay

The petition of residents of Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay in the South Staffordshire constituency, and others,

Declares that the current proposals to build 136 houses on Landywood Lane, Great Wyrley will lead to the erosion of the distinct identity of our individual villages and could cause substantial environmental damage and further notes that residents have already successfully fought these proposals at local council level in 2013.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take all possible steps to encourage South Staffordshire District Council to reject these proposals, and if the proposals go to the Planning Inspectorate, to also encourage them to reject the proposals so that the green belt can be conserved for future generations.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Gavin Williamson, Official Report, 19 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 888.]

[PP001684]

Observations from the Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis); received 17 May 2016:

Green Belts are created by local authorities, who are required to protect them in line with national policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework states that inappropriate development, including most forms of housebuilding, should not be approved there except in very special circumstances. It also makes it clear that a Green Belt boundary can be altered only in exceptional circumstances, using the Local Plan process of public consultation followed by rigorous independent examination of the revised Plan.

Local authorities, working with their communities, have to determine the best location for new homes. Our guidance reminds them to have due regard to national policies, such as Green Belt policy, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain an authority’s ability to meet its housing need. Moreover, the Framework asks local authorities to recognise the character and beauty of the countryside, and the benefits of the best and most versatile farmland. They should also insist on the highest standards of design when considering new development.

We want local authorities and their communities to be in charge of planning their areas. As Secretary of State, I intervene in the planning application process only in a very few, exceptional circumstances, where planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Each case is considered on its merits. If the local authority is minded to approve a proposal, but has not yet determined it, anyone may draw the application to the attention of the National Planning Policy Casework Unit (npcu@communities.gsi.gov.uk) and request that it be considered for call-in. NPCU advises the Secretary of State on such cases.

HEALTH

Ealing Hospital and the Shaping a Healthier Future programme

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that since 2013 there has been a programme of rationalisation and downgrading of health services across North West London as part of the Shaping a Healthier Future programme; further that this has led to the loss of a number of important local services; further that the programme is often depriving communities of some of their most important resources; further that the Accident and Emergency department at Ealing Hospital has already lost its maternity unit; further that Ealing Hospital is also due to close its paediatric unit in June; further that there are hugely concerning reports that Ealing will not now receive the new ‘Local Hospital’ promised under the programme, as the costs of the Shaping a Healthier Future programme have spiralled; and further that an online petition on a similar matter has been signed by 100,229 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to reconsider the impact of the Shaping a Healthier Future programme on Ealing Hospital, Ealing and the surrounding boroughs that rely on Ealing Hospital to deliver high quality emergency care 24 hours a day.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Virendra Sharma, Official Report, 26 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1404.]

[PP001686]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer); received 16 May 2016:

The changes taking place in Ealing are being led by clinicians and are designed to improve the quality of care including maternity and paediatric care, for local people.
Plans for NHS services across north-west London, including those at Ealing Hospital, are being implemented by the local NHS under the reconfiguration programme Shaping a Healthier Future (SaHF).

The Government are clear that the reconfiguration of local health services is a matter for the local NHS. Services should be tailored to meet the needs of the local population and reconfiguration will only take place when it is clear that patients will benefit.

The changes taking place under SaHF are about improving healthcare for the residents of northwest London. The benefits include:

- improved consultant cover in A&Es;
- better access to GPs; and
- increased community services so more people can be treated closer to their homes.

Ealing hospital is to be redesigned as a new 21st century facility for the local community. The hospital will have a local Accident and Emergency and a 24/7 GP-led Urgent Care Centre with access to 24/7 specialist care, as well as a range of specialist services designed with and for the local community, such as a diabetes Centre of Excellence.

Changes to maternity services in North West London have already yielded benefits such as improved midwife ratios and 24/7 consultant availability, 365 days a year.

It is proposed that inpatient paediatric services will move from Ealing Hospital on 30 June 2016 into five other hospital sites in north-west London, all of which will significantly expand their capacity by either increasing their number of inpatient beds or increasing the size of their paediatric A&E units. There will also be more senior doctors on site for longer hours, seven days a week, and/or more paediatric nurses.

However, nearly three quarters of existing children’s services will continue on the Ealing Hospital site and elsewhere in the borough.

It is also proposed that these changes will see new Paediatric Assessment Units in place at five receiving hospital sites by autumn 2016. The units will provide ambulatory care, which is care during the day for children who do not need to be admitted to hospital, but need a period of observation and treatment. This will provide better care and means less children will need to stay in hospital overnight.

On 14 January 2016, the North West London Clinical Board considered the Independent Healthcare Commission for North West London’s final review of the SaHF programme. The unanimous conclusion of the NW London Clinical Board was the Commission's report offered no substantive clinical evidence or credible alternative to consider that would lead better outcomes for patients above the plans already in place.
We have sought to encourage contributions from all stakeholders, including patients and the public, to help inform our discussions with the PSNC. We will certainly take account of the views of the patients and public who signed this petition.

The Government are committed to maintaining access to pharmacies and pharmacy services and believe efficiencies can be made within community pharmacy without compromising the quality of services or public access to them. Our aim is to ensure that those community pharmacies upon which people depend continue to thrive. That is why we are consulting on a Pharmacy Access Scheme, which will provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population.

Our proposals are about improving services for patients and the public and securing efficiencies and savings. A consequence may be the closure of some pharmacies but that is not our aim.

We want to promote the use of online, click and collect, or home delivery models to enable patient choice while at the same time maintaining a network of community pharmacies for face to face high quality clinically and public health focused services.

We want to transform the system to deliver efficiency savings and ensure the model of community pharmacy reflects patient and public expectations and developments in technology.

**HEALTH**

**Community pharmacies**

*The petition of residents of Scunthorpe.*

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Nic Dakin, Official Report, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 508.]

P001691

*The petition of residents of the UK.*

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tom Brake, Official Report, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 5P.]

P001694

*Observations from the Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):*

The Government agree that community pharmacy is a vital part of the NHS. We recognise the public and patient support for community pharmacies locally that this petition has demonstrated.

We want to see a high-quality community pharmacy service that is properly integrated into primary care and public health in line with the Five Year Forward View.

Our proposals are about ensuring we have a modern, efficient community pharmacy sector in England offering patient choice, easier access and fit for the future as well as today.

On 16 March 2016 we announced that the consultation period was to be extended to allow more time to develop the proposed changes with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and others. It closed on 24 May 2016.

**TRANSPORT**

**Wellington Railway Station**

*The petition of residents of Taunton Deane.*

Declares that a new railway station in Wellington in the constituency of Taunton Deane should be opened; further that this project has a local support from residents and businesses; further that the rapidly expanding town is experiencing high volumes of road congestion and that a rail link could help alleviate this and improve local air quality whilst at the same time improving rural transport networks in the area; and further that Taunton Deane Borough Council have committed £40,000 to a feasibility study and pending commitment from other involved partners we seek the support of the Department of Transport through the New Station Fund.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Transport to open a new metro style railway station in Wellington and support the feasibility study.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rebecca Pow, Official Report, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 508.]

P001692

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):*

Planning and development of new stations is a matter for local authorities to take forward. Guidance on how to do this is provided by Network Rail on behalf of the rail industry. Department for Transport (DfT) officials are ready to provide advice and an overview of strategic issues.
The Chancellor announced in the 2015 Budget that he was making a further £20 million available in a second round of the New Stations Fund (NSF). Work is ongoing to develop the fund with a launch anticipated shortly.

The NSF is able to contribute up to 75% of the total station project costs, with the remainder coming from local authorities and third parties, however funding is not currently available from the NSF to support feasibility studies or initial development works.

New stations are expected to cover running costs from the farebox and this needs to be demonstrated in the business case. Funding would need to be secured from locally determined funding sources to pay for any subsidy the service might need, in particular during the first three years of operation.

Identifying train services may be the biggest challenge in making the case for a new station. The local authorities should liaise with the train operator and Network Rail to determine what services are feasible at the new station.
Petition

Thursday 26 May 2016

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH

Closure of Garforth Clinic

The petition of residents of the Elmet and Rothwell,
Declares that the decision of the Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust to close Garforth Clinic removes ease of access to local health services for elderly and disabled patients; further that it removes podiatry, adult dietetics, children’s speech and language therapy, psychological therapies, musculo-skeletal, cardiac and weight management services from Garforth; further that it removes access to a local warfarin clinic for those without personal transportation; further that it highlights a failure to comply with statutory functions of an NHS Trust; further that the Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust has failed to identify a sustainable alternative or detail how neighbouring health centres will cope with increased demand; further that the Trust has failed to reference pressure from Leeds City Council’s Core Strategy, which plans to build thousands of additional dwellings around the town; and further that the Trust withdrew from a pre-arranged public meeting with our Member of Parliament and City Councillors at which residents were hoping to explain their personal concerns over the removal of local health services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to encourage the independent Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust to review its decision to close Garforth Clinic; arrange a meeting with residents to answer concerns; and re-consult with patients on the impact that such a closure will have.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alec Shelbrooke, Official Report, 03 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 143.]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):

Configuration of health services is a matter for the local NHS. Any changes must meet the four tests for service change: they must have support from GP commissioners, be based on clinical evidence, demonstrate public and patient engagement, and consider patient choice.

Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust advises that during 2014/15, it undertook a programme of service review and redesign affecting the majority of services. As a result of this programme, a number of services identified the need to change and reduce the number of locations from which care was delivered.

The Trust advises that there was a full public consultation for 12 weeks from August to November 2015. Proposed changes included the removal of services from Garforth Clinic and the subsequent closure of the building. The Trust sought feedback from patients, carers and other stakeholders by a variety of methods during this period and advises that the views of both local councillors and MPs were sought.

The Trust Board received a report outlining all comments and questions received during the engagement period. The report also set out mitigating actions to support the most vulnerable members of the public.

The Trust advises that it continues to provide the same level of service to Garforth residents. Most services are now provided at the nearby Kippax Health Centre, with additional clinics having been arranged. A local voluntary transport scheme helps those who have difficulty accessing services which have relocated. The Trust is monitoring the changes and engaging local community groups to advise on service changes where appropriate. The Trust hopes to arrange a further public meeting within the Garforth community to provide feedback on progress with service changes and the proposed sale of the clinic building.
Petition

Monday 6 June 2016

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH
Community Pharmacies

The petition of residents of the UK, Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 386 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Jim Cunningham, Official Report, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 1-4P.]

Observations from The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):

The Government agree that community pharmacy is a vital part of the NHS. We recognise the public and patient support for community pharmacies locally that this petition has demonstrated.

We want to see a high quality community pharmacy service that is properly integrated into primary care and public health in line with the Five Year Forward View. Our proposals are about ensuring we have a modern, efficient community pharmacy sector in England offering patient choice, easier access and fit for the future as well as today.

We have sought to encourage contributions from all stakeholders, including patients and the public, to help inform our discussions with the PSNC during the public phase of the consultation. This ended on 24 May. We will certainly take account of the views of the patients and public who signed this petition.

We are now entering a new confidential phase of the consultation process. We will continue to discuss the proposals with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and hold a final round of confidential discussions with other key stakeholders.

The Government are committed to maintaining access to pharmacies and pharmacy services and believe efficiencies can be made within community pharmacy without compromising the quality of services or public access to them. Our aim is to ensure that those community pharmacies upon which people depend continue to thrive. That is why we have been consulting on a pharmacy access scheme, which will provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population.

Our proposals are about improving services for patients and the public and securing efficiencies and savings. A consequence may be the closure of some pharmacies but that is not our aim.

We want to promote the use of online, click and collect, or home delivery models to enable patient choice whilst at the same time maintaining a network of community pharmacies for face to face high quality clinically and public health focused services.

We want to transform the system to deliver efficiency savings and ensure the model of community pharmacy reflects patient and public expectations and developments in technology.
Ministerial Correction

Thursday 26 May 2016

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Bangladesh

The following is an extract from questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 24 May 2016:

Alex Cunningham: The Minister has said that he has talked to the Bangladeshi Government, but does he really think that that Government are taking sufficient steps to tackle the issue of violence against LGBT people?

Mr Swire: Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, giving £162 million in 2015-16—so our voice has some influence there.


Letter of correction from Mr Swire:

An error has been identified in the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham).

The correct answer should have been:

Mr Swire: Clearly I do not. We have a certain amount of leverage in Bangladesh—we are the largest grant aid donor, allocating £162 million for 2016-17—so our voice has some influence there.
Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 15 June 2016

CABINET OFFICE
EU Referendum

The following is an extract from the debate on the EU Referendum: Voter Registration on 9 June 2016:

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): My right hon. Friend says that the problem of ballot papers being issued to those who are not eligible to take part in this election has been identified and cured. Can he therefore give us an idea of the scale of the problem? How many of these wrong ballot papers were issued?

Mr Letwin: We believe it to have been around 5,000. [Official Report, 9 June 2016, Vol. 611, c. 1364.]

Letter of correction from Mr Letwin:
An error has been identified in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox).
The correct answer should have been:

Mr Letwin: We believe it to have been 3,502.
INDEX TO THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SIXTH SERIES OFFICIAL REPORT VOLUME 611
SESSION 2016–17

7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

SCOPE
The index is derived from the headings that appear in Hansard.
The index includes entries covering the names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard, including Divisions.

REFERENCES
• References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
• There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings, written statements, written questions, ministerial corrections and petitions
  • References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  • References ending in ‘wh’ indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  • References ending in ‘ws’ indicate written statements.
  • References ending in ‘w’ indicate written questions.
  • References ending in ‘p’ indicate written petitions.
  • References ending in ‘mc’ indicate ministerial corrections.
• References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
• References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings-
  • Chamber Debates (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  • Westminster Hall Debates (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings);
  • Written Statements (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing);
  • Questions (which includes all written, oral and urgent questions); and
  • Petitions (which includes all oral and written petitions).
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Blackford, Ian—continued
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 135-6, 708
Defending Public Services 309, 321-3
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1635
Junior Doctors Contract 160
Term-time Holidays 145
Questions
Constituency Boundaries 1743
Manufacturing 1172
Prisoner Release, Employment 1622
Pro Bono Legal Services 664
Topical Questions 1033

Blenkinsop, Tom
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 25
Tees Valley Inward Investment Initiative 1869-73, 1875-6
Questions
Engagements 532
Security Situation 1173
Steel Industry 721

Blomfield, Paul
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 709
Defending Public Services 338-40

Blunt, Crispin
Chamber Debates
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 414
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 439, 450, 463-4
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1443
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 849
Questions
EU Sanctions, Russia 380-1

Boswell, Philip
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 4wh, 12wh

Bottomley, Sir Peter
Chamber Debates
Carers 1385
Debate on the Address 71-5

Boycott and Divestment Guidance 1740

Bradley, Karen, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department
Chamber Debates
Policing and Crime Bill 1572, 1575-6
Questions
Cybercrime 1429-30
Topical Questions 679, 681-2, 1438
Violent Acid Attacks 1432-3

Brady, Mr Graham
Westminster Hall
West Coast Rail Franchise 316wh, 319wh

Brain Family
Deportation 683

Brake, Tom
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 701
Committee on Standards 241-2
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 418
Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran 247
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1362, 1372, 1380
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 429, 436, 441
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1341
Points of Order 1207
Term-time Holidays 142
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 266-7
Voter Registration 1198, 1204
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 406
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 217wh, 230wh
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 95-6wh
Questions
EU Sanctions, Russia 381
House of Commons Employees 1330-1
Older Women in the Workplace 674
Palace of Westminster Artwork 1329-30
Parliamentary Estate, Refurbishment 1332-3
Topical Questions 680, 1329
Petitions
Community Pharmacies 5-6p

Brennan, Kevin
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 706
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Consumer Protection
Resale of Tickets 14ws

Contingencies Fund
1029

Conveyancing
27wh

Cooper, Julie
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 626-7

Corbyn, Jeremy
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 12-21

Costa, Alberto
Questions
Cybercrime 1429

Cox, Jo
Chamber Debates
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 416-7

Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Chamber Debates
Investigatory Powers Bill 980

Crabb, Stephen, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Chamber Debates
Disability Employment Gap 1265-72

Crabey, Angela—continued
Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 10-2wh

Creagh, Mary
Chamber Debates
Tributes to Jo Cox 1897-8

Creasy, Stella
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 558, 592-5

Cryer, John
Westminster Hall
Adequate Housing, London (14.06.2016) 273wh, 286wh

Cunningham, Alex
Chamber Debates
Brain Family, Deportation 688

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Chamber Debates
Budget for Community Pharmacies 509
Defending Public Services 288

Crawley, Angela—continued
Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 10-2wh

Crawley, Angela—continued
Questions
Employment Tribunal Fees 1624

Crawley, Angela—continued
Questions
Unaccompanied Child Refugees (Family Reunification) 1425

Croydon, Angela
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 558, 592-5

Cryer, John
Westminster Hall
Adequate Housing, London (14.06.2016) 273wh, 286wh

Culling, Judith
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 227-8

Culling, Mr Jim
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 288

Culling, Mr Jim
Chamber Debates
Budget for Community Pharmacies 509
Defending Public Services 288

Cullinane, Mark
Questions
Employment, Women Returnees 671

Cybercrime
Questions
Brexit 1023-4

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Defending Public Services 288

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Disability Employment Gap 1266

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Disability Employment Gap 1266

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Defending Public Services 288

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Disability Employment Gap 1266

Cyril, Captain
Written Statements
Defending Public Services 288
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Davies, Mims—continued
Questions
Disabled People, Employment 669
Engagements 1180
EU Sanctions, Russia 379
Pro Bono Legal Services 664-5

Davies, Philip
Chamber Debates
Brain Family, Deportation 684-5
Business of the House 130, 704, 1354
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 257
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1765-6
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1362
Junior Doctors Contract 161
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 851-2
Term-time Holidays 142
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 269
Questions
Brexit 1026
Divisions 1334
Engagements 531-2
Prisons, Population 1611
Rugby Union 1321
Sentencing Policy, Child Neglect/Abuse 671
Topical Questions 397-8

Davies, Mr David
Chamber Debates
BHS 857
Investigatory Powers Bill 884, 887, 889, 896, 949-51, 954, 956, 967, 978-80, 1067, 1069

Day, Martyn
Westminster Hall
Diabetes-related Complications 47-9wh
Questions
Topical Questions 1031-2

De Piero, Gloria
Chamber Debates
Voter Registration 1193-4
Questions
Constituency Boundaries 1744

Death of a Member
1883

Debate on the Address
165, 272, 425, 542, 732
6

Debbonaire, Thangam
Chamber Debates
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1638

Defending Public Services
272

Deferred Division
1879

Delegated Legislation
1305, 1599, 1728, 1868

Delegated Legislation (Committees)
648, 1005

Departmental Civil Servants
Coventry 827

Departmental Estate
Rodent Eradication 392

Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran
243

Developing Countries
Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 355wh

Development on the former Two Trees
High School site, Denton
649

Diabetes-related Complications
34wh

Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy
253

Dinenage, Caroline
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice
Chamber Debates
Women and the Vote 1308-14
Questions
Employment, Women Returnees 670-1
Older Women in the Workplace 673-5
Sentencing Policy, Child Neglect/Abuse 671-2
Women in Business 676-7

Disability Employment Gap
1258

Disability Hate Crimes
667

Disabled People
Employment 668
Government Expenditure 1028

Divisions
1333

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Chamber Debates
BHS 859
Questions
Employment Tribunal Fees 1625

Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 37
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1845-6
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 408-9
Westminster Hall

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1220
Business of the House 1349
Debate on the Address 75-9, 88
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1362
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1638
Tributes to Jo Cox 1897
Questions
Engagements 1192
Northern Ireland Question Time 1331
Security Situation 1174
Tourism 1319

Domestic Tourism
1324

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M.
Questions
Organised Crime and Terrorism 1178

Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 372-4wh
Questions
Topical Questions 679
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Duddridge, James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Topical Questions 395-6

Dugher, Michael
Chamber Debates
Budget for Community Pharmacies 508-12

Duncan, Sir Alan
Chamber Debates
Investigatory Powers Bill 1099
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1446
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 402

Dunne, Mr Philip, Minister for Defence Procurement
Chamber Debates
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 401-10

Durkan, Mark
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 708, 1257
Carers 1407
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1785
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1342
Junior Doctors Contract 156
Voter Registration 1202

Ellwood, Mr Tobias, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence
Questions
Topical Questions 397, 399-400

Ellison, Jane, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Topical Questions 1035

Ellison, Jane, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Questions
Topical Questions 1032

Ellison, Jane, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Topical Questions 1031

Donelan, Michelle
Chamber Debates
Careers 1386, 1388-91
Education, Skills and Training 583, 589-92
Questions
Topical Questions 1034

Dorries, Nadine
Westminster Hall
Elected Mayors 340wh, 343-4wh
Library Services, Thornton-Cleveleys 335wh
West Coast Rail Franchise 327wh

Dowden, Oliver
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1844-5
Term-time Holidays 138-9
The Economy and Work 760
Transport and Local Infrastructure 187-90
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 217-25wh, 268-70wh
Questions
Steel Industry 724

Duffy, Steve
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1832-3

Doughty, Stephen
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 430-1, 434-5, 443
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1042
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1441-2
Points of Order 1048
Tributes to Jo Cox 1894-5
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 404-5
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 233-5wh, 265wh
Questions
Yemen 390-1

Dowd, Peter
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 785

Dowden, Oliver
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 697
Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran 243-7, 249
The Economy and Work 734

Drax, Richard
Questions
Engagements 530-1, 1184

Drewe, Jack
Questions
Cybercrime 1429-30

Drummond, Mrs Flick
Chamber Debates
Battle of Jutland Centenary 650-5
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1832-3
The Economy and Work 757
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 365-6wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 258-9wh
Questions
Topical Questions 1031

Eagle, Maria
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1208-15
Defending Public Services 365-8
Questions
Topical Questions 1327-8

Eagle, Ms Angela
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 542-52, 556-7
Questions
Engagements 527-30
Steel Industry 716-7

Ealing Hospital and the Shaping a Healthier Future Programme
2p

ECOFIN
25 May 2016 11ws, 47ws
17 June 2016 47ws

Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Regional Deal
824

Education
21ws
Education, Skills and Training
542

Education, Youth, Culture and the Sport Council
20ws

Edwards, Jonathan
Chamber Debates
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1641-2
Policing and Crime Bill 1554-5, 1562, 1572, 1575
Wales Bill 1645-6, 1648, 1658, 1670-1, 1674, 1688, 1693, 1695-6, 1699, 1705, 1710-5, 1724
Questions
S4C 524-5
Topical Questions 1035

Efford, Clive
Questions
Football, Television Rights 1326

Efcor, Mark
Questions
Elected Mayors

Elliott, Tom
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 619
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1643
Investigatory Powers Bill 1062, 1083-4
The Economy and Work 789-90
Voter Registration 1202
Questions
Security Situation 1174
Topical Questions 1627

Ellison, Jane
Chamber Debates
Excess Winter Deaths 1009-14
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1037-45
Points of Order 1048
Westminster Hall
Diabetes-related Complications 53-8wh
HPV Vaccinations for MSM 77-82wh
Written Statements
Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, June 2016 45-6ws
HPV Vaccination 27-8ws

Ellman, Mls Louise
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 190-2
Questions
Middle East 392

Ellwood, Mr Tobias, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chamber Debates
Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran 247-52
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 437
Questions
Middle East 392
Middle East, Press Freedom 385-7
Middle East 392

Mls Louise
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 190-2
Questions
Middle East 392

Middle East, Press Freedom 385-7

Palestinian Territories, Radicalisation 389
Topical Questions 397, 399-400
Yazidi Population, Syria and Iraq 384-5
Yemen 390-1
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Government’s Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2016-17
4ws

Government’s Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2016-17
5ws

Government’s Legislative Programme (Wales) 2016-17
6ws

Grady, Patrick
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 135, 708
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 423
Debate on the Address 107-10
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1779
The Economy and Work 810
Voter Registration 1202
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 409
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 356wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 235wh, 261-4wh, 267wh
Visitor Visas, Sub-Saharan Africa 143-8wh, 150wh
Questions
Engagements 534

Graham, Richard
Chamber Debates
Disability Employment Gap 1271, 1295
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 442
Questions
Stalking 1626
Starter Homes 818

Grant, Mrs Helen
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1221-2
Women and the Vote 1313
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 378wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 218-9wh, 229wh, 247-8wh
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 86wh, 94-5wh
Visitor Visas, Sub-Saharan Africa 145wh

Grant, Peter
Chamber Debates
Brain Family, Deportation 690
Business of the House 714
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 422
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1835
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 496
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 410
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 98-9wh
Questions
Calais and Dunkirk Camps 1423

Gray, Mr James
Questions
Affordable Housing 820

Gray, Neil
Chamber Debates
Battle of Jutland Centenary 652, 656-7
Business of the House 712
Debate on the Address 26
Disability Employment Gap 1266, 1272-6
Education, Skills and Training 555, 561-6, 641

Gray, Neil—continued
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1814
The Economy and Work 798
Questions
Disabled People, Employment 669
Steel Industry 718

Greiling, Chris, Leader of the House of Commons
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 125, 127-37, 1255-7, 1344, 1346-60
Written Statements
Government’s Legislative Programme 2016-17 3-4ws

Green Belt Land Between Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay
1p

Green, Chris
Chamber Debates
Investigatory Powers Bill 917-8
Questions
Employment Trends 1019

Green, Damian
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1209
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 845
Voter Registration 1196
Questions
Border Force Personnel 1422

Green, Kate
Chamber Debates
Point of Order 691

Greening, Justine, Secretary of State for International Development
Written Statements
World Humanitarian Summit 32-3ws

Greenwood, Lilian
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 171, 174-80

Greenwood, Margaret
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 629-31, 636, 638

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 434, 457-60

Griffith, Nic
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1654-9, 1725
Questions
Small Business Support 523

Griffiths, Andrew
Questions
Engagements 533

Gummer, Ben, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health
Petitions
Closure of Garforth Clinic 10p

Guyenne, Andrew
Chamber Debates
BHS 864-5
Business of the House 135
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 423
Development on the former Two Trees High School site, Denton 649

Vol. 611]
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Hancock, Matthew, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster

General
Chamber Debates
Voter Registration 1193-204
Questions
Anti-Corruption Summit 1744-5
Boycott and Divestment Guidance 1740
Topical Questions 1746-7

Hands, Greg, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1863-5
Written Statements
National Infrastructure Commission 1ws
Questions
Contingencies Fund 1029
Topical Questions 1036
Young People 1015-6

Hanson, Mr David
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 29, 36, 56-63
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 259-60
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 271
Voter Registration 1201
Wales Bill 1645, 1653
Westminster Hall
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust 127-9wh
Questions
Boycott and Divestment Guidance 1740
Brexit 1023-4
Employment 524
English Votes for English Laws 666
Police Reforms 1428

Harman, Ms Harriet
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 460-3
Investigatory Powers Bill 904-5, 968-73, 1080-1, 1094-9, 1117-8, 1120-1
Topical Questions 1198

Harrington, Richard, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees
Westminster Hall
Refugee Family Reunion Rules 207-14wh
Questions
Unaccompanied Children (Family Reunification) 1425-6

Harris, Carolyn
Chamber Debates
Disability Employment Gap 1282
Transport and Local Infrastructure 171
Wales Bill 1646
Questions
Engagements 1755

Harris, Rebecca
Westminster Hall
Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 8-10wh

Hart, Simon
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1655, 1705, 1714

Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 749-50

Hayes, Helen
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 355-7
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1041-2
Questions
Anti-Corruption Summit 1744-5
Topical Questions 1747
Young People 1015

Hayes, Mr John, Minister for Security
Chamber Debates
Investigatory Powers Bill 870, 878-82, 884-6, 889, 891-3, 896, 899, 904, 909, 960, 971, 974-5, 980-4, 1054, 1057, 1061-4, 1066, 1069, 1071, 1075-6, 1080-1, 1094-9, 1117-8, 1120-1
Investigatory Powers Bill (Programme) (No. 2) 868-9

Hayman, Sue
Chamber Debates
Budget for Community Pharmacies 510
Business of the House 698
Careers 1387-8
Disability Employment Gap 1270, 1279-80
Questions
Broadband 1322
Permanent Secretaries, Diversity 1741
Steel Industry 727-8

Heald, Sir Oliver
Chamber Debates
Junior Doctors Contract 157
Term-time Holidays 141
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 407
Questions
Starter Homes 819

Healey, John
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 228-33
Questions
Topical Questions 835-6

Health
Chamber Debates
27ws, 2p, 5p, 9p, 11p, 45ws

Heappey, James
Westminster Hall
Electric and Low-emission Vehicles 383wh, 385wh

Heaton-Harris, Chris
Chamber Debates
Voter Registration 1198

Heaton-Jones, Peter
Chamber Debates
Disability Employment Gap 1287-9

Henderson, Gordon
Questions
Constituency Boundaries 1743

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1823-4

Hendry, Drew
Chamber Debates
Aviation Noise 119
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1857-8
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 491, 504
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Hollobone, Mr Philip—continued
Points of Order 867
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 852
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 17-21wh
HPV Vaccinations for MSM 69wh Questions
Brexit 1024
Divisions 1334
EU Prisoner Transfer Directive 1617
First World War Commemoration 1316
Social Care Costs 826

Home Department
28ws, 1421, 41ws, 50ws

Hopkins, Kelvin
Chamber Debates
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 259
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 267
Questions
Topical Questions 836

Hosie, Stewart
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 745-9
Questions
Business Support 1021-2

House of Commons Commission
1339, 1332

House of Commons Employees
1330

Howarth, Mr George
Chamber Debates
Budget for Community Pharmacies 513
Investigatory Powers Bill 891, 899, 906-8, 957, 961, 972, 976, 1153
The Economy and Work 750-1
Questions
Engagements 1754

Howarth, Sir Gerald
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 1256
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 427, 434, 474-5, 480-2, 501
Transport and Local Infrastructure 165
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 265

Howell, John
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 355wh, 370wh
Diabetes-related Complications 34-5wh
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust 121wh
Stillbirth (09.06.2016) 175-6wh
Questions
Conflict Zones, Cultural Heritage 1324

Howlett, Ben
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 132, 706
Education, Skills and Training 550, 560
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1847-8
Junior Doctors Contract 158
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1042
Transport and Local Infrastructure 173, 198-200
Voter Registration 1199
Questions
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 675
Starter Homes 819

Howlett, Ben—continued
Topical Questions 679, 1034
HPV Vaccination 27ws
HPV Vaccinations for MSM 68wh
HS2 Phase 2a 34ws

Huddleston, Nigel
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 345-7
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1776
Questions
Tourism 1319

Human Rights Act
1622

Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia
(08.06.2016) 83wh

Hunt, Mr Jeremy, Secretary of State for Health
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 272-81, 283
Junior Doctors Contract 146-62

Hunt, Tristram
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 294, 342, 351-3
Education, Skills and Training 567-8, 570

Hug, Dr Rupa
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 557, 627-9
Westminster Hall
Affordable Housing, London (14.06.2016) 272wh, 275wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 224wh
Questions
Engagements 1189
Starter Homes 818

Hussain, Imran
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 358wh, 374-6wh

Immigration Rules (Constituent Parts of the UK)
1434

Implications of the UK Leaving the EU
1178

Indemnity for Petition Officers (Recall Petitions)
16ws

Insurance Fraud Taskforce
17ws

Intelligence and Security Committee
34ws

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
675

International Development
30ws

International Syria Support Group
Airdrops 1337
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Johnston, Diana—continued
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1391
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1045-4
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1451
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 847
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 265
Voter Registration 1201
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 103-5
Questions
Border Force Personnel 1421-2
Contingencies Fund 1029
Disability Rights 394
Economic Estate, Refurbishment 1332
Rape Offences, Conviction Rates 661
Social Care Costs 825
Vazidi Population, Syria and Iraq 385

Johnson, Gareth—continued
Chamber Debates
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1638
Questions
Violent Acid Attacks 1432-3

Johnson, Joseph, Minister for
Universities and Science—continued
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 552-61
Written Statements
Social Care Costs 825

Jones, Andrew—continued
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 285-6
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity
Strategy 260
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1361, 1373-5
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 846
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 261-2
Voter Registration 1194-5
Questions
Engagements 436

Jones, Helen—continued
Westminster Hall
Elected Mayors 341-3wh, 351-2wh
Prisons, Education 1614
Rape Offences, Conviction Rates 662

Jones, Kat
Chamber Debates

Jones, Mr Kevan—continued
Policing and Crime Bill 1470, 1476-7, 1493, 1495-7
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 406
Questions
Steel Industry 724

Jones, Mr Marcus, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Communities and Local Government—continued
Westminster Hall
Affordable Housing, London (14.06.2016) 292-5
Questions
Pay to Stay 826-7
Planning and Development, Local
Views 833-4
Topical Questions 836-8
Violence against Women and Girls 824

Jones, Susan Elan—continued
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1718-21
Westminster Hall
Social Investment 411-4wh, 416wh
Questions
Rail Electrification 518

Junior Doctors Contract 146

Justice

Kane, Mike—continued
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 291
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1642
Westminster Hall
Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 388-9wh, 394wh, 406wh, 409-10wh

Kawczynski, Daniel—continued
Chamber Debates
Social Care Costs 825

Keeley, Barbara—continued
Chamber Debates
Carers 1398, 1407-13, 1415, 1417
EU Membership, Economic Benefits
1771, 1783, 1796-7
Transport and Local Infrastructure 167, 176, 191, 209-13, 225, 235, 237
Women and the Vote 1307, 1311
Westminster Hall
Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 17-20wh
Questions
Disability People, Government
Expenditure 1028
Engagements 537

Kendall, Liz—continued
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1817-9

Kennedy, Seema—continued
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 583, 612-4
Investigatory Powers Bill 1057, 1081-3
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Latham, Pauline
Chamber Debates
BHS 860-1
Business of the House 698
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 248-9wh
Questions
Brownfield Land/Green Belt 832
Prisons, Education 1613
Steel Industry 718
Tourism 1319-20

Leary, Ian
Westminster Hall
Fire Service, Flooding and Statutory Duties 114wh, 117wh

Leader of the House
3ws, 1331, 1333

Leadsom, Andrea, Minister of State,
Department of Energy and Climate Change
Chamber Debates
Coal Authority (Compensation Procedures) 815-6
Westminster Hall
Plutonium Disposition 300-2wh Written Statements
Carbon Capture and Storage, Yorkshire and Humber 23ws
Planning Act 2008, Hornsea Offshore Wind Farm 22-3ws

Lee, Dr Phillip
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 9-12
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 9wh

Lefroy, Jeremy
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 131, 1352
Carers 1383
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 419
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1835-7
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 427
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1340
The Economy and Work 755-6
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 266
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 408
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 355-62wh, 379wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 256-7wh
Visitor Visas, Sub-Saharan Africa 144wh
Questions
Sumbath Somphone 390
Steel Industry 725

Leigh, Sir Edward
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1764
Investigatory Powers Bill 950, 958-62
Policing and Crime Bill 1499-500
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 847
The Economy and Work 751-3
Questions
Extremism and Radicalisation 1431

Leslie, Charlotte
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 98wh

Leslie, Chris
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 276
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 268

Letwin, Mr Oliver, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Chamber Debates
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1361-5, 1368-9, 1377, 1379
Questions
EU Referendum 4mc
Permanent Secretaries, Diversity 1741-2
Topical Questions 1746-8

Leveson Inquiry
1317

Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 780-1
Westminster Hall
Elected Mayors 349-52wh
Questions
Yazidi Population, Syria and Iraq 383-4

Lewes Prison
1623

Lewis, Brandon, Minister for Housing and Planning
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 234-40
Questions
Affordable Housing 820-1
Brownfield Land/Green Belt 832-3
Right to Buy, Low-cost Housing 829-30
Supported Housing 822-4
Topical Questions 836, 838, 840

Lewis, Clive
Questions
Capital Gains Tax/Corporation Tax 1027

Lewis, Dr Julian
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 40-1
Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran 245-6
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 428, 443, 473-4, 481, 501
Voter Registration 1197
Westminster Hall
Southern Health NHS Foundation
Trust 129-32wh, 142wh

Lewis, Mr Ivan
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 469-70

Library Services
Thornton-Cleveleys 328wh

Liddell-Grange, Mr Ian
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 705, 1348
Junior Doctors Contract 154-5

Lidington, Mr David, Minister for Europe
Chamber Debates
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1337-43
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 105-8wh
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

McCaig, Callum
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 712
The Economy and Work 744
Questions
Immigration Rules (Constituent Parts of the UK) 1434

McCartney, Jason
Chamber Debates
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 417
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1637
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 7wh
Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 13-4wh
Questions
Engagements 533
Topical Questions 1746

McCartney, Siobhain
Chamber Debates
Women and the Vote 1310
Questions
Engagements 1758

McDonald, Andy
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping
People Safe at Home and Abroad 441, 492-3
Points of Order 1046
The Economy and Work 742
Westminster Hall
West Coast Rail Franchise 319-21wh, 326wh

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 709-10
Debate on the Address 35-6
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1043
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1452
Points of Order 1047
Westminster Hall
HPV Vaccinations for MSM 75-6wh, 79wh
Questions
Middle East, Press Freedom 385

McDonald, Stuart C.
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 224wh
Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 390wh, 400wh
Questions
Coastal Communities 831
Lewes Prison 1623
Topical Questions 679

Mackinlay, Craig
Questions
Engagements 1187

Mckinnell, Catherine
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 217-5wh
Questions
Human Rights Act 1622-3

Mackintosh, David
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 1-4wh, 30wh
Questions
Government Offices, London 1742
Prison Reform 1618-9

McLaughlin, Anne
Investigatory Powers Bill 1049, 1053-8, 1070, 1072, 1089, 1096, 1099-100
Questions
Topical Questions 678

McLaughlin, Mr Patrick, Secretary of State for Transport
Chamber Debates
Transport and Local Infrastructure 165-74, 179, 183, 185
Written Statements
Rail Franchising 36ws

McMahon, Jim
Chamber Debates
BHS 865
Disability Employment Gap 1261, 1277
Education, Skills and Training 553, 560
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1770
Women and the Vote 1308
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Malthouse, Kit—continued
Chamber Debates
Southern Health NHS Foundation
Trust 123wh, 125-6wh
Questions
EU Prisoner Transfer Directive 1618

Mann, Scott
Westminster Hall
Fireworks 1wh

Manufacturing 1171

Marris, Rob
Chamber Debates
UK Economy, Post-Referendum
Assessment 263
Questions
Domestic Tourism 1325
Prisons: Education 1614
Pro Bono Legal Services 665-6

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Westminster Hall
Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 401-5wh, 407wh

Maskell, Rachael
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1856-7
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 497-8
Kentmere Mental Health Ward, Westmorland General Hospital 1602
Voter Registration 1202
Westminster Hall
Fire Service, Flooding and Statutory Duties 111wh, 116wh
Questions
Topical Questions 397

Matheson, Christian
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 136
Defending Public Services 281, 286-9
Westminster Hall
Diabetes-related Complications 49-53wh
Elected Mayors 336-9wh, 354wh
Stillbirth (09.06.2016) 185-8wh
Questions
Topical Questions 1036
Unaccompanied Children (Family Reunification) 1426

Mathias, Dr Tania
Chamber Debates
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 408
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 94-5wh
Junior Doctors Contract 159
Term-time Holidays 143
Transport and Local Infrastructure 167, 208, 212, 221-4
Westminster Hall
Questions

Mears, Ian
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 697, 1349-50
UK Economy, Post-Referendum
Assessment 268-9
Voter Registration 1199

Mears, Ian
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 697, 1349-50
UK Economy, Post-Referendum
Assessment 268-9
Voter Registration 1199

Meadowcroft, Jo
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 1395

Meadows, Mark
Chamber Debates
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 99-100wh

Meggings, Alan
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 1396-8

Meirion, Huw
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1223, 1234-7
Business of the House 701
Careers 1396-8
Defending Public Services 340-3
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1342
Investigatory Powers Bill 919
UK Economy, Work 735-6
Questions
Broadband 1321
Engagements 1757
Topical Questions 1630-1
Young People 1016

Micol, Stephen
Chamber Debates
First World War Commemoration 1315
Topical Questions 837-8

Middle East 392
Press Freedom 385

Migrants
Illegal Working 1424

Miller, Mrs Maria
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 281, 286-9
Disability Employment Gap 1267
Policing and Crime Bill 1556-8, 1570,
Women and the Vote 1306

Minghella, Amanda
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 699
Education, Skills and Training 548, 596-7
Mills, Nigel
Questions
Tax Transparency 1030

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 467-9
Tributes to Jo Cox 1887-8
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 237wh, 254-5wh, 265wh

Monaghan, Carol
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 610, 633-5
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1783
Questions
Topical Questions 1440

Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 702
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 421
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 432, 474-6
Westminster Hall
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 371wh
Questions
Steel Industry 730

Morden, Jessica
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 701
Questions
Steel Industry 724

Morgan, Nicky, Secretary of State for Education
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 638-44
Questions
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 675-6
Revenge Porn Helpline 677-8
STEM Careers 672-3
Topical Questions 678-80

Morris, David
Questions
Topical Questions 1035

Morris, James
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 278
Disability Employment Gap 1268-9
Policing and Crime Bill 1490-1, 1493
Questions
Topical Questions 1036

Morton, Wendy
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 703
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 419
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1351-2
Investigatory Powers Bill 1077-9
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1446
Westminster Hall
Ceramic and Brick Industries 419-23wh, 426-8wh, 430wh, 436wh
Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 371wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 231-3wh
Questions
Brownfield Land/Green Belt 833

INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Morton, Wendy—continued
Prisons, Education 1612-5
Steel Industry 723
Topical Questions 1438

Mowat, David
Westminster Hall
Elected Mayors 340-1wh, 347-8wh
Electric and Low-emission Vehicles 382wh, 386wh
West Coast Rail Franchise 306wh, 318wh, 323-4wh
Questions
Personal Injury Law 1626
Steel Industry 720

Mulholland, Greg
Chamber Debates
BHS 864
Business of the House 1358
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1640
Investigatory Powers Bill 1159
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1043-4
Points of Order 866
Questions
Neighbourhood Plans 832
Topical Questions 1034, 1631-2

Mullin, Roger
Chamber Debates
BHS 857-8
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 424
Education, Skills and Training 632
The Economy and Work 776-7, 793
Transport and Local Infrastructure 224-6
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 264
Questions
Engagements 1754

Mundell, David, Secretary of State for Scotland
Written Statements
Government’s Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2016-17 5-6ws

Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1783, 1801-2, 1825, 1844

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Chamber Debates
Battle of Jutland Centenary 652
Business of the House 700, 1351
Comparative Healthcare Economics/ NHS Finance 1161-5
Defending Public Services 282, 335-8, 341
Investigatory Powers Bill 880, 959, 963, 1056, 1121, 1130, 1154-5
Junior Doctors Contract 160
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1040
Term-time Holidays 144
Voter Registration 1198
Questions
Topical Questions 1329

National Infrastructure Commission
1ws

Neighbourhood Plans 831

Neill, Robert—continued
Policing and Crime Bill 1463-4, 1486-8
Questions
Engagements 1190
Prison Reform 1619-20
Topical Questions 1631

Newhaven Port
1426

Newlands, Gavin
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 713, 1360
Carers 1393-6
Education, Skills and Training 622-4
Investigatory Powers Bill 1093, 1125-30
Questions
EU Membership, Human Rights 1615
Football, Television Rights 1326
Topical Questions 1328-9

NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1037

Nicolson, John
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1222-8
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1450
Westminster Hall
HPV Vaccinations for MSM 72-3wh
Questions
Rugby Union 1321
Topical Questions 1629

Nokes, Caroline
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 567, 607-10
Investigatory Powers Bill 915-6
Women and the Vote 1309
Westminster Hall
Ceramic and Brick Industries 421-2wh

Norman, Jesse
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 549-50, 554

Northern Ireland
4ws, 1171

Northern Ireland Question Time 1331

Northern Powerhouse 1017

Nuttall, Mr David
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 705, 1257, 1354-5
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 255
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1364
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 852
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 270
Voter Registration 1200
Questions
Brexit 1024
Engagements 1755
EU Digital Single Market 1323
EU Membership 526
EU Membership, Human Rights 1616
EU Referendum 1175

O’Hara, Brendan
Chamber Debates
Battle of Jutland Centenary 658
Brain Family, Deportation 690
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 415
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Qureshi, Yasmin
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 605-7

Raab, Mr Dominic, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice
Westminster Hall
Conveyancing 30-3wh
Questions
Bill of Rights 1625
Employment Tribunal Fees 1624-5
EU Membership, Human Rights 1615-7
Human Rights Act 1622-3
Stalking 1626
Topical Questions 1630, 1632

Rail Electrification
517

Rail Franchising
36ws

Rape Offences
Conviction Rates 661

Rayner, Angela
Chamber Debates
BHS 861
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity
Strategy 258
Education, Skills and Training 624-6
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1767
Questions
Pay to Stay 826
Topical Questions 396

Redwood, John
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 274, 282, 290, 293, 297-9, 304, 366
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1765, 1773, 1782, 1786-9, 1861-2, 1864
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1366, 1373
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 844
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 264

Reed, Mr Jamie
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1778, 1806-8
Westminster Hall
Diabetes-related Complications 37-8wh, 45wh, 51wh, 53-4wh, 58wh
Plutonium Disposition 296-300wh

Reed, Mr Steve
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1830-2
The Economy and Work 766-7
Questions
Enterprise Zones 829

Rees, Christina
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 698
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1860-1
The Economy and Work 790-1
Wales Bill 1715-8
Questions
Prisoner Release, Employment 1622

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 17

Reeves, Rachel
Chamber Debates
Tributes to Jo Cox 1886-7
Questions
Northern Powerhouse 1017-8

Refugee Family Reunion Rules 196wh

Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 841

Report of the Biometrics Commissioner 30ws

Revenge Porn Helpline 677

Reynolds, Jonathan
Chamber Debates
Junior Doctors Contract 158
The Economy and Work 767, 771-2
Tributes to Jo Cox 1899-900
Westminster Hall
Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 396-9wh

Right to Buy
Low-cost Housing 829

Rimmer, Marie
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 453, 495
Policing and Crime Bill 1472

Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 133, 702
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1840
The Economy and Work 773-4
Westminster Hall
Diabetes-related Complications 34wh
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 257-8wh
Questions
Employment Trends 1020
Prisons, Education 1615
Steel Industry 728
Topical Questions 399

Roberts, Liz Saville
Chamber Debates
Policing and Crime Bill 1541, 1553-7, 1576-7
Wales Bill 1684, 1705-8, 1726
Questions
EU Membership 526
Yazidi Population, Syria and Iraq 384

Robertson, Angus
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 33-41
Questions
Engagements 531, 1184-5, 1752-3

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 223wh
Questions
Manufacturing 1171

Robinson, Gavin
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 487-8
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1642
Investigatory Powers Bill 914, 984, 1064-5, 1079-81
Voter Registration 1202-3
Questions
Implications of the UK Leaving the EU 1178-9
Prisons, Education 1614
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Entry</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, Mary</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers 1382</td>
<td>International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1341 Westminster Hall Ceramic and Brick Industries 427-9wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosindell, Andrew</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 441-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotheram, Steve</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigatory Powers Bill 955, 957 Policing and Crime Bill 1465, 1468, 1472</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Amber</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Climate Change 524</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby Union</td>
<td>1320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutley, David</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHS 861 Debate on the Address 47-8, 63-7 Education, Skills and Training 552 EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1778 Westminster Hall Elected Mayors 339wh, 342wh Questions Steel Industry 724</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, Joan</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business of the House 1256 Disability Employment Gap 1259-60 International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1343 Westminster Hall Fireworks 2-3wh Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 225-7wh, 256wh, 260wh Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 405wh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmond, Alex</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandbach, Antoinette</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1779 Westminster Hall Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 12-3wh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>5ws Scotland Act 2016 668 Security Situation 1173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharma, Mr Virendra—continued</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business of the House 712 Questions Sentencing Policy, Child Neglect/Abuse 672</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharma, Mr Virendra</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheeran, Mr Barry</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelbrooke, Alec</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate on the Address 28 Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 429-30, 432, 440, 468, 486-7 Questions Closure of Garforth Clinic 10p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheppard, Tommy</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC White Paper 1240-3 EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1833-5 EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1370 Voter Registration 1195 Questions Boycott and Divestment Guidance 1740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherriff, Paula</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson, David</td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Countries, Jobs and Livelihoods (15.06.2016) 362-4wh Diabetes-related Complications 35wh, 37wh Support for Life-shortening Conditions (07.06.2016) 2wh, 6wh Questions Terrorism Threat 1177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson, Mr Keith</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions Departmental Estate, Rodent Eradication 392-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinner, Mr Dennis</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1768 UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 266</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Smith, Jeff—continued
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 410
Westminster Hall
Further Education Colleges, Greater Manchester 399-401wh

Smith, Mr Andrew
Westminster Hall
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust 122wh, 128-9wh, 140wh

Smith, Owen
Chamber Debates
Disability Employment Gap 1258-65, 1276
The Economy and Work 794-7

Smynth, Karin
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1722-3

Social Care Costs 825

Social Investment 411wh

Solloway, Amanda
Chamber Debates
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 483-4
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 235-7wh
Questions
Engagements 1752

Somnath Somporn 390

Souby, Anna, Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise
Chamber Debates
BHS 854-5, 857-65
Westminster Hall
Ceramic and Brick Industries 433-6wh
Written Statements
Post-Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) 15wh

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust 119wh

Speaker, Madam Deputy
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1228, 1237
Defending Public Services 289, 338
Education, Skills and Training 256, 566, 584-5
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1838, 1845
Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 492, 496
Investigatory Powers Bill 1099, 1105-11, 1151, 1155, 1160
Policing and Crime Bill 1468, 1478, 1571
"Schedule 6A 1593-4
The Economy and Work 740, 745, 749, 781, 798
Transport and Local Infrastructure 180
Wales Bill 1672

Speaker, Mr
Chamber Debates
Aviation Noise 121
Brain Family, Deportation 686
Business of the House 127, 134, 136, 695, 708, 1255-7, 1349, 1353
Counter-Daesh Quarterly Update 415-6
Death of a Member 1883
Debate on the Address 6, 17, 19-21, 32, 40

Speaker, Mr—continued
Delegated Legislation 1305
Delegated Legislation (Committees) 1005
Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 254, 260
Disability Employment Gap 1276
Education, Skills and Training 542, 619, 624
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1764, 1766, 1769, 1835
EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1377, 1381
Excess Winter Deaths 1006
Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016 1635-6, 1641
International Syria Support Group, Airdrops 1339
Investigatory Powers Bill 870-7, 935-47, 975, 980, 982, 1049-53, 1127-8, 1133-4
Investigatory Powers Bill (Programme) (No. 2) 869
Junior Doctors Contract 159
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1044
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1445-6, 1452
Point of Order 691, 1453
Points of Order 539-41, 866-7, 1046-8, 1207, 1761-3
Policing and Crime Bill 1456-63
Queen’s Speech 3-5
Removal of Foreign National Offenders and EU Prisoners 841, 845, 849
"Schedule 6A 1593
Speaker’s Statement 3-4, 163, 507
term-time Holidays 139-41
The Economy and Work 810-1
Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 1206
Tributes to Jo Cox 1900
UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 261
Voter Registration 1195-6, 1203-4
Women and the Vote 1309
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 408
Questions
Broadband 1323
Business Support 1023
Constituency Boundaries 1743
Departmental Estate, Rodent Eradication 392
Domestic Tourism 1325
Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Regional Deal 825
Employment 1324
Employment, Women Returnees 670
Engagements 528-9, 531, 536, 1191
English Votes for English Laws 1336
Enterprise Zones 828
EU Membership 527
EU Prisoner Transfer Directive 1618
Exports 1027
Glen Parva 1161
Middle East, Press Freedom 387
Migrants, Illegal Working 1425
Newhaven Port 1427
Prison Reform 1620
Prisoner Release, Employment 1622
Prisons, Population 1617
Pro Bono Legal Services 665
S4C 525
Scotland Act 2016 668
Sentencing Policy, Child Neglect/Abuse 672
Starters Homes 819
Tax Transparency 1030
Topical Questions 398, 400, 680, 682, 840, 1036, 1436, 1440, 1747
Tourism 1320
Young People 1015-6
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chamber Debates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Local Infrastructure</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury</td>
<td>1ws, 11ws, 16ws, 1015, 47ws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevethyan, Mrs Anne-Marie</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trickett, Jon</td>
<td>Specialist Domestic Violence Refuges 817-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Elizabeth, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</td>
<td>Written Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agricultural and Fisheries Council 23-4ws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tugendhat, Tom</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education, Skills and Training 610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1798-9, 1812-4, 1817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Europe, Human Rights and Keeping People Safe at Home and Abroad 446-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investigatory Powers Bill 908, 912-4, 1082, 1092-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turley, Anna</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disability Employment Gap 1280, 1288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steel Industry 723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, Karl</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disability Employment Gap 1280, 1288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steel Industry 723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, Mr Andrew</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BBC White Paper 1220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business of the House 1257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Term-time Holidays 143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical Questions 143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twigg, Derek</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BHS 862-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twigg, Stephen</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Economy and Work 768-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment Trends 1202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU Digital Single Market 1323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending Public Services 299-300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 253-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Injury Law 1625-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical Questions 1629-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vázquez, Mr Edward, Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising Standards Authority 375-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BBC White Paper 1248-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending Public Services 368-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library Services, Thornton-Cleveleys 331-5wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education, Youth, Culture and the Sport Council 20-1ws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telecommunications Council 12ws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadband 1321-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU Digital Single Market 1323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical Questions 1328-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vara, Mr Shaijalens, Parliamentary</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under-Secretary of State for Justice Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Injury Law 1625-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical Questions 1629-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Váz, Keith</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brain Family, Deportation 687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Budget for Community Pharmacies 508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business of the House 1353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car parking facilities at Watermead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country Park, Leicester 1160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debate on the Address 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending Public Services 299-300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dietary Advice and Childhood Obesity Strategy 253-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Football Fan Violence, Euro 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Injury Law 1625-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical Questions 1629-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaz, Valerie</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business of the House 699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU Referendum, Voter Registration 1366-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemen, Cluster Munitions 405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee Family Reunion Rules 204-6wh, 209wh, 211wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Border Force Personnel 1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disability Hate Crimes 667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leveson Inquiry 1317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prisons, Population 1612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemen 390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaz, Valerie</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business of the House 703, 1356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemen, Cluster Munitions 405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee Family Reunion Rules 204-6wh, 209wh, 211wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Border Force Personnel 1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disability Hate Crimes 667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leveson Inquiry 1317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prisons, Population 1612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemen 390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vickers, Martin</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business of the House 703, 1356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK Economy, Post-Referendum Assessment 270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Border Force Personnel 1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coastal Communities 830-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Powerhouse 1018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steel Industry 721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism 1318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical Questions</th>
<th>394, 678, 834, 1031, 1327, 1435, 1627, 1746</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>1318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey, Craig</td>
<td>Chamber Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Economy and Work 781-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Westminster Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ceramic and Brick Industries 425-7wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinian Territories, Radicalisation 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>34ws, 6p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

West Coast Rail Franchise
305wh

Wharton, James, Parliamentary
Under-Secretary of State for
Communities and Local Government
Chamber Debates
Tees Valley Inward Investment Initiative 1873-8
Westminster Hall
Elected Mayors 350-4wh
Questions
Departmental Civil Servants, Coventry 827-8
Edinburgh and South East Scotland
City Regional Deal 824-5
Enterprise Zones 828-9
Tayside Region City Deal 821-2

Whately, Helen
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1781, 1819-20
Junior Doctors Contract 153
Women and the Vote 1310
Westminster Hall
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 88-9wh, 103wh
Questions
Engagements 1191

White, Chris
Chamber Debates
Business of the House 701, 1349
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1768
The Economy and Work 767-8, 795
Yemen, Cluster Munitions 403
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 218-9wh
Human Rights and Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia (08.06.2016) 85-6wh
Questions
Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 1745
Topical Questions 395

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 39
Disability Employment Gap 1285-7
Tributes to Jo Cox 1892-4
Questions
Engagements 538

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Chamber Debates
Defending Public Services 314-6
Questions
Engagements 538

Whitford, Dr Philippa
Chamber Debates
Carers 1404-7
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1770-1, 1782
Junior Doctors Contract 151
NHS Commissioning (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) 1039-40
Transport and Local Infrastructure 186
Women and the Vote 1311, 1313-4
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 232wh, 238wh, 243wh

Whittingdale, Mr John
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1215-22, 1224, 1228
Questions
Conflict Zones, Cultural Heritage 1324
Football, Television Rights 1326

Whittingdale, Mr John—continued
Leveson Inquiry 1317-8
Topical Questions 1327-9
Tourism 1318-9

Wiggin, Bill
Chamber Debates
Education, Skills and Training 545

Williams, Craig
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1677, 1680-5
Questions
Employment 524

Williams, Hywel
Chamber Debates
Debate on the Address 57, 62, 85-9, 95
Questions
Policing and Crime Bill 1554
Wales Bill 1645, 1647, 1651, 1665-6,
1674, 1685-92, 1696, 1722
Questions
Steel Industry 519-20, 725

Williams, Mr Mark
Chamber Debates
Wales Bill 1683-4, 1697-702
Questions
Small Business Support 522-3

Williamson, Gavin
Petitions
Green Belt Land Between Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay 1-2p

Wilson, Corri
Chamber Debates
Carers 1391-3

Wilson, Mr Rob, Minister for Civil Society
Westminster Hall
Social Investment 414-8wh
Questions
Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 1745-6

Wilson, Phil
Chamber Debates
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1814-6
Transport and Local Infrastructure 207-9
Westminster Hall
Foreign Aid Expenditure (13.06.2016) 225wh, 235wh

Wilson, Sammy
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1210, 1214, 1218-9,
1222, 1224, 1227
Questions
BBC White Paper 1207, 41, 70, 111
Education, Skills and Training 546-8
Questions
Brexit 1025

Winnick, Mr David
Chamber Debates
Brain Family, Depopulation 689
Debate on the Address 130, 1350-1
Questions
Investigatory Powers Bill 883, 969, 1127,
1150-1
Orlando Attack, UK Security Measures 1448
Questions
Older Women in the Workplace 674
Topical Questions 398

Wishart, Pete
Chamber Debates
BBC White Paper 1209, 1216
Brain Family, Depopulation 689
Business of the House 129, 695-6, 1255
EU Membership, Economic Benefits 1768-9
INDEX—SESSION 2016–17
7th June, 2016—20th June, 2016

Wood, Mike—continued
Westminster Hall
Ceramic and Brick Industries 426wh
Questions
Steel Industry 726
Work and Pensions
36ws
World Humanitarian Summit
32ws

Wragg, William
Chamber Debates
Closure of Lloyds Bank in Bredbury
242
Term-time Holidays 142-3
Transport and Local Infrastructure
180-3

Wright, Mr Iain
Chamber Debates
BHS 858-9

Wright, Mr Iain—continued
Tees Valley Inward Investment Initiative
1869-70, 1875
Questions
Steel Industry 719
Yazidi Population
Syria and Iraq 383
Yemen
390
Cluster Munitions 401
Young People
1015

Zeichner, Daniel
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 792-3
Questions
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 676
Pay to Stay 826-7

Wishart, Pete—continued
Investigatory Powers Bill 881, 901
Points of Order 866

Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Chamber Debates
Junior Doctors Contract 150
The Economy and Work 762-3

Women and Equalities
668
1600

Women and the Vote
1306

Women in Business
676

Wood, Mike
Chamber Debates
Carers 1401
Defending Public Services 353-5
EU Membership, Economic Benefits
1853-4

Women and the Vote
1306

Women and the Vote
1306

Women in Business
676

Wood, Mike
Chamber Debates
Carers 1401
Defending Public Services 353-5
EU Membership, Economic Benefits
1853-4

Zeichner, Daniel
Chamber Debates
The Economy and Work 792-3
Questions
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 676
Pay to Stay 826-7

Vol. 611]